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August 1, 2024
Be Strong

Readings for today: [Haggai 1-2, Psalms 59](#)

[\(video intro\)](#)

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Be strong. In the face of all the challenges this world can bring. Be strong. When you're disappointed and let down. Be strong. When you are anxious and afraid. Be strong. When life doesn't go your way. Be strong. When you feel overwhelmed. Be strong. I love today's words from Haggai. They are words for every generation. Words for every community of believers in every culture and place around the world. Words for those who are old and young, rich and poor, educated and lacking education, powerful and powerless, influential and marginalized, black, brown, or white. It doesn't matter who you are or where you've come from or your background or life experience, God says, "I am with you." I am with you in the midst of life. I am with you in the midst of all the challenges you face. I am with you in success and failure. I am with you in plenty and in want. I am with you in sickness and in health. I am with you to the end.

And what is the faithful response to God's amazing promise? Work. Keep pressing in. Keep pushing forward. Keep working until the job is finished. And what is the job? For Zerubbabel and Joshua, it was the rebuilding of the Temple. For us, it is the work of evangelism and discipleship. Proclaiming the good news of the gospel to the whole world and teaching those who believe all God has commanded. This is a work that never ends. It is a work that demands our best effort and our best resources. It is a work that is worth doing because eternity is literally at stake. It is a work that will endure. A work that will last. A work that will become a monument in the heavens for all to see just as the work of the ancient Israelites would result in a Temple that would stand as a monument to God's greatness and glory for all the nations to see.

Listen to Haggai's words again and think about how they apply to your own life. Insert your name where it mentions Zerubbabel and Joshua. Don't be afraid to claim these promises as your own. "Even so, be strong, _____ — this is the Lord's declaration. Be strong, _____, high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land — this is the Lord's declaration. Work! For I am with you, _____ — the declaration of the Lord of Armies. This is the promise I made to you, _____, when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is present among you; don't be afraid." For the Lord of Armies says this: "Once more, in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations so that the treasures of all the nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord of Armies. "The silver and gold belong to me" — this is the declaration of the Lord of Armies. "The final glory of this house will be greater than the first," says the Lord of Armies. "I will provide peace in this place" — this is the declaration of the Lord of Armies." (Haggai 2:4-9 CSB) It's amazing to think about. God shaking the heavens and the earth, the sea and dry land. God shaking the nations to fill His house with His glory. God promising that the final glory of His house will far eclipse the former glory of His house. This is the glory we are working towards as His people. This is the glory we will one day worship and dwell in when we stand before the Lord at the end of days.

Readings for tomorrow: Zechariah 1-4, Psalms 60

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August 2, 2024
Eternal Security

Readings for today: [Zechariah 1-4, Psalms 60](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Walls were incredibly important in the ancient world. They marked out the boundaries of a particular city. They provided security for those living within them. They protected the water supply and food stores. In fact, your community didn't qualify as a "city" unless it was surrounded by a wall. If you were to set out to build a city in the ancient world, the very first thing you would do is build your wall. Often made of sun-dried mud and brick, you would try to build it as high and as deep as possible. Jericho, among the oldest cities in the world, has the oldest defensive wall in existence and it was a monster. Thirteen feet high and six feet wide, backed by a twenty-eight foot watchtower. They were sloped in order to make it difficult to scale if you were an opposing army. A few years ago, I stood on those walls and looked out over the modern day city of Jericho. Truly amazing.

Perhaps that's why a line in today's reading stuck out to me. Zechariah 2:4-5. "The angel said to him, "Run and tell this young man: Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the number of people and animals in it." The declaration of the Lord: "I myself will be a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory within it." At first blush, this is not a message Zechariah wants to hear. A city without walls? A city laid vulnerable before her enemies? A city without protection? No thanks! It wouldn't matter how large it was or how many people lived within it, if she didn't have a wall, they would be an easy target for their enemies. But the Lord isn't done. He will be their wall. He will be their protection. He will be their security. They have nothing to fear for He will keep out their enemies. Not only that but He will be their glory. This image will be echoed later on the final Book of Revelation where the Apostle John talks about there not being a need for a sun or a moon for the glory of the Lord will be the light of the heavenly Jerusalem.

What does God want us to learn here? He wants us to lean on Him for our security. Lean on Him for protection. Lean on Him when we are anxious or afraid. As powerful as they were, the walls of Jericho were destroyed and rebuilt many times over. The same was true for every single city in the ancient near east. No matter how big your army or how technologically advanced your weaponry or how wealthy your nation might be, all of them fell into ruin. All of them are eventually overcome by an enemy more powerful and more advanced. The same is true for us. We can do all we can to keep ourselves safe. Protect our health and wealth and those we love. We can store up millions in retirement accounts. Exercise every single day. Get enough sleep. Eat well. Take supplements. Utilize our access to the best doctors and medical care in the world. None of it will extend our lives a single day longer than what God has already ordained. Much better to trust the Lord. To let God take care of our lives. To let Him be the wall of fire that surrounds us and the glory that lives inside us. With God providing our eternal security, we are set free to live completely and fully for Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Zechariah 5-8, Psalms 61

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August 3, 2024
Be the Blessing

Readings for today: [Zechariah 5-8, Psalms 61](#) (audio reading)

I love these words from Zechariah today, “The Lord of Armies says this: “In those days, ten men from nations of every language will grab the robe of a Jewish man tightly, urging: Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” (Zechariah 8:23 CSB) Can you imagine? Can you imagine a day where God’s people are so marked by His grace and peace and steadfast love and righteousness and holiness that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation on the earth would lay hold of them just to be in God’s presence? Can you imagine a day when the culture wars cease and the perpetual outrage cycle ends and people turn in exhaustion to those who walk humbly before their God? Can you imagine a day when we lay aside all our selfishness, greed, lust for power, and love of deception and instead cling to those who follow Jesus?

The Apostle Paul says, “All creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God.” (Romans 8:19) The whole world is looking forward to a day when the people of God, filled with the Spirit of God, will answer the call of God and walk in the ways of God to fulfill the mission of God. Read that sentence again to yourself. Read it slowly. Read it carefully. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the message is clear. The world is waiting for you! The world is waiting for me! The world is groaning under the weight of sin, longing for release! Longing for freedom! Longing for the day when the people of God will take up their mandate once again to care for and steward all God has made, especially the creatures made in His image.

This is God’s plan. He reveals it clearly to His prophet. Over and over again, Zechariah declares the truth of God. Over and over again, Zechariah proclaims the promises of God. The Lord is jealous for Zion. (Zech. 8:2) The Lord will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. (Zech. 8:3) The Lord will save His people and gather them from the east and the west to live with Him in Jerusalem. (Zech. 8:7-8) I will save you and you will be a blessing. (Zech. 8:13) You will sow in peace and the vine will yield its fruit, the land its produce, and the skies their rain. I will give the remnant of My people all these things as an inheritance. (Zech. 8:12) Friends, the message to us could not be more clear. We are to live as citizens of heaven here on earth. The church is created to be a community of life in the midst of a culture of death. We are called to be salt and light in the world. We must live and love and serve and speak in such a way that those around us who do not yet know God will sense His Spirit within us.

Readings for tomorrow: Zechariah 9-14, Psalms 62 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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August 4, 2024
(No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [Zechariah 9-14, Psalms 62](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

August 5, 2024
Perspective

Readings for today: [Malachi 1-2, Psalms 63](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

So much depends on our perspective. The more narrow our perspective, the more difficult it is to see the world or our lives clearly. The wider our perspective, the more we are able to take in and understand. I think about how important it is, for example, to put oneself in another's shoes. To try and see things from another person's vantage point or truly listen to them share their experiences. When we do that, we develop empathy and our view of the world around us expands. However, it seems clear from the debates raging in our nation today or the divisions that exist around the world that our perspectives are only growing more narrow. We retreat further and further into echo chambers of our own making. We place ideological litmus tests on those we are in relationship with and we cut off those who do not pass. We aren't interested in assuming the best of another person or giving them the benefit of the doubt, instead we are quick to pounce on anything and everything that doesn't fit our narrow worldview. It's tragic and heartbreakingly a significant source of violence and hatred in our society.

Now apply that same concept to our relationship with God. Think about how demanding we have become as human beings. We demand evidence of God's existence. We want Him to prove His love for us over and over again. We refuse to take Him at His word and even deny the miracles He performs day after day. We want a relationship with Him...but we want it on our terms. We want Him to fit into our narrow perspective rather than trust His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We try to squeeze Him into our theological systems or remake Him in our own image or project on Him our own feelings, values, and ideologies. The same thing was happening in Israel in Malachi's day. "You say you love us but how have you loved us?" "Where have you been all these years?" "Why do we find ourselves in the same mess over and over again?" "You say we have despised your name but how have we done so?" "Don't you understand how hard it is for us to give up the best of our flock?" "Do you really need all these sacrifices from us?" "Don't we at least get partial credit for going through the motions?"

Friends, God's perspective is much bigger and much wider than our own. He sees the past, present, and future laid out before Him all at once. He knows what's best for us and what He has in store for us. He knows the plans He has for us to give us hope and a bright future. A covenant of love and peace and joy and abundance. He is faithful even when we are not. He remains true even when we fall away. He will never relent until we accept life on His terms, walk in His ways, and rest in His love.

Readings for tomorrow: Malachi 3-4, Psalms 64

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August 6, 2024
Purification

Readings for today: Malachi 3-4, Psalms 64

audio reading

As I write, there are several wildfires burning in my part of the country. They threaten homes and other buildings. Tragically, there is at least one person who lost their life. This isn't uncommon for us. In the heat of summer, the fire danger rises. Hundreds of thousands of acres have burned over the last twenty or so years. Their names are etched in our memories. Hayman. Pine Gulch. Cameron Peak. Waldo Canyon. Marshall. The list goes on. Fire can be devastating and destructive. However, it can also be cleansing and purifying. Some of those fires have been fueled by brush and deadwood that has built up over decades. It creates unhealthy and dangerous conditions in our forest systems that lead to larger and more uncontrollable burns once they start. Fire is a necessary part of the cycle of renewal because of how it clears out the old to usher in the new.

Perhaps this is why the prophet Malachi picks up on this image in our reading today. "For look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them," says the Lord of Armies, "not leaving them root or branches. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall. You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing," says the Lord of Armies."

(Malachi 4:1-3 CSB) God looks down on the earth and can see the wickedness of humanity stacking up over the centuries. He sees the injustice. He sees the oppression. He sees the greed. He sees the selfishness. He sees the lust for power. He sees the deceit and violence and hatred. He sees all of it and He knows humanity must be cleansed and purified in order for righteousness to spring up. So He likens His coming to that of a cleansing fire that burns throughout the earth, consuming the wicked. But those who fear the Lord will find refuge from the flames and healing underneath His wings. We will go out in the wake of the fire to renew the land and reign in righteousness over all God has made.

So what then does it mean to be righteous? It means worshipping God in the way He deserves and demands. God doesn't grade on a curve. He will never be satisfied with leftovers. Never be content to take second place. He will not allow us to take Him for granted or treat Him with disdain. God is a refining fire. A purifying fire. A cleansing fire. Malachi testifies to the fact that when the great Day of the Lord comes and Jesus returns in all His glory, all that is evil and arrogant and corrupt in this world will be burned by fire. All that is sinful and impure and ungodly in our lives will be set ablaze. The gold will be refined. The silver purified. Only that which is of the Lord will endure. It's a sobering vision. One that should challenge and convict us as it did the people of Israel. We who have been saved by Jesus Christ have seen His glory. The glory of the One and Only Son come from the Father. As such, more is demanded from us. More is expected from us. It doesn't matter what's happening in the world around us. It doesn't matter how difficult life's circumstance may be. It doesn't matter what barriers may exist or what trials we have to endure. God wants our heart. God wants our full devotion. He will never rest until He has the highest place in our lives.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 1-10, Psalms 65

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August 7, 2024
Chronological Snobbery

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 1-10, Psalms 65](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

One of the major obstacles C.S. Lewis had to overcome when he came to faith was what he dubbed, “Chronological snobbery.” He defined it as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.” Essentially, it is the false belief that we have it right and those who came before us had it wrong. We’ve figured things out and those who preceded us were operating from superstition, ignorance, and foolishness. We ask all kinds of critical questions of the past but are unwilling to subject our present to those same questions. Eventually, Lewis was challenged to think more deeply by his friend, Owen Barfield, who forced him to confront a series of questions like why did an idea go out of date? Was it ever refuted? If so, by whom, where, and how conclusively? In other words, which things are false—and why—and which things remain true?

I thought about Lewis as I read through today’s genealogies. It’s so easy to pass them over. Treat them as a series of names with which we have no connection. But if we will slow down, we will recognize quite a few of them. And if we have been keeping up on our reading, we will realize we do know their stories. We get to see God and the world and human life through their eyes. We get to learn some things from their example. Foundational beliefs that undergird how we understand the world even to this day. For example, we learn from the story of Adam and Eve that creation is ordered and regulated by God’s Word. This idea is what eventually will give birth to modern science. We learn that human beings are made in the image of God which is the fundamental underpinning to universal human rights. We learn from Abraham that God is personal and desires a relationship with us. We learn from Moses that God has a particular plan for our lives, to set us apart as holy and pure. Taking a step back and looking at the big picture, we learn about God’s faithful, covenantal love for His people. A love that endures despite our many failures and sin. It’s incredible when you stop to think about it.

Every generation naturally assumes they know what’s best. Every generation naturally assumes they are more enlightened than the ones who came before them. Every generation naturally engages in chronological snobbery. The challenge for the people of God is to humble themselves, recognizing we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. We are challenged to be thankful of the sacrifices they have made and be appreciative of the things they have to teach us. The old cliches that those who don’t know their history are doomed to repeat it certainly rings true. If we forget the lessons of our past, we will repeat them in the present. If we forget what God has taught us about Himself and the world and the life He longs for us to live, we will have to re-learn it the hard way. It is much better to treat those who have gone before us with respect, learn from them what it means to follow God in their cultural context, and then seek to apply it to our own lives.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 11-14, Psalms 66

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August 8, 2024
Mighty Men and Women

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 11-14, Psalms 66](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

No person is an island. No one accomplishes anything in life on their own. I remember years ago speaking to a man who was a significant benefactor to Princeton Theological Seminary. He had made his millions in real estate in New York City. He had endowed academic chairs at Ohio State and Princeton as well as created fellowships for the training of pastors. He was incredibly generous and I asked him one time why he gave so much of his wealth away. He replied, “Doug, I have benefited from the generosity of so many over the course of my life. So many people who invested in me, taught me, helped me network, and used their resources to get me where I am today. I didn’t do any of this on my own and I simply want to create similar opportunities for others.” He’s just one example of a “mighty man.” Someone who seeks not his own good but the good of others. Someone who understands his role to build others up. Someone who celebrates the success of others.

David had his mighty men. They are named in our passage for today. David would never have become king without these men. He would have never captured Jerusalem without these men. He would never become the greatest leader Israel had ever known without these men. They invested in David. They served David. They gave their lives for David. Everything David accomplished in his life was due in large measure to the efforts of these men. It’s a great reminder to us all of how much we need “our people.” People who will invest in us, bless us, create opportunities for us, and even give their lives for us. I naturally think of my wife and children here. I do my best to serve them, invest in them, and give my life for them. I think of my church family. I would do the same for them. I think of the pastors I serve overseas. I would do the same for them. I have reached a place in my life where serving others and investing in others and celebrating others brings me the greatest joy.

I would not be where I am today without so many mighty men and women over the years. The list is endless. My mom. My wife. My children. My in-laws. Mentors. Professors. Fellow pastors. Men and women in the church who have supported me, encouraged me, and blessed me in so many ways. I am a product of their intentional effort and prayer. Take a few moments and make a list of the people who have invested in you over the years. People who helped shape you into the person you are today. People who opened doors for you. People who gave you opportunity. People who mentored you along the way. Thank God for each of them. Pray for them and their families. Find a way to reach out to them to thank them if you can. Find ways to cultivate relationships with even more mighty men and women. And perhaps most importantly, be a mighty man or woman yourself!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 15-17, Psalms 67

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August 9, 2024
A Model Prayer

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 15-17, Psalms 67](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

I love the heart of David. To be sure, the guy's a mess. The successes of his life are massive but so are his failures. His devotion to the Lord is convicting, his unfaithfulness deeply troubling. Despite the problems he creates for himself through his penchant for violence and greed and selfishness and a lust for power, David does have his moments. Moments when his deep love for God shines through.

Today's prayer (1 Chronicles 16:8-36 CSB) is a great example. There is praise, thankfulness, gratitude, and joy. There is awe and reverence for who God is and revealed Himself to be as well as humility as David acknowledges his need for salvation. David's prayer provides a model for the believer to help guide our own prayers as we seek to build a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

"Give thanks to the Lord; call on his name; proclaim his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him; sing praise to him; tell about all his wondrous works! Boast in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." David begins with an ascription of praise. He looks at the world around him and sees the handiwork of God. He looks back throughout history and sees the hand of God at work. He knows God is faithfully ordering things according to His sovereign will and purpose and he calls on God's people to give Him praise. Take a moment and look at the world around you. No matter where you live, creation itself is singing the praises of God. The mountains. Oceans. Fields full of wheat and corn. Mighty rivers like the Nile. Lakes like Victoria in Uganda where I will be going tonight. The birds. The fish. The animals. All of it designed to bring us to our knees in awe and wonder.

"Remember the wondrous works he has done, his wonders, and the judgments he has pronounced, you offspring of Israel his servant, Jacob's descendants — his chosen ones. He is the Lord our God; his judgments govern the whole earth. Remember his covenant forever — the promise he ordained for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, swore to Isaac, and confirmed to Jacob as a decree, and to Israel as a permanent covenant: "I will give the land of Canaan to you as your inherited portion." When they were few in number, very few indeed, and resident aliens in Canaan wandering from nation to nation and from one kingdom to another, he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their behalf: "Do not touch my anointed ones or harm my prophets." David remembers not just the miraculous works of creation but the specific acts of God for His people. The faithfulness of God in choosing His people and setting them apart for His holy purpose. The eternal covenant He made to give them a land and an identity. The protection God provided as He guided them from Egypt to the Promised Land. This is where prayer becomes personal. We reflect not just on what God has done generally but what He has done for us personally and we give Him praise.

"Let the whole earth sing to the Lord. Proclaim his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples. For the Lord is great and highly praised; he is feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. Ascribe to the Lord, families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; let the whole earth tremble before him." David next turns to the character and nature of God. God is worthy of our worship simply because He is God. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else. We don't worship God for His blessings. We don't worship God because of His benefits. We worship God for His greatness and holiness and glory and strength. Reflecting on the nature and character of God naturally

brings us to our knees in humility. It serves as a good reminder to us of how fleeting and finite we are as human beings. Our lives come and go but God endures forever. And because God endures forever, we can trust Him.

“The world is firmly established; it cannot be shaken. Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, “The Lord reigns!” Let the sea and all that fills it resound; let the fields and everything in them exult. Then the trees of the forest will shout for joy before the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever. And say, “Save us, God of our salvation; gather us and rescue us from the nations so that we may give thanks to your holy name and rejoice in your praise. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting.” Then all the people said, “Amen” and “Praise the Lord.” Finally, David calls on the Lord, the judge and ruler of the earth, to save him and his people. He calls on God to deliver and rescue His people from the nations that seek to enslave, oppress, and terrorize. He calls on God to do what He’s always done which is protect and guide His people so they may be free to worship Him in spirit and in truth. God sets us free not just to do what we want. He sets us free so we might bring Him the worship He deserves. Take time today to thank God for His freedom and ask His Spirit to guide you in how you use that freedom to worship and serve the Lord.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 18-21, Psalms 68

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August 10, 2024
The One Job of a Leader

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 18-21, Psalms 68](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Leaders have one job. To lead with righteousness and justice. This is especially true the higher up in leadership one ascends. It's true in every facet of life. Parents are to lead their families with righteousness and justice. Pastors and elders are to lead their churches with righteousness and justice. Business leaders are to lead their employees and organizations with righteousness and justice. Civic and political leaders are to lead with righteousness and justice. Why? Because righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne. (Psalms 97:2) When we lead or rule or exercise whatever authority we've been given with righteousness and justice, the people and organizations we serve are blessed because we are patterning our leadership after God. When we lead or rule or exercise whatever authority we've been given with pride and selfishness and greed, the people and organizations we serve suffer and are cursed as a result. We see this on display in David's life in our passage today.

David begins well. He is given victory after victory by God. He triumphs over his enemies. Whoever raises an army against him is defeated. As a result, David consolidates his power. He solidifies his reign over the Promised Land. The people of Israel become a nation under his banner and leadership and are blessed. Why? 1 Chronicles 18:14 CSB gives us the answer. "So David reigned over all Israel, administering justice and righteousness for all his people." However, David's reign of blessing soon comes to an end as he falls prey to pride. He calls for a census. He wants to count the soldiers serving in his army. He wants to quantify his military might. He wants to demonstrate his power to the nations around him. Let's pause and reflect a moment. God has given David all kinds of victories over armies that vastly outnumbered his own. He has given David victory over giants and mighty warriors. He has expanded David's territory and delivered entire nations into his hands. It's still not enough. David has begun to believe his own hype. He's reading his press clippings. He's starting to believe he has accomplished these things by his own strength and military genius. These are unrighteous and unjust goals and it triggers a plague that kills seventy thousand of his men.

We are no different. Think about the impact of righteous and unrighteous political leaders in our nation. Think about righteous and unrighteous civic leaders in our communities. Think about the impact of righteous and unrighteous parents in the home or teachers in the schools or pastors in churches. Now think about yourself. Where do you lead righteously in your life? Where do you lead unrighteously? What would those under your leadership say? How do they experience you? Do you seek to be a blessing to others or are you seeking to serve yourself?

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 22-24, Psalms 69 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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August 11, 2024
(No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 22-24, Psalms 69](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

August 12, 2024
Godly Generosity

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 25-29, Psalms 70](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

How does one become a generous person? The kind of giver God loves? King David shows us the way. First and foremost, one must love God supremely. We must love God more than our wealth. More than our lifestyles. More than our safety. More than our comfort. We must love God with our whole hearts. Listen to what David tells his son Solomon. “As for you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him wholeheartedly and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will reject you forever.” (1 Chronicles 28:9 CSB) Essentially, the key to Solomon’s success, the key to his successful kingship, will be his love for God.

Second, we must recognize God as the giver of all good gifts. "May you be blessed, Lord God of our father Israel, from eternity to eternity. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty, for everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to you. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom, and you are exalted as head over all. Riches and honor come from you, and you are the ruler of everything. Power and might are in your hand, and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name." (1 Chronicles 29:10-13 CSB) We don’t own a single thing. Everything we have comes from God’s own hands. He chose the place of our birth. He endows us with gifts and talents and abilities. He sovereignly orchestrates the opportunities we’ve been given. All these things were outside our control and yet they are the secret to our success. Of course we work hard. Of course we do our best. We are not passive in this process. But the foundation of whatever success we’ve achieved in this life was not laid by our own hands but by God Himself.

Third, we must acknowledge we are unworthy of such divine attention. “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? For everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your own hand. For we are aliens and temporary residents in your presence as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.” (1 Chronicles 29:14-15 CSB) The world is constantly telling us we “deserve” all we have. We’ve “earned” all we’ve received. We are “good” and “righteous” and “worth” every penny of our wealth. The Bible calls this a lie. We are unworthy sinners. Unworthy of God’s attention. Unworthy to come into His presence. We are sinners in desperate need of grace. Our days are like a shadow. There is no abiding. In a generation or two, all we have accomplished will be dust and no one will even remember our names. But God loves us. He has dealt bountifully with us. He has secured for us an eternal home in the heavens if we will receive His greatest gift, Jesus.

Fourth, once we’ve set our hearts on Christ. Once we’ve acknowledged God as the “sole proprietor” of this world and all that is in it. Once we’ve humbled ourselves in our unworthiness before Him. Our hearts and hands quite naturally open. Our fists unclench. Our fears and doubts fade. And we give. Give generously. Freely. Cheerfully. “I know, my God, that you test the heart and that you are pleased with what is right. I have willingly given all these things with an upright heart, and now I have seen

your people who are present here giving joyfully and willingly to you. Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep this desire forever in the thoughts of the hearts of your people, and confirm their hearts toward you.” (1 Chronicles 29:17-18 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 1-4, Psalms 71

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August 13, 2024
A Life of Praise

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 1-4, Psalms 71](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

God wants us to live a life of praise. A life of continual thanksgiving for all He has done for us. A life of faith with our eyes continually focused on our Savior. God wants us to understand all of life is in His hands. All our days are numbered according to His sovereign will. All our resources counted out in advance by His plan. All our experiences - good, bad, and otherwise - are sovereignty used by God to shape us into the image of His Son. When we see life from this perspective, we cannot help but praise the Lord. We cannot help but fall to our knees in awe and wonder. We are humbled and honored and blessed and life takes on a glory we could never create for ourselves.

I find myself sitting in a cafe in Uganda reflecting on God's goodness to me. Who could have known He would send me to the ends of the earth over and over again to proclaim his gospel to the nations? Who could have planned for my life to work out the way that it has? Since the day God delivered me on the campus of the University of Colorado in Boulder, He has used me to advance His Kingdom on the earth. Who am I that God would choose me? Who am I that God would use me in such a way? Who am I that God would honor me? I am nothing. My life is but a breath. My days pass so quickly. And yet God has favored me. Perhaps this is why the Psalm we read this morning hits so differently today.

"Lord, I seek refuge in you; let me never be disgraced. In your justice, rescue and deliver me; listen closely to me and save me. Be a rock of refuge for me, where I can always go. Give the command to save me, for you are my rock and fortress. Deliver me, my God, from the power of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and oppressive." I can look back and see where God has answered this prayer in my life. He has been a refuge for me in times of trouble. He has never let me be disgraced. He has rescued and delivered me in so many situations. He has remained close to me and protected me. He has not allowed the wicked to triumph over me. My life is a testimony to His goodness and grace.

"For you are my hope, Lord God, my confidence from my youth. I have leaned on you from birth; you took me from my mother's womb. My praise is always about you. I am like a miraculous sign to many, and you are my strong refuge. My mouth is full of praise and honor to you all day long." From the day I said "yes" to Jesus, God has been my confidence. He has been my stronghold. He has filled me with His Spirit and anointed my days. He has made my life a miraculous sign to many. What can I do in response to all He has done for me? I can praise God. I can praise Him with my lips. I can praise Him with my heart. I can praise Him from the depths of my soul.

"Don't discard me in my old age. As my strength fails, do not abandon me. For my enemies talk about me, and those who spy on me plot together, saying, "God has abandoned him; chase him and catch him, for there is no one to rescue him." God, do not be far from me; my God, hurry to help me. May my adversaries be disgraced and destroyed; may those who intend to harm me be covered with disgrace and humiliation. But I will hope continually and will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell about your righteousness and your salvation all day long, though I cannot sum them up. I come because of the mighty acts of the Lord God; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone." Now I am growing older. And as I age, I fully expect my outer body to waste away even as my inner body is renewed day by day. The days will fly by more quickly. My strength and energy will diminish over time. My wisdom and knowledge will eventually fail. But God will remain my hope and I will praise Him more and more. I will use every breath to tell the world of your righteousness and your mighty works.

“God, you have taught me from my youth, and I still proclaim your wondrous works. Even while I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me, while I proclaim your power to another generation, your strength to all who are to come. Your righteousness reaches the heights, God, you who have done great things; God, who is like you? You caused me to experience many troubles and misfortunes, but you will revive me again. You will bring me up again, even from the depths of the earth. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again. Therefore, I will praise you with a harp for your faithfulness, my God; I will sing to you with a lyre, Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you because you have redeemed me. Therefore, my tongue will proclaim your righteousness all day long, for those who intend to harm me will be disgraced and confounded.” (Psalms 71:1-24 CSB) What an incredible privilege it is to proclaim God’s power and works to yet another generation. To remind everyone yet again of the glory and honor and power and splendor and majesty of God. To teach everyone to number the days they’ve been given and count the hours God has blessed them with and use all the time they have to tell others about Christ. God has taught us from our youth...so we proclaim His good works. God has blessed us in our old age...so we proclaim His power to another generation. God has caused us to go through trials and temptations, good times and bad...so we tell of His deliverance and salvation. God has brought us up over and over again from the depths of the earth to increase us in honor and comfort...so we praise Him yet again. Praise Him with all that we are and all that we have and all the energy we have left. We proclaim His praise all the day long!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 5-8, Psalms 72

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August 14, 2024
Every Square Inch of Creation

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 5-8, Psalms 72](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Abraham Kuyper, the famous Dutch theologian and politician, once said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” That quote rings in my mind as I preach in northern Uganda this morning. This is an area recovering from the trauma of a twenty-year reign of terror under the notorious warlord and witch doctor, Joseph Kony. From the 1980’s until the early 2000’s, he kidnapped children, forced them torture and kill and even eat their parents, and turned them into mindless slaves and soldiers. For years, the government tried to capture him and bring him to justice. The United States even sent their special forces after him. He would evade capture over and over again. The local population believes it was due to his connection to demonic spirits. Once his power was broken - a miraculous story in itself - the region began the long process of recovery. The people here are marked by their suffering physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. They have endured unspeakable horrors and yet God, through the Holy Spirit, is bringing healing. He is reclaiming lives that the devil tried to “kill, steal, and destroy.” He is reclaiming territory that the devil tried to curse. He is breaking the power of evil in this part of the world and it is incredible to witness.

Over and over again, through the Bible, God declares His great desire to dwell with His people. He dwelt with them at the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden. He journeyed with them through the wilderness in the Tabernacle. His presence filled the Temple Solomon built. He came in the Person of Jesus Christ to walk among us. He will eventually return in all His glory to dwell forever here on earth with those He made in His image. This is God’s great plan for all of creation. Until that great day comes, God promises to dwell with His people through the Holy Spirit. He indwells the church. The local gathering of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation on the earth. As God comes to be with His people, we are sanctified and made holy. The very ground we occupy is reclaimed for God’s purposes. The power of evil and sin and death is driven out and new life begins to emerge. The sick are healed. The enslaved are set free. The broken are mended. The grieving are comforted. The lost are found. The poor are provided for. These are all signs of God’s presence breaking into the world. It happens in places like Parker, CO and Kitgum, Uganda. It happens in beautiful church buildings and under mango trees. It happens in major metropolitan cities and remote villages. It happens all over the world and the incredible news is we get to part of it!

Take some time and re-read Solomon’s prayer today from 2 Chronicles 6. Let yourself feel his emotions as he marvels at all God has done for him and for Israel. Reflect on all God has done for you and your family and your church family. Think about the blessings He has bestowed on you. The many ways He has provided and protected you. The incredible things He has done for you. Rejoice in how much He loves you. God is for you, friends, not against you! God is with you, friends, not distant from you! God knows your every need, your every desire, your every hope, your every fear, your every success, your every failure, your every joy, your every heartbreak and He is faithful. Faithful and good to love you and draw near to you if you will draw near to Him. This is why God’s Presence filled the Tabernacle in the wilderness. It’s why God’s Presence filled the Temple in Jerusalem. This is why God’s Presence fills the heart of every believer. There is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence nor one individual person made in God’s own image over which Christ does not declare, “You are mine!” He will never cede any territory to the devil. Never cede a single soul to His great enemy. He will never relent until the powers of sin and death and evil and the devil are destroyed once and for all.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 9-12, Psalms 73

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August 15, 2024
The Power of Kindness

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 9-12, Psalms 73](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Kindness seems in short supply these days. In fact, kindness no longer seems to be a virtue in some circles. It is despised. It is rejected in favor of anger or hate or sacrificed in pursuit of power. Kindness is now equated with weakness. Those who are kind are perceived to be soft. Compromising. Even cowardly. I wish I could say this was a secular problem but sadly, it's become a spiritual one as well. Despite the fact that kindness is an attribute of God, far too many Christians have exchanged kindness for crassness. Gentleness for brute force. Humility for pride. It's hard to watch and it reminds me of Rehoboam's tragic response to his people.

The people were weary after laboring so hard under the reign of Solomon. They naturally sought relief when Rehoboam ascended to the throne. They came before him and asked him to set a different course. Lighten the load. Make the burden easier to bear. They didn't do this to avoid work. They weren't engaged in any kind of rebellion. They simply were asking for a bit of grace. Rehoboam sought out the wisdom of his counselors. His older, wiser counselors told him, "If you will be kind to this people and please them by speaking kind words to them, they will be your servants forever." (2 Chronicles 10:7 CSB) They had seen the demands Solomon had placed on them for decades and knew the people were at their breaking point. All Rehoboam had to do was show a little kindness. Speak words of understanding. Offer mercy and grace and help in their time of need. Had he done that, he would have won over the people forever and kept his kingdom together. Unfortunately, Rehoboam listened to his peers. He followed the advice of his younger, more foolish and entitled counselors who told him to increase his hold on the people. Tighten his grip. Brook no challenge to his authority. The result was division and outright rebellion from which the nation never recovered.

I find the same dynamics to be true in our world today. The more use of power and control and authority to get our way, the more bitterness and anger and frustration we create. The more we turn to force, the more it backfires on us. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. When we reject kindness and gentleness and humility for spite and force and pride, we can expect there to be a backlash every single time. People will mirror the behavior they see in us. It could be our spouse. It could be our kids. It could be our friends. It could be our enemies. It happens in homes and communities and schools and churches and businesses and nations all over the earth. The result is always division. Always dissension. Always conflict. Perhaps that's why the Apostle Paul is quick to remind the Roman Christians that it is God's kindness that leads to repentance. He is quick to remind them of the gentleness and humility of Christ in the face of our own hatred and anger and violent rebellion. Kindness leads to repentance. Gentleness turns away wrath. Humility seeks to serve rather than be served. This is the way of Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 13-17, Psalms 74

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August 16, 2024
Trust in God

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 13-17, Psalms 74](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

It's one thing to say you trust in God. It's another to actually place your trust in God. It's only when we are put to the test that we find out whether our trust in God is real or not. This week, I have spent hours interviewing church planters from all over northern Uganda. They face seemingly insurmountable obstacles like food insecurity, lack of access to clean drinking water, little to no formal education, high unemployment, no medical care, violence and suffering on a daily basis. The list is endless and overwhelming. One would think the trauma from these experiences would cripple them forever. Drive them to depression and despair and suicidal ideation. That's what it does for much of the population here. What makes our church planters different? They trust in God. They believe He is with them. And this gives them strength and hope and joy in the midst of their sufferings. Furthermore, this trust translates into action. It actually leads them to success. They are planting churches. They are planting gardens. They are educating their children. They are working to overcome all of the obstacles that stand in their way. Life is slowly, incrementally getting better. And as it gets better for them, they share it with those around them. As a result, many are coming to faith in Jesus Christ, learning to trust Him, and making their lives better as well. It's incredible!

The life of King Asa shows us the difference between trusting God and trusting Self. Asa begins well. When faced with overwhelming odds in battle, he cries out to the Lord. "Lord, there is no one besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, Lord our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army. Lord, you are our God. Do not let a mere mortal hinder you." (2 Chronicles 14:11 CSB) He knows he cannot hope to win against the might of Israel or the might of Cush on his own. He trusts in the Lord for His strength. Not only that but he brought revival to the land of Judah. He tore down the false idols and renewed the worship of God. As a result, God granted him decades of peace. Decades of prosperity. But towards the end of his reign, another threat appeared on the horizon. Israel once again sought to invade. And this time, instead of turning to the Lord, Asa trusted in his own strength, his own wisdom, his own political connections and the result was disaster. Wars broke out all around him. He contracted a wasting disease. His prosperous and peaceful rule came to an end.

Do you trust the Lord? Not just on Sundays. Not just in an occasional worship service that fits into your busy schedule. Not just when times are tough. Not just in emergencies. Not just when it's convenient. Not just when God's will for your life happens to match your own. Do you trust the Lord with your life? Do you trust the Lord with your family? Do you trust the Lord with your work? Do you trust the Lord with the decisions you make on a daily basis? Do you live a life of whole-hearted devotion to Him? How would you know? There are signs. When you find yourself hungering and thirsting for holiness and righteousness. When you find yourself easily convicted of sin. When you find yourself longing to be in worship with God's people. When you find yourself prioritizing devotional time with the Lord each and every day. When you find yourself serving others rather than yourself. All of these are signs you are trusting God. Of course, the signs you are trusting yourself are just as obvious. Every day we are faced with a choice. Will we trust God or will we trust Self? Trusting God leads to a life of joy and peace and fulfillment while trusting Self leads to a life of fear and anxiety and insecurity and discontentment. Which will you choose today?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 18–20, Psalms 75

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August 17, 2024
The Power of Singing

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 18-20, Psalms 75](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Yesterday, we wrapped up our training conference in northern Uganda. As is our custom, we held a commissioning service to send out our church planters. We prayed for them. We encouraged them with Scripture. We heard testimonies. But the part that always gets me is the singing. These men and women are headed into some of the most difficult to reach places on earth. They will face food insecurity and potential starvation. They will lack access to clean drinking water. They will sleep in the bush. They will leave their families for days at a time. They will be attacked along the way. Persecuted for their faith. Some might be imprisoned. We even had one brother martyred for his faith in the past year. And still they sing. Still they go forth with praises on their lips. It's awe-inspiring.

It reminds me so much of what we read in today's passage. King Jehoshaphat is so confident in his victory over his enemies that he sends a choir out to lead his army. "Then he consulted with the people and appointed some to sing for the Lord and some to praise the splendor of his holiness. When they went out in front of the armed forces, they kept singing: Give thanks to the Lord, for his faithful love endures forever." (2 Chronicles 20:21 CSB) This is par for the course for Jehoshaphat. He's a faithful king. A godly king. One who places his trust in the Lord. So when he hears news that the nations around him have banded together and brought a mighty army against him, he doesn't panic. He declares a fast. He calls on the people to pray. They cry out to the Lord and He delivers them from their enemies. All that is left for them to do is sing. Sing of His goodness. Sing of His faithfulness. Sing of His steadfast love forever.

Over the years, I've had a lot of people ask me why Christians sing and my answer is always the same. We sing because we know the Lord has delivered us. We sing because the Lord has saved us. When the mighty powers of sin and death and devil came against us, we sing because God has protected us and scattered our enemies. In fact, when Christians in the churches I've led start arguing over the singing, it's a sure sign we've lost sight of all God has done for us. When we fuss and fight or withhold our singing out of spite, we are making a mockery of the Lord's salvation and He is not pleased. God has performed a miraculous work for us. How can we not help singing? How can we not join our voices together and sing of the goodness of God? How can we not praise the Lord for all His benefits? The next time you have the opportunity to sing, sing with all your heart. Sing with all our soul. Sing at the top of your lungs. Sing for joy. Sing for love. Sing for God.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 21-24, Psalms 76 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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August 18, 2024
(No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 21-24, Psalms 76](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

August 19, 2024
Mentoring

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 25-27, Psalms 77](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Everyone needs a mentor. An older, wiser person in their life who has walked with Jesus faithfully and who can share from a deep well of spiritual wisdom. I've been blessed to have several mentors over the course of my life. Don Bachman and Berk Sterling were two men who took me under their wing when I was a new Christian. They taught me how to have a devotional time with Jesus. They taught me how to be a godly husband and father. They taught me the value of serving the Lord with open hands. Jim Kay, Cleophus LaRue, and Sam Atchison were next up for me. I met them in seminary and while I was serving at New Jersey State Prison. They taught me how to be a godly pastor, preach the Word of God, minister effectively and professionally, and most of all, to trust the power of the gospel to change lives. Steve Hayner became a mentor to me while I was pursuing my doctorate. He poured his heart into me and taught me the value of relationships. He was one of the most humble men I have ever met and he cultivated friendships across the political, social, global, and theological spectrum. Something I've tried hard to duplicate in my own life. Currently, I am blessed not only to still be meeting with Don Bachman but also men like Randy MacFarland and David Schultz who continue to encourage and challenge me. I am where I am today because of these men. I am who I am today because of these men. There is nothing better for your walk with Jesus than having a godly mentor in your life.

I thought about the power of mentoring when I ran across these words in our reading today, "He sought God throughout the lifetime of Zechariah, the teacher of the fear of God. During the time that he sought the Lord, God gave him success." (2 Chronicles 26:5 CSB) By all accounts, Uzziah was a godly king. He ruled for over fifty years in Jerusalem. He expanded the borders. He built wealth and power. The nation enjoyed a period of great blessing under his leadership. But Uzziah didn't do this on his own. He wasn't born this way. He didn't stumble onto it by himself. He had a mentor. A priest named Zechariah who was well-known in Judah for his faithfulness to God. Zechariah feared the Lord and taught others to do the same, including the young king. While Uzziah was under his influence, the nation prospered and Uzziah sought the Lord and walked in the ways of his father Amaziah and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. However, one gets the sense that after Zechariah dies (an implicit assumption from the text since Azariah was priest when Uzziah went into the Temple), Uzziah loses his way. He becomes proud and arrogant, believing himself to be worthy enough to offer sacrifices before the Lord. The result is decline and eventual disease and death.

I have known many over the course of my life who started well. They gave their lives to Christ and followed him faithfully under the wise counsel of older, wiser saints. However, I have seen some of those same people fall away as relationships shifted and they no longer had the benefit of a spiritual mentor. That's why I'm so passionate about mentoring. It's why I mentor several younger men in my congregation. It's why I make myself available to younger, less experienced pastors in our denomination and around the world. We all need someone to guide us in the Christian life. If you don't have one, let me encourage you to find a mentor today.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 28-31, Psalms 78

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August 20, 2024
Seek the Heart of God

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 28-31, Psalms 78](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Hezekiah was a remarkable man. The polar opposite of his father. Where his father was unfaithful, Hezekiah was faithful. Where his father was morally compromised, Hezekiah was pure. Where his father was evil, Hezekiah was good. One wonders where Hezekiah learned such faithfulness. What made him turn from his father's ways? Who taught him the ways of the Lord? How did he know to cleanse the Temple, reinstitute the Levites, and celebrate the Passover? These things had been absent for decades. The Temple had been desecrated. The priests and Levites forgotten. And yet somehow Hezekiah's heart was not only stirred to seek the Lord in this pagan environment but God provided faithful teachers along the way to instruct and guide him. They remain nameless. Their identities known only to God. But what an impact they make through this great man!

Hezekiah is a great example of what can happen when key leaders seek the heart of God. God doesn't need our wealth. He doesn't need our power. He doesn't need our influence or position or authority. He simply needs our hearts. If we seek to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; His promise is He will use us to make Kingdom-sized impact on those around us. I love how Hezekiah himself describes it. "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us." (2 Chronicles 29:10 CSB) He dedicated his life to the destruction of idolatry. He tore down the pagan shrines that dotted the hillsides. He cleansed the Temple. He restored true worship. He sent messengers throughout the length and breadth of the nation to invite people to celebrate the Passover meal. And even though the people had forgotten how to cleanse themselves in preparation, Hezekiah interceded on their behalf, calling on God to honor the intent of their hearts. The impact of this time of celebration was so profound, the people asked to stay an additional seven days to keep worshipping! "The Israelites who were present in Jerusalem observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day after day with loud instruments. Then Hezekiah encouraged all the Levites who performed skillfully before the Lord. They ate at the appointed festival for seven days, sacrificing fellowship offerings and giving thanks to the Lord, the God of their ancestors. The whole congregation decided to observe seven more days, so they observed seven days with joy..." (2 Chronicles 30:21-23 CSB) Once the feast was complete, the people - inspired by the worship of the True and Living God and Hezekiah's example - returned to their homes to continue to purge the nation of its idolatry. "When all this was completed, all Israel who had attended went out to the cities of Judah and broke up the sacred pillars, chopped down the Asherah poles, and tore down the high places and altars throughout Judah and Benjamin, as well as in Ephraim and Manasseh, to the last one. Then all the Israelites returned to their cities, each to his own possession." (2 Chronicles 31:1 CSB) This is nothing short of revival!

I know a lot of Christians who pray for revival. They pray regularly for a fresh movement of God's Spirit through their lives, churches, communities, and their nation. If that describes you...and I hope it does...I want to encourage you to follow Hezekiah's example. Don't wait! Don't delay! Simply begin to seek God's face right where you are! If you are a mother or father, seek God's heart for your home and children. If you are a student or employee, seek God's heart for your school or place of work. If you are a business, community, or church leader, seek God's heart for the people you serve. If you are a national leader, seek God's heart for your country. The secret to Hezekiah's success had very little to do with his authority as king. It had everything to do with his heart for God. "Hezekiah did this throughout all Judah. He did what was good and upright and true before the Lord his God. He was diligent in every

deed that he began in the service of God's temple, in the instruction and the commands, in order to seek his God, and he prospered." (2 Chronicles 31:20-21 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 32-34, Psalms 79

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August 21, 2024
[Knowing the Lord](#)

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 32-34, Psalms 79](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

One of the most consistent themes throughout Scripture is God's desire to make Himself known. He will not stop until knowledge of God fills the earth like the waters fill the sea. God will never rest until every person on earth from every tribe, tongue, and nation are given the opportunity to know Him and trust Him. This is God's great desire, for all to come to know the truth about who He is and His great love for all He has made. We see this on display in a myriad of ways in the Old Testament. God speaks to certain individuals like Abraham and Sarah. God confronts other individuals like the kings of Israel and Judah. God challenges individuals like Pharaoh and the other leaders of the pagan nations of the earth. But the refrain is always the same. God wants to be known. God wants the world to see Him for who He is and has revealed Himself to be. God wants the nations to find their true purpose in worshipping Him alone.

Today we see this mapped out in the conflict between Sennacherib and Hezekiah. Sennacherib was the king of the greatest empire of the time. His armies had rolled through nation after nation, meeting little if any resistance. He saw himself as divinely appointed by his gods to rule over the earth. He even taunts Hezekiah and the people of Israel, claiming God stood no chance against him. "His servants said more against the Lord God and against his servant Hezekiah. He also wrote letters to mock the Lord, the God of Israel, saying against him: Just like the national gods of the lands that did not rescue their people from my power, so Hezekiah's God will not rescue his people from my power. Then they called out loudly in Hebrew to the people of Jerusalem, who were on the wall, to frighten and discourage them in order that he might capture the city. They spoke against the God of Jerusalem like they had spoken against the gods of the peoples of the earth, which were made by human hands." (2 Chronicles 32:16-19 CSB) Sennacherib was a bold and arrogant and foolish king who believed the God of Israel was just another pagan idol. But God will not be mocked and He made Himself known as He destroys the armies of the Assyrians and sets in motion a chain of events that eventually leads to Sennacherib's death. Hezekiah, on the other hand, is lifted up by God and exalted among the nations. Many turn to the Lord in fear after witnessing the great miracle of salvation and God's name became known among the people's of the earth. The same dynamics are in play in the repentance of Manasseh and the reforms of Josiah. Over and over again, God making Himself known.

God is still making Himself known today. God is still on the move in our world today. It can be tough to see at times. The news comes at us fast and hard and relentlessly. It's almost universally tragic and deceitful and bad. Humanity seems to be locked in a death spiral from which there is no escape. We simply cannot outrun our own foolishness. Our own pride and arrogance. Our own idolatry and sinfulness. Everything we do is corrupted by the pursuit of power, love for money, and a lust for personal, selfish gratification. Only God can turn this around. Only God can change the human heart. Only God can give us a new perspective. Pray for the Lord to give you His eyes to see and His heart to understand and His passion to make Himself known.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 35-36, Psalms 80

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August 22, 2024
The End and the Beginning

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 35-36, Psalms 80](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

The Old Testament ends with a significant plot twist. For those who may not be aware, 2 Chronicles is the last book of the Hebrew Bible. In the traditional Jewish ordering of the books, it comes last because it summarizes so much of what has gone before. So as we come to the end of our Old Testament journey this year, we run across an important reflection. Listen to how God summarizes what has happened to Israel and why...

“All the leaders of the priests and the people multiplied their unfaithful deeds, imitating all the detestable practices of the nations, and they defiled the Lord’s temple that he had consecrated in Jerusalem. But the Lord, the God of their ancestors sent word against them by the hand of his messengers, sending them time and time again, for he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept ridiculing God’s messengers, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the Lord’s wrath was so stirred up against his people that there was no remedy. So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their fit young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He had no pity on young men or young women, elderly or aged; he handed them all over to him. He took everything to Babylon — all the articles of God’s temple, large and small, the treasures of the Lord’s temple, and the treasures of the king and his officials. Then the Chaldeans burned God’s temple. They tore down Jerusalem’s wall, burned all its palaces, and destroyed all its valuable articles. He deported those who escaped from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and his sons until the rise of the Persian kingdom. This fulfilled the word of the Lord through Jeremiah, and the land enjoyed its Sabbath rest all the days of the desolation until seventy years were fulfilled.” (2 Chronicles 36:14-21 CSB)

God is patient with us but He will not be mocked forever. God perseveres with His saints but He will not tolerate sin. Time and time again, God sent His messengers to call His people to repentance only to have them mistreated, rejected, despised, even beaten and killed at times. As the sin of the nation increased, God’s righteous anger increased as well. God had set Israel apart to be a light to the nations. This was their mission. This is why they existed. But like Adam and Eve before them, they rejected God’s plan for their lives and went their own way. They created their own gods and set up idols just like the nations around them. They defiled the Temple and corrupted their worship. As a result, God issues a decree of judgment. It is swift and terrible. He sends the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple and carry the people off into exile. Essentially, He reclaims the Promised Land for Himself. He gives it rest for seventy years. He sanctifies it and sets it apart for His own use until He was ready to bring His people back home.

It’s a devastating indictment. One we would do well to heed ourselves today. Especially the church in the West which is so corrupted by sin and abuse and a lust for political power and social relevance. The church in the West does not do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Instead, we reject God’s law. We refuse to walk in God’s love. We worship according to our own preferences and expect God to help us achieve our plans for our lives. We do not submit to Him in humility. We do not sacrifice for Him. We do not seek to advance His Kingdom on the earth. I know I am speaking in generalities and I know there are clear exceptions but, by and large, all the data bears these conclusions out. We are foolish to think we will escape God’s judgment. He will not be mocked. He will not tolerate sin. He will eventually act to bring about His righteousness among His chosen people.

Thankfully, judgment doesn't have the last word in the Old Testament. There is a postscript to the story. A note of hope to sustain God's people in the midst of their despair and heartbreak. "In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom and also to put it in writing: This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: The Lord, the God of the heavens, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build him a temple at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up, and may the Lord his God be with him."(2 Chronicles 36:22-23 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 1-2, Psalms 81

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August 23, 2024
Prophetic Fulfillment

Readings for today: [Matthew 1-2, Psalms 81](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

One of the things I look most forward to when I read the Bible every year is the transition between Old and New Testaments. To finish the Old Testament after months of being immersed in the history and story and struggles of God's chosen people and then to see it fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ is powerful. It never gets old. It never fails to hit me. I love reading through the genealogy and reflecting on all the work it took to get from the call of Abram to the birth of Christ. I think about all the different ways God orchestrated His plan, bending their often sinful, selfish decisions to His perfect will. I think about all the times the plan of God seemingly comes under threat only to have God act miraculously and powerfully to protect the line of the Messiah. I think of the four hundred year enslavement in Egypt, the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the victories and defeats, the corruption of the kings, the scattering and exile of the nation, and the glorious, unexpected return. As I've often said, there is no greater miracle than the preservation of God's chosen people.

Matthew clearly has a deep appreciation what has come before as well. He speaks often of the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophets. Everything from the genealogy to the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of his virgin mother to the birthplace of the Messiah to the flight into Egypt to the massacre of the innocents and the eventual settlement in Nazareth was all foretold. It was all planned. It was all sovereignly decreed by the Lord in advance. It's a powerful witness that highlights the inextricable relationship between the Old and New Testaments. One cannot study the life of Jesus in a vacuum. We can't pretend He came on the scene out of nowhere. As confusing and challenging as it is at times to read, we simply cannot jettison the Old Testament because it shapes the world and cultural context into which Jesus was born. He was a Jew. Born to Jewish parents. Circumcised on the eighth day. Raised among God's covenant people. Taught the Torah and the histories and the words of the prophets from a very young age. The Old Testament was Jesus' Bible and He Himself is the fulfillment of all the Law and Prophets.

So as we make the turn into more familiar, more comfortable territory, I want to encourage to take time to thank God for all that you have read so far this year. Thank God for the Law and the Prophets. Thank God for the history of His people. Thank God for the men and women who came before us and came before Jesus who were used by God to further His great salvation plan. Thank God for the Jewish people and how God continues to use them to further His purposes in the world. Most of all, pray for our Jewish friends to recognize their Messiah and come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 3-4, Psalms 82

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August 24, 2024
John the Baptist

Readings for today: [Matthew 3-4, Psalms 82](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

John the Baptist is one of the most fascinating figures in all the Bible. He is Elijah reborn. The one whom Malachi prophesied would prefigure the coming of the Messiah. He is the messenger. The final Old Testament prophet. Like the prophets of old, he lives an ascetic lifestyle. He dwells in the desert. Survives on locusts and wild honey. Wears clothing made from wild camel hide. From birth, he was set apart as a Nazarite which meant no wine touched his lips nor would he cut his hair. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and he was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

John preached a message of repentance. In keeping with his prophetic forebears, he pulled no punches. He showed no fear. In the face of political and religious opposition, he spoke the truth. He called out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He called out the immoral behavior of Herod the tetrarch. He called out the sins of the people as they came to be baptized. He called them to obedience. Called them to surrender. To sacrifice. To devote their lives to Yahweh. And revival began sweeping the region.

God called John to serve a very special purpose. Though it meant prison. Though it would eventually cost him his life. John was called to prepare the way for Jesus. To make His path straight. To lift up every valley. To tear down every mountain. To straighten out the crooked and smooth the rough edges. He was called to lay the groundwork for the ministry of the Messiah so that all people might see the salvation of God. His calling was not to fame. Fortune. Safety. Security. Comfort. Peace. As soon as his ministry gets rolling, he hands it off. As soon as he is becoming popular, Jesus shows up on the scene. As soon as he really starts getting traction, he steps aside.

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) This is our calling as well. To step aside. To get out of the limelight. To do all we can to point everyone to Christ. It may not make us popular. It may not gain us fame or fortune or a good reputation. It may cost us some of our rights. Some of our freedoms. Some of us may indeed be put in prison. Some of us indeed may lose our lives. (Not necessarily here in America but certainly in many places around the world.) The calling John received from God has been given to the church. To preach the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth. To call people to repentance before the Lord. To call people to surrender their lives to Jesus before it's too late. Before the day of judgment comes. Before the ax is laid to the root of the tree and the wicked are cut off. We too must make straight the path for Jesus. We too must lift up every valley. Tear down every mountain. Straighten out the crooked and smooth over the rough edges. In short, we must do all we can to remove every barrier to Christ. We must ourselves get out of the way so that others will see Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 5-6, Psalms 83 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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August 25, 2024
(No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: Matthew 5-6, Psalms 83 ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

August 26, 2024
The Kingdom Life

Readings for today: [Matthew 7-8, Psalms 84](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

We are entering an election season where we exercise our rights as citizens of a kingdom called the United States of America. Over the next few months, millions of dollars will be spent to fill our airwaves with messages promising the coming of a messiah. One who will save us from the existential threat of the other party. Both candidates and their campaigns are using apocalyptic imagery to suggest our nation is doomed if the other person is elected. They attack each other's character and motives. They seek to tear down one another's reputation. The media is complicit and joins the fray. Social media is a dumpster fire, filled with fake news and misinformation. It's a brutal reminder of how quickly we devolve as a species. We are so prone to violence and hatred and anger and division.

Jesus offers us a different kind of citizenship. He offers us a place in a different kind of Kingdom. One marked by mercy and grace, kindness and love. One marked by humility and service, where others are considered more important than ourselves. One marked by wisdom and beauty and glory and peace. The ways of this Kingdom are far different than the ways of our little kingdoms here on earth. In fact, many of the values of Jesus' Kingdom feel upside down to us. Naive and impractical. It's why we struggle so much to put them into practice. And yet, Jesus promises that if we do keep His commands and align our hearts with His heart and do what He says to do, we will be building our lives on a foundation that can never be shaken.

It's quite the contrast. I don't know a single person - Christian or otherwise - who thinks our nation is headed for better days. Most tell me they just hope things don't completely collapse and break down. We live with so much fear and anxiety. We medicate at high levels. We are more depressed than ever. It seems clear to me that we've build our life together on sand. And the storm is coming and is already here. And the foundations of our world are shaking and coming apart. In many ways, good is now evil and evil is now good. We ignore biological and sociological realities to our great peril. We've saddled ourselves with a debt that will take lifetimes to repay. So where do we find hope? We place our faith in Christ. We apply His Kingdom principles to our lives. We embrace the ways of His Kingdom.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 9-10, Psalms 85

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August 27, 2024
God Doesn't Live in a Box

Readings for today: [Matthew 9-10, Psalms 85](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

I love theology. I went to one of the top theological schools in the world to get my degree. I received my doctorate from another top school. I continue to study theology for a living. I am passionate about the subject. Right theology is critically important because what we think about God matters. It matters here on earth as well as in eternity. Wrong theology can be abusive and terrorizing. Right theology can be incredibly freeing and life-giving. And of course, there's a whole spectrum in between. And that's why I've taken theological stands over the years that placed me at odds at times with the prevailing authorities in the denominations I've served.

In today's reading we see what happens when theology gets in the way. When theological principle becomes more important than ministering to the needs of people. We see what happens when we desire to be right over the desire to be merciful. Jesus is attacked by the scribes for claiming to forgive sins. He is attacked by the Pharisees because of the company he kept. He is even questioned by the disciples of John the Baptist over a lack of fasting. The final insult comes when he is accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil himself. What did Jesus do to merit such treatment? He healed a paralytic. He ate a meal with a tax collector and his friends. He healed a woman with a serious medical issue and raised the dead. Finally, he cast out a demon from a demon-possessed man. One would think the scribes and Pharisees and other religious leaders of his day would rejoice over what Jesus was doing. His miracles were signs of the inbreaking power of the Kingdom of God. But their theology got in the way. They had used their knowledge of the Law and the Prophets to put God in a box and they expected Him to stay there. But God cannot be controlled. He is untamable. He is not safe. He continually breaks through the boundaries we set for Him through our limited understanding which is why we should always approach Him with deep humility.

Sadly, the spirit of Pharisaism is alive and well today. I have seen it and experienced it on any number of occasions. I have been accused over the years of any number of things simply because I don't believe God can be limited to any human theological "system." Now don't get me wrong. I absolutely believe God will never contradict His Word but the Bible is not a systematic theology textbook. The God who reveals Himself through Jesus Christ and in the pages of the different books that make up the Old and New Testament is a wild God who proves over and over again that He simply will not allow us to fence Him in. It's why Jesus' words today are so important, "Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice." If only we could learn how to embrace God's love as well as God's law! He would take us to places we've never dreamed and do things through us we never thought possible.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 11-12, Psalms 86

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August 28, 2024
[The Importance of Rest](#)

Readings for today: [Matthew 11-12, Psalms 86](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Medical professionals all agree that healthy adults need around 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Rest is an essential part of our overall health and well-being not just physically but mentally and emotionally as well. Sadly, we live in a society where rest seems to be in short supply. According to recent studies by the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health, 70% of Americans reported insufficient sleep at least one night a month. 11% report insufficient sleep every night. Sleep-related problems impact some 50-70 million Americans of all ages and socio-economic classes and seem largely due to technology, anxiety, lifestyle demands, and the lack of education around the impact of sleep loss. As the “sleep debt” piles up, so do the consequences. It is estimated that our collective lack of sleep is costing us over 100 billion a year in lost productivity, medical expenses, sick leave, etc. Throw in the fear fostered by our culture and is it any wonder we see a marked rise in hate and outrage as sleep-deprived, chronically anxious people begin acting out in all sorts of ways?

Now listen to the words of Jesus. “All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him. “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:27-30 CSB)

What a difference! What a contrast! All things have been given to Jesus by His Heavenly Father. All authority in heaven and on earth has been entrusted into His hands. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that has been made. Jesus reigns. He rules. He sits on heaven’s throne. As such, He is the only one with the authority to set us free from our anxiety and restlessness. He is the only one with the power to grant us a peaceful sleep. Furthermore, this is His great desire. To grant us rest. He is no tyrant. No dictator. No abusive strongman. He is a gentle and humble King who loves His people dearly. His yoke is therefore easy. His burden is therefore light. He doesn’t seek to pile on. He is not like human rulers who seek to accumulate as much control over our lives as possible. His goal for us is “soul-rest.” The kind of rest that sinks deep into your bones. The kind of rest you can only get when you truly believe someone benevolent and good and righteous and faithful sits on the throne of eternity and is watching over your life.

Human beings were made to rest. Rest one day out of every seven. It’s what we call a Sabbath. We were made to rest one-third out of every day. It’s what we call sleep. We were made to rest in an intimate relationship with God that would relieve all the pressure that comes from life in this world. It’s why Jesus tells us not to be anxious. God is in control. It’s why Jesus tells us not to worry. God is in control. It’s why Jesus tells us not to be afraid when we see all the upheaval and turmoil in the world around us. God is in control. It is the sovereignty of God that gives rest to our souls.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 13-14, Psalms 87

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August 29, 2024
Treasure of God's Word

Readings for today: [Matthew 13-14, Psalms 87](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

God's Word is a treasure. It is of inestimable worth. One simply cannot put a price on it. It has stood the test of time for thousands of years. Sixty-six books written over several centuries by forty different authors all declaring the mysteries and glories of the Kingdom of God. This is why I read through it every single year. It is worth the effort. It is worth the work. Through it, God speaks. God reveals. God commands. There is nothing more important than seeking to understand God's Word. Nothing more relevant to a person's life. The more we align our lives with what God has to say, the more we experience the blessings of the Kingdom in every moment and every conversation and every relationship in life.

Jesus tells His disciples that anyone who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the wealthy owner of a house who displays treasures, both old and new. He or she brings out the ancient, priceless heirlooms as well as the new pieces he or she has recently bought. This is a clear reference to the truths of the Old Testament as well as the truths of what will eventually become the New Testament. Jesus' disciples are being trained in their Scriptures - the Hebrew Bible - as well as given fresh insights from the Incarnate Word of God Himself. As they combine what they are learning from Jesus with their knowledge of the Old Testament, they will gain a fuller, richer, more complete understanding of who God is and what He is doing in the world. Indeed, the Risen Christ will become the "interpretive lens" through which all of Scripture is understood.

You and I have the benefit of a complete Bible. We have the benefit of two thousand years of commentary and study by some of the greatest theological minds in human history. We have the benefit of the Holy Spirit who dwells inside us and illuminates our hearts and minds so we might understand what we are reading and what we are hearing from the Lord. We are so richly blessed. And the more we study God's Word, the more treasures we will have to display. The more we engage God's Word, the more insights we can offer the world around us. The more we read and reflect on God's Word, the more wisdom we will have by which we can live and encourage others to do the same. Take some time to thank God today for the Bible you hold in your hands. Ask God to hide His Word deep in your heart so you may become wealthy in all wisdom and understanding as it relates to the kingdom of heaven.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 15-16, Psalms 88

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August 30, 2024
The Fickle Nature of the Human Heart

Readings for today: [Matthew 15-16, Psalms 88](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

In his book, *The Righteous Mind*, author Jonathan Haidt argues persuasively that human beings are not rational creatures but instead are driven by emotion and desire. He compares the head/heart relationship to that of a human rider on a large elephant. The brain relates to our heart much like a rider relates to the elephant. Yes, there are times when it seems like the rider is in control. He or she guides the elephant one way or another using reins or perhaps a stick of some kind. But if the elephant decides to go their own way, the rider has little choice but to hang on. The same is true for the brain's relationship to the heart. Yes, there are plenty of time when it seems like the brain is guiding the decision-making process using rationality and logic. But if the heart decides to go its own way, the brain has very little power to get it to change direction. Perhaps this is why Jesus warns us about the folly of "following our hearts."

You and I hear it all the time. We are inundated with the same messages day after day. Do what feels good. Do what feels right. Be true to yourself. These platitudes sound so promising until one actually decides to act on them. If one chooses to follow one's heart, one quickly ends up in a ditch. Why? Our hearts are broken. Our hearts are corrupt. Our hearts are filled with all kinds of evil thoughts and intentions. Evil? Really? Perhaps you think "evil" is too strong of a word. Okay. Try selfish. I think most of us would agree that our natural way of operating is to take care of ourselves first. Make sure our own needs get met first. Fulfill our own desires before we give or serve others. Our culture reinforces this idea. Put yourself first. Take care of yourself. You deserve a break. Make yourself the first priority. Unfortunately, the American church too often uncritically blesses this mindset. I love what a Korean pastor, Jay Kim, recently wrote, "The uniquely American emphasis of the gospel is seeing faith as a means to personal benefit, rather than a sacrificing of personal benefits for eternal rewards."

Jesus is clear. We are not the center of the universe. Our hearts are not pure. Our hands are not clean. Our desires are oriented inward rather than outward and result in a defilement that affects the whole person. This is why behavior management is no substitute for the gospel. We cannot work from the outside in. We must work from the inside out. Our hearts have to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Renewed and restored by the indwelling presence of God Himself. Only then will our lives begin to reflect His true glory. The reality is too many Christians are working far too hard at cleaning the outside of the cup. Making sure they live morally upright lives. They major in the minors. And it ends up crippling our witness. Christ wants our hearts. He will not settle for less. It doesn't matter if you are a Pharisee, a disciple, or a Syrophoenician woman. It doesn't matter whether you are sick or well. Free or oppressed. Rich or poor. Christ wants your heart. He wants to transform you from the inside out. He wants your love and devotion far more than your outward obedience to His commands.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 17-18, Psalms 89

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August 31, 2024
[Forgiveness](#)

Readings for today: [Matthew 17-18, Psalms 89](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

It's the million dollar question. I get it all the time. It gets asked in some form or fashion by lots of different people as they navigate relationships in life. How many times must I forgive? The world's answer is clear. Not very many if any at all. The world tells us that when we are hurt, when we've been betrayed, when we've been attacked, when we are disappointed or let down to cut that person out of our lives. We are to end the relationship. It could be with an organization. It could be with a church. It could be a friendship. It could be a marriage. Forgiveness is not something we should offer that other party unless they earn it. We withhold forgiveness until they confess their sin against us and work hard to regain our trust. We demand restitution and reparation and only then will we consider extending the grace of forgiveness. Where has that gotten us as a society? Not very far. Relationships are broken and fractured in all sorts of ways. People feel more isolated than ever. Marriages don't last very long. Families break up as kids split their time between households. Churches and other organizations are weakened as people leave at the first sign of disappointment.

Jesus offers us a different way. A much harder and more difficult way to be sure but one that promises so much more in terms of relational benefit. The way of Jesus recognizes that every single human being is a sinner. Every single human being is broken. Every single human being is imperfect and therefore prone to anger and impatience and vulnerable to hurt and disappointment. However, rather than encouraging people to cut and run, Jesus challenges us to remain connected through forgiveness. How many times must we forgive? This was the question the Apostle Peter asked him along the way. Probably because he was struggling to forgive his fellow disciples! Jesus response is legendary. Seventy times seven. In other words, as often as it takes. Why? Because that's what God does for us.

So what is forgiveness? Is it the resolution of every feeling? Is it the end of all conflict? Does it give the other person a pass? Does it mean the person will never again sin against you? Is it fundamentally unjust? Does it mean we have to forget what they've done or pretend it didn't happen? Not at all. Forgiveness is honest. It acknowledges the depth of the hurt. Forgiveness is courageous. It never forgets but is a conscious decision not to hold the hurt against the person. Forgiveness is just. It never denies the pain. Most of all, forgiveness sets us free. We are no longer bound by our hurt. No longer held back by our pain. No longer locked a cycle of bitterness or anger or frustration. And this is why Jesus calls His followers to forgive freely and often and as many times as it takes. He wants us to live in freedom. No longer held back by what's happened in the past. No longer paralyzed by fear of what might happen in the future. This is what makes forgiveness so powerful.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 19-20, Psalms 90 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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