

SERMON OUTLINES

ON

VARIOUS PSALMS

BY

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1. REFUGE IN JESUS

Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:12).

Everyone needs refuge from storms and from sin.

1. Unless we take refuge in God we have no refuge from God.

The almighty sovereign laughs at those who oppose his rule.
God's wrath flames against those who reject his chosen king.
The church has always identified this anointed king as Jesus.

2. Our options reduce to refuge or wrath.

Jesus is a refuge from divine wrath.
To kiss him is life; to dismiss him is death.
Peace with men is not worth displeasing God.

I choose life.

2. THE SPEAKING LORD IS A HEARING LORD

In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice, in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation (Psalm 5:3).

Having human enemies, we need a divine friend.
Our cries for help will lead to songs of joy.

1. A big part of prayer is "requests."

For most of us the biggest part of prayer is petition.
That's wise for only the Lord can meet our needs.

2. A good time for prayer is "morning."

Pray early and the entire day goes better.
Before talking to others talk to the Lord.

3. A vital benefit from prayer is "expectation."

Prayer reduces our enemies and magnifies our Lord.
We expect him to hear and to answer our prayers.

Prayer assures the Lord's attention.
Prayer prompts the Lord's action.

3. WHAT IS MAN?

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:4).

Man is a little lower than angels.
Man is a little higher than animals.

1. Viewed in his environment man is not much.

He is dwarfed by the heavens.
He is devalued by his sin.

2. In light of his origin he is indeed significant.

He is made by God and he is made for God.
He is being remade as he turns to God.

3. His destiny pales all questions of his value.

He will outlive much that now dwarfs him.
The creator-redeemer will judge him.

Man's options: his will or God's will.
Man's outcome: heaven or hell.

4. WHAT TO DO WHEN AMBUSHED

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them (Psalm 11:4).

The psalmist was being ambushed (v. 2).
Evil often comes as a surprise attack.

1. A victim's question: "What can the righteous do?"

He can flee the scene (v. 1).
He can find refuge on the scene (v. 1).

2. A more vital question: What is the Lord doing?

He is observing as a participant (vv. 4-6).
He is offering himself as a refuge (vv. 1, 7).

In his time God will separate the just from the unjust.
In his time God will judge the world in righteousness.

5. QUALIFICATIONS FOR WORSHIP

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? (Psalm 15:1).

To visit with God requires very little effort.

To live with God demands commitment to His will.

1. A pertinent question.

A pilgrim enroute to the temple raises the question.

It's a good question for someone on the way to church.

What kind of person must I be to have fellowship with the Lord?

2. A practical answer.

The answer is given in terms of walking and talking.

What one does and what one says must be congruent.

Truth must be planted in character and blossom in conduct.

Lack of integrity robs rituals of meaning and power.

Sunday worship can't substitute for everyday integrity.

Our relationship with God must govern those with people.

6. THE LORD IS OUR GOOD

I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing" (*Psalms 16:2*).

The Lord is our highest good.
Our highest good merits our greatest praise.

1. Nothing is good apart from Jesus.

Apart from Jesus all that is apparently good turns bad.
With Him, all that is apparently bad becomes good.

2. Nothing is bad when Jesus is Lord.

The Lord is good; what he allows is always for a good purpose.
This is true even when his purpose is hidden from us.

"God is my good" expresses a God-centered life.

"Good is my god" expresses a self-centered life.

7. SPEAKING GOD AND HEARING PEOPLE

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.... The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul: The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple (Psalm 19:1, 7).

The skies and the scriptures are voices.
Through them the Lord proclaims himself.

1. The skies proclaim a glorious creator.

The heavens "pour forth speech" by which God reveals himself.
Nature as a witness to God is denied by some, ignored by many.

2. The scriptures proclaim a glorious redeemer.

The scriptures name the creator as the savior.
They promise pardon and empower life changes.

These voices sound to all, but all do not hear and believe.
Those who hear and believe know God as rock and redeemer.

8. COMFORTING TRUTH

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

The Lord is with me on earth; I will be with him in heaven.
These truths deprive fear of its power to intimidate us.

1. A fear-destroying presence: "...the Lord is with me..."

He is with us as a shepherd is with his sheep.
He leads us, feeds us, guides us and defends us.

2. A fear-destroying prospect: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The Lord conquered death and confers eternal life.
We journey through death, not to death, to dwell with him always.

We follow our "shepherd."
His "goodness and love" follow us."

9. THE EARTH IS HIS NOT OURS

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1).

What God has made he still owns.
He gives us occupancy but not title.

1. In the light of this text every owner is a squatter.

We occupy what is truly the Lord's.
He made it and fitted it for human habitation.
We are here by his permission and for his pleasure.

2. In the light of this text death becomes an eviction.

We are hurled by death from what we entered at birth.
We are stripped, but not robbed, of all that we called ours.
We shall account to him for how we lived with what we had.

His people will re-enter a renewed and purified earth.
What we are taken from will one day be our home forever.
The creator of heaven and earth is a gracious, generous giver.

10. SHORT PRAYERS, LONG ANSWERS

O Lord, be my help (Psalm 30:10).

Scholars call this a psalm of thanksgiving.
God is praised for long answers to short prayers.

1. "Short prayers are long enough."

Some preacher once said that and I believe he was right.
Peter cried, "Save me, Lord," and was snatched from drowning.
What matters is the strength of our God, not the length of our prayers.

2. The Lord's help is strong enough.

He can snatch us from the edge of death.
One day he will even snatch us from the grave.
His power is the greatest; if he helps we can't lose.

Divine help will also be long enough.
The psalmist declares that "his favor lasts a lifetime."
That's as long as we will need the help for which we pray.

11. THE WORD THAT MADE WORLDS

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth (Psalm 33:6).

This psalm is communal, not individual.
This psalm celebrates God as the creator.

1. God's words clothe his ideas.

Human ideas may exceed human words.
Divine words can always equal divine ideas.

2. God's power equals his words.

Human weakness may frustrate human plans.
Divine power is always equal to divine purposes.

3. God's love vindicates his power.

God's words and power express his unfailing love.
His love comforts our hearts and inspires our praise.

To behold his creation should excite our praise.
Our praise should exalt his person and his purpose.

12. DELIGHT CONDITIONS DESIRE

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:5).

God's promises are never blank checks.
The contexts always include some conditions.

1. God grants the desires of those who delight in him.

"Those" are persons who seek God's will in his word.
They are persons whose lives contrast the world's ways.

2. To receive his gifts you may travel some rough paths.

Wicked men with evil desires abound.
The righteous are always under fire.

Delight yourself in the Lord.
Devote yourself to his word and will.
Then and only then, the promise is yours.

13. A LOT TO PRAISE GOD FOR

*He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God
(Psalm 40:3).*

God did "many things" for the psalmist.
The things were "planned," not accidental.

1. The psalmist praised the Lord for listening.

"[He] turned to me and heard my cry" (v. 1).
As a concerned Father, God hears our cries for help.

2. The psalmist praised the Lord also for lifting.

"He lifted me out of the slimy pit..." (v. 2).
The Lord gives us a hand up, not just a hand out.

3. The psalmist praised the Lord, above all, for loving.

"I do not conceal your love and your truth" (v. 10).
Love motivates his gifts to us and our praises to him.

Praising God gives heart to people.
Giving heart to people pleases God.

14. UPLOOK FOR THE DOWNCAST

Why are you downcast, O my soul? (Psalm 42:5, 11).

Dominating questions afflicted the downcast soul.
Delayed answers compounded the misery.

1. The thirsting: "My soul thirsts for God..."

He was alienated from the Lord's house.
He felt alienated from the Lord himself.

2. The taunting: "Where is your God?"

It became oppressive.
It was continuous.

3. The trusting: "I will yet praise him..."

He remembered better days.
He expected better days.

If you are downcast, look back.
You will soon be looking up.
Then you will look forward.

15. GOD'S HELP IS BASED ON GOD'S LOVE

*Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love
(Psalm 44:26).*

The psalmist boldly accuses God of injustice.
The psalmist wisely petitions God for mercy.

1. Redemption is rooted in divine love, not human merit.

Man's wrongs, not God's, make redemption necessary.
God's unfailing love is the only basis of our hope.

2. Jesus' death supremely illustrates that divine love.

Love alone took Jesus to his death on the cross.
His death alone atones for all our sins.

He delivers us from our worst situation.
He guides us to our best destination.

16. THE IRREPLACABLE

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end (Psalm 48:14).

The psalm exalts God and the city of God.
God can do without the city; the city can't do without God.

1. "Our God"--a confession.

He chooses us but we must choose him.
God is an active person, not an idle abstraction.

2. "Our guide"--a condition.

God and guide are inseparable.
His primary guidance system is his word.
We find our way in Scripture or lose it in culture.

Zion has changed; God has not.
Places can be replaced; God can not.

17. A ROYAL CONFESSION

I know my transgressions... (Psalms 51:3).

Psalm 51 is a royal confession.
It reminds us that God impartially judges.

1. God shows us our hearts.

His Spirit applies his word to us.
He leaves us no excuse for our sins.

2. God changes our hearts.

He provides a covering for sin.
Our salvation is his way or no way.

Contrition and confession are required of us.
Forgiveness and cleansing are provided by him.

18. HOW TO HANDLE FEAR

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid (Psalm 56:3, 4).

Everyone fears something.
Everyone needs to learn to handle fear.

1. First, admit it.

The psalmist had his share of life-or-death moments.
In a one-against-many situation he could say, "I am afraid."
He didn't deny the reality of fear but denied the finality of fear.

2. Next, commit it.

"I am afraid" becomes "I will not be afraid" by trusting in God.
God's love is more constant than man's persecution.
God's word is adequate ground for trust.

Faith grows and fear withers through prayer.
A little trust in God defeats a large fear.

19. A BAD NIGHT; A GOOD MORNING

O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God (Psalm 59:17).

Ever have a bad night? If so, this psalm is for you.

1. The psalmist was having a bad night.

Brutal enemies snarled for his blood like wild dogs.
They robbed him of sleep but not of prayer.
Prayer increased his confidence.

2. The psalmist expected a good morning.

God is stronger than all that keeps us from sleep.
He is stronger than the people who oppose us.
He is stronger than all that threatens us.

Our strength is small and quickly spent, but his strength is limitless.
If you pray during a bad night you can have a good morning.

20. LONGING FOR LODGING

I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings (Psalm 61:4).

Though God is always near he doesn't always seem near.
He alone can bridge that distance and comfort us.

1. He is a shelter from all adverse circumstances

He shelters us during natural, political or spiritual storms.
In such times we long to live close to him and on his terms.

2. Were it not for the storms we would not seek the shelter.

Our most dangerous times are between the storms.
Our most comforting place is his sheltering "wings."

We cherish the song, "He came to me."
His consistent coming is our hope and strength.

21. THE GREAT BURDEN-BEARER

*Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens
(Psalm 68:19).*

Want an easy life? Don't serve the Lord.
Want an easier life? Then do serve the Lord.

1. Daily life brings daily burdens.

Every day brings some kind of burden.
Ours is an everyday burden-bearing God.

2. All burdens are not created equal.

Some are heavier and longer-lasting than others.
No burden outweighs or outlasts the love of our God.

3. God puts his shoulder under our burdens.

God does not exempt us from burdens.
God does make them bearable by sharing them.

Our heaviest burden was borne by Jesus at Calvary.
We can't save others; we can bear another's burdens.

22. O LORD, HURRY!

Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me (Psalm 70:1).

A “giddy up” to God? How brazen. How common.

1. Urgent situations call for desperate prayers.

The psalmist was heaven-bent on salvation.
His enemies were hell-bent on his destruction.

2. We can't hurry God; we can't help trying to.

God doesn't need to be informed or spurred to action.
He knows when, how, with what and by whom to intervene.

3. Why then should we pray?

Pray because God acts in response to prayer.
Pray because it helps us to trust in God.

A reason the psalmist didn't have--Jesus told us to pray.

23. THANKS TO YOU, O GOD

We give thanks to you, O God.... it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another (Psalm 75:1, 8).

Paul teaches us to give thanks for everything.
The psalmist teaches us to give thanks for something.

1. A good reason to give thanks. "It is God who judges."

God alone is qualified to be judge of all persons and nations.
Human judges are limited in knowledge and subject to biases and bribes.
Justice often miscarries in human courts, but never at the judgment seat of God.

2. God's judgment never miscarries. "He brings one down, he exalts another."

God sees all that is hidden from us and all that is hidden by us.
God can't be bullied or bribed; he exalts and dethrones as he wills.
God's rulings determine the ultimate fate of both nations and persons.

We should persist in learning and refrain from judging.
We should prepare today for judgment tomorrow.

24. WHEN PRAYERS END

This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse (Psalm 72:20).

There are times when prayers must end.

1. Prayers end when they are intended for publication.

This was true of David's collected prayers.
Some dislike prayer books; others benefit from them.

2. Prayers end when the praying person dies.

Perhaps prayer will be made in heaven or hell.
Death is "amen" to prayer as we know it on earth.

3. Prayers end when action must begin.

Prayer does not bring escape but enablement.
This was modeled by Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane.

Prayers often end too soon, for many of us do not pray enough.

25. SILENT GOD AND STRETCHING TIME

Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? (Psalm 74:1).

“Why” is a question we often ask but God rarely answers.

“When” is a question we often ask but God rarely answers.

1. God is righteous.

The psalmist knew that God was right in judging his people. He thought it was time for judgment to end and rescue to begin.

2. Time is relative.

Decades can seem like “forever” when pain is heart deep. When pain persists and prayer fails, God seems unconcerned.

What can we do when God takes "forever" to answer prayers?
We can keep hoping, praying and trusting that he will intervene.

26. HOW GOD LEADS HIS PEOPLE

He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance (Psalm 78:70-71).

“Sheep” is a humbling metaphor.

“Shepherd” is a comforting metaphor.

1. God suits our callings to our gifts.

As sinners we put good means to bad ends.

As servants we now put old means to new ends.

2. In serving God we do not “start from scratch.”

We utilize the skills we already possess.

We use the knowledge gleaned from experience.

God doesn't waste what we wrongly used.

Instead, he changes our motives and our goals.

27. THE SCHOOL OF GOD

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD--that you alone are the Most High over all the earth (Psalm 83:18).

The teacher is “the Lord.”
The students are his “enemies.”

1. God has a one-lesson school.

The lesson: God alone is “Most High over all the earth.”
This lesson constitutes compulsory education.

2. God has a two classroom school.

One classroom is mercy, the room less crowded.
The other is judgment, the room most used.

We can't choose teacher or lesson.
We can and will choose the classroom.

28. WALKING IN TRUTH

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart... (Psalm 86:11).

The psalmist found that his ways were ruinous.
He found also that the Lord's way was redemptive.

1. To walk in truth is to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the truth."
He leads to pardon, freedom and heaven.

2. To follow Jesus two things are necessary.

We must have undivided hearts.
We must also have informed minds.

We must be taught by Jesus, not simply about him.
His presence and guidance keep us as we walk in truth.

29. A PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation” (Psalm 91:14-16).

Trouble is inevitable--a fact of life.

The troubled can be invincible--a truth of Scripture.

1. The best of persons may have the worst of troubles.

All who live for the Lord in this world will experience trouble. They will share the forms and degrees of trouble common to mankind.

Added to these will be trouble that arises from the world's opposition to the Lord.

2. Trouble will come but it need not overcome.

The Lord's presence is our power when trouble comes.

That power-giving presence is ours as an answer to prayer.

He delivers us because we love him.

We love him because he first loved us.

30. GLORY TO HIS NAME

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name (Psalm 97:8).

God's name stands for all he is and does.

1. What God is and does deserves praise and honor.

He is the sovereign of the universe.

He is the creator of the universe.

He is the savior of the universe.

He is judge of the universe.

2. We ascribe glory to his name in two special ways.

The first is by worship given in special courts.

The second is by witness given to all nations.

We should glorify him individually.

We should glorify him communally.

31. A RICH INHERITANCE

...they fell heir to what others had toiled for... (Psalm 105:44).

Psalm 105 calls God's people to praise and witness.
The subject of this praise and witness is God's faithfulness.
Following their God his people had inherited riches from others.

1. An inheritance.

Israel lived in houses others had built.
Israel lived on crops others had raised.

2. A testimony.

Call me Israel, for I live daily upon the labor of others.
In my study I tap mines of knowledge that others have created.
At my computer I work with machinery and systems that others
devised.
At my dining table I eat nourishing food that others have raised and
processed.

3. A debt.

My life is enhanced by "what others had toiled for."
For them I thank God and from them I take courage.
Like them I seek to make the world better than I found it.

God's mercy has provided my rich inheritance.
My experience is that of every person serves the Lord.
Let us praise him for what we inherit from his other servants.

32. WHAT'S COMING WHEN YOU'RE GOING?

Good will come to him who is generous.... the longings of the wicked will come to nothing (Psalm 112:10).

Death brings your future when it comes.
What will be coming when you are going?

1. The psalm presents a sharp contrast in futures.

“Good” is coming for the righteous.
They will have “dawn” in the darkness.
They will be welcomed by “the light of the world.”

“Not so the wicked,” as the first Psalm says.
The wicked will lose everything and have “nothing”.
Their future is to be forever poor, lonely and miserable.

2. The psalm extols lives of compassion and generosity.

“A righteous man will be remembered forever.”
He will live in the memories of those he has helped,
He will live in the presence of the Lord who gives eternal life.

Not so the wicked.” They “come to nothing.”
Self-indulgent lives are both wicked and wasted.
“In the end” all that the wicked valued will be lost forever.

When you are going what is coming?
You are choosing “good” or “nothing.”

33. OUR GOD--WHO OR WHAT?

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their gods are silver and gold, made by the hands of men (Psalm 115:3-4).

“Our God.... their gods...”

Every one has a god, even the atheist.

1. The ultimate choice: “Our God... their gods...”

We will be God-made persons or god-making persons.

We will worship the creator or fashion gods for ourselves.

2. The superior God: Our God is in heaven.”

He is superior to all men, sovereign over all men.

As our superior the true God can do whatever he pleases.

Our idols are mindless and helpless, dependent on our decisions.

Man-made gods will perish with their makers.

God-made men will live forever with their maker.

34. A CALL TO PRAISE GOD

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD (Psalm 117:1-2).

Matthew Henry calls this “a gospel psalm.”

“We are among the persons to whom the Holy Spirit here speaks.”

1. This is the shortest of the psalms.

It can be easily memorized.

It can be too easily dismissed.

2. This short psalm has a long content.

It extols the loyal love of the Lord.

His love is global; it embraces “all nations.”

His love is faithful; it endures all circumstances.

His love is eternal; it is unconditional and unending.

The Lord deserves our constant praise.

His people need his constant faithfulness.

I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant... (Psalm 119:176).

Strayed sheep are helpless to retrace their steps.
They cannot find the shepherd; he must find them.

1. Our God has a shepherd's heart.

He finds us before we can find him.
He chooses us before we can choose him.
His initiative in rescuing strays is the meaning of grace.

2 Jesus is God seeking his strays.

Jesus called himself "the good shepherd."
In Hebrews he is called "that great shepherd."
Peter, a notorious stray, called him "the Chief Shepherd."

Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost."
The seeking and saving God is the object of our faith.

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech (Psalm 120:5).

A common problem is good people in bad neighborhoods.
A common response is lamentation and intercession.

1. You can live as a stranger in your own neighborhood.

Having a home is not the same as being at home.
Neighborhood is not a synonym for brotherhood.

2. You can have speaking neighbors and a silent God.

God answers prayer but he doesn't answer to prayer.
God will deliver some time; we live in the meantime.

3. You can be for peace when you can't have peace.

Peace results from cooperation, not from coercion.
When cooperation is denied relocation is desired.

Pray, for God is always within hearing distance.
Trust, for God always knows what is best.

*Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth
(Psalm 124:8).*

Many scientists are rejecting “the Maker.”
Denying “the Maker” is scientism, not science.

1. Scientism is false religion; it replaces God with godless men.

God is, whether scientists say yes or no.
Men are not gods, whether scholars or brutes.

2. Science helps us; scientism robs us of our most needed help.

Science has greatly improved our lives.
Scientism would rob us of our greatest help.

Science cannot save us--“the Maker” can.
Science will not judge us--“the Maker” will.

...they have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me (Psalm 129:2).

The nation affected the person.
The person reflected the nation.

1. This was Israel's history in a nutshell.

They were always oppressed, never destroyed.
Like Paul, they were "Knocked down but not knocked out."

2. God allows oppression but not destruction.

He limits the oppression that he permits.
Pray for greater strength, not for easier lives.

Remember, Jesus was oppressed for us.
Oppression need not result in depression.

He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins (Psalm 130:8).

To redeem is to purchase freedom for captives and slaves.
The psalmist speaks here of mankind's ultimate redemption.

1. God alone can redeem us from sin.

Sin makes us all part of the problem, not the solution.
God alone is mighty enough and wealthy enough to redeem.

2. The price he paid to redeem us is infinite.

It began with the incarnation of Christ.
It was finalized by the crucifixion of Christ.

Here is mystery enough to baffle any finite mind.
Here is power enough to unshackle any penitent soul.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever--do not abandon the works of your hands (Psalm 138:8).

The Lord's will is mightier than its opposition.
We live connected to his purpose through prayer.

1. The Lord's purpose for us.

His purpose for us is likeness to Jesus.
Our progress is embarrassingly slow at times.

2. The Lord's power to achieve his purpose.

His purpose is powered by his enduring love.
His love controls all he wills and allows in our lives.

3. Our prayer for the achievement of his purpose.

Prayer is not meant to remind God of anything.
Prayer reminds us of God as my source of power.

God keeps us from becoming unfinished projects.
Prayer keeps us from becoming ungrateful recipients.

41. DON'T LEAVE THE DOOR UNGUARDED

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3).

The Bible has a lot to say about talking.
Review your past or listen to others to know why.

1. The world's busiest door: "...the door of my lips."

To talk without thinking is easy and it causes much sorrow.
To think without talking is hard but it prevents much trouble.

2. The world's strongest guard: "O Lord; keep watch..."

The Lord is a watchman who never goes AWOL.
The Lord's words will keep ours fewer, kinder and simpler.

A good rule: Talk to God more; talk to people less.
A good reminder: Talk isn't cheap so budget it wisely.

Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name (Psalm 142:7).

Scholars think the prison was metaphorical, not actual.
The desire for freedom, however, was actual, not metaphorical.

1. Prison, here, could represent any situation that entraps us.

“My prison” may be home, work, illness or poverty.

“My prison” is anything that makes me feel trapped.

2. The Lord has lots of experience in getting his people out of prison.

Prime examples are Joseph, Peter, Paul and Silas.

His power can free us from sin, people and situations.

His freedom comes through prayer and issues in praise.

Do you feel trapped?

The Lord is present to deliver.

43. THE NEARNESS OF GOD

*The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth
(Psalm 145:18).*

God's nearness may be just a doctrine.
God's nearness can be a real experience.

1. Nearness refers to deliverance not distance.

God's nearness is our environment.
God's nearness is personal involvement.

2. Nearness results from prayer not performance.

A recital of our virtues alienates God.
A sincere cry for deliverance attracts God.

Effectual prayer is truth-conditioned.
Answered prayer is praise-producing.

44. GOD'S POWER ELICITS OUR PRAISE

He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart (Psalm 148:14).

The psalm opens and closes with an injunction to praise God. That is how each day and all life should be bracketed.

1. The horn: “He has raised up for his people a horn...”

Horn is a metaphor for strength of aggression and defense. Jesus fulfills the promise of God embedded in this psalm.

2. The heart: “the people close to his heart.”

Love is universal and particular, embracing sinners and saints. They are close to God’s heart who trust in God’s horn.

Praise is evoked “from heaven” and “from earth.”
Praise honors God as creator and savior.

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints (Psalm 149:1).

All the Israelites were not in the “assembly.”
All in the “assembly” were not “saints.”

1. A neglected gathering: “...the assembly of the saints.”

Our neglect betrays the example of Jesus.
Our neglect defies the command of Scripture.

2. A joyful gathering: “Sing to the Lord a new song...”

Music is a traditional feature of worship.
New songs imply new experiences of grace.

Small groups are not a substitute for the assembly of saints.
The assembly of saints does not preclude small groups.

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3).

The foundations of family life, school life, political life and even religious life are being destroyed. Hopes for national unity and for international peace are collapsing into the chaos.

1. What is God doing?

Before we ask, "What can the righteous do," we must ask, "What is the righteous Lord doing?"

He seems to be indifferent or helpless, and many despair of his love, even of his existence. "The Lord is in his holy temple" but cynics wonder if that temple has windows opening on the world.

The psalmist assures us that God "observes" and "hates" the evils that plague our lives. He "loves" justice. He will destroy the wicked and preserve the righteous.

When? We don't know. God marks his own calendar and calls his own shots. We can only say, "Sooner or later" the Lord will set things straight.

History gives hope. Calvary reminds us that God is involved; Easter assures us that God is triumphant.

2. What can we do?

The psalmist's answer: "In the Lord I take refuge." Every lesser refuge will fail. Only God is eternal. He is a refuge that will stand when all the storms of evil have spent their fury.

We who believe "will see his face." He will wipe the tears from our eyes and welcome us to endless fellowship in a perfect environment. Unbelievers sneer at this as "pie in the sky," but it's the

only pie anywhere. If, in our arrogance and unbelief, we dismiss this refuge, no other hope remains.

Trust in God whatever happens. He is our only hope of ultimate and eternal victory.

Samuel Young began a message with the question, "What can you do when you can't do anything?" He answered with Hebrews 12:3: "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." That's all we can do at times, but that is enough to bring triumph over despair.

47. THE ARCHER

Your arrows have pierced me (Psalm 38:2).

Metaphors can be flexible and versatile. Paul spoke of “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16), and here the psalmist speaks of the Lord’s arrows. Both the devil and the Lord are viewed as archers. I don’t want to talk about the diabolic archer; I want to talk about the divine archer.

1. The Lord always hits the target.

Ahab was slain in battle when an enemy archer “drew his bow at random” (1 Kings 22:34). The lucky shot caught the king in an unprotected spot, mortally wounding him.

The Lord does nothing by chance. He selects his targets wisely and hits them squarely. The psalmist speaks of “vigorous enemies” who “repay my good with evil” (vv. 19, 20). He speaks of some who “seek my life” and “set their traps” (v. 12). These were unable to drop him, but the Lord’s arrows pierced, the Lord’s hand struck him down (v. 2).

When the Lord has you in the cross hairs you are going to get hit.

2. The Lord wounds in order to heal.

The psalmist speaks of festering wounds and searing pain (v. 5). He speaks of failing strength and failing eyes and a heart filled with anguish (vv. 7, 8, 10). All of this had resulted as a judgment upon his sins (vv. 3, 5, 18).

His only hope is mercy and this he expects from the Lord, calling him “my Savior” (vv. 15, 22). God’s healing includes both the wounds and the sins that made the wounding necessary.

“The wounds of a friend can be trusted” (Proverbs 27:6). A friend will hurt you only to help you. How much truer is that of the divine friend!

Has the Lord wounded you? Has he laid bare your sin and guilt? Has he acted to make emphatic the truth that sin brings death? Then do what the psalmist did--pray and trust the heavenly archer to be your savior.

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1).

This psalm is a classic lament. It is the outpouring of a man who is deeply hurt, confused and saddened. He is undergoing a crisis of faith. Three things especially trouble him.

1. He is troubled by the arrogance of evil.

The “wicked man” who arrogantly and cruelly “hunts down the weak” distresses the psalmist. The wicked man “reviles the Lord” and “sneers at his enemies,” confident that he will escape retribution. “Nothing will shake me,” is his proud boast.

2. He is troubled by the impotence of good.

In contrast to the haughty wicked man, who plots and traps and kills “the innocent,” the victims of evil seem so utterly “helpless.” They are caught and crushed under the weight of their oppressor. It seems to them, as it seems to their oppressor, that “God has forgotten.”

3. He is troubled by the absence of God.

God seems remote, hidden and indifferent. While the wicked gloat and the helpless suffer, God seems to be doing nothing, though the afflicted cry out to him.

The psalmist rallies his faith, however. He affirms that God does see and does care and does hear and will take things “in hand.” The Lord will “arise” and call the wicked “to account.” He will encourage and defend “the fatherless and the oppressed.” “The Lord is King for ever and ever.” In his time and way he will bring justice to the nations.

The opening and closing words of the psalm are instructive. In times of trouble, the first words of the afflicted are, “Why, O Lord?” In times of trouble, the last words of God to the oppressor are, “no more.”

THE MEASURELESS

For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great (Psalm 25:11).

The psalmist declares that God is “good and upright” (v. 8). Because he is “upright” forgiveness is necessary. Because he is “good” forgiveness is possible. The wisest prayer a sinner can pray is our text.

1. The enormity of sin is measureless.

The psalmist calls his iniquity “great.” He doesn’t specify it but he does quantify it. Sin is the heaviest load that human life can bear. Paul called himself “the worst of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15, 16). Every sinner, when under conviction, feels that he or she has replaced Paul in that category. When awakened to the enormity of sin our instinctive cry is for mercy and pardon.

2. The abundance of grace is measureless.

With trust in the Lord (v. 1) the psalmist prays “forgive my iniquity.” He is confident that divine grace reaches deeper than human sin. John Bunyan entitled his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. That’s what grace does--it abounds. It isn’t dribbled out but poured out. God is more willing to forgive than we are to repent. “Take away all my sins,” the psalmist cried (v. 18). No sin is too great for grace to forgive.

3. The glory of God’s name is measureless.

The psalmist prays, “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive...” There is no reason in us for God to show favor. Our only hope lies in the fact that “God is love.” His name alone has saving merit and power (Acts 4:12). There are powerful names among men,

but none can deliver from sin. The glory of God's name shines brightest in His saving deeds.

Do you need to echo the psalmist's prayer today? The best time is now. The best place is here.

SERMON OUTLINES

ON

VARIOUS PSALMS

BY

W. E. McCumber

1. REFUGE IN JESUS

Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:12).

Everyone needs refuge from storms and from sin.

1. Unless we take refuge in God we have no refuge from God.

The almighty sovereign laughs at those who oppose his rule.
God's wrath flames against those who reject his chosen king.
The church has always identified this anointed king as Jesus.

2. Our options reduce to refuge or wrath.

Jesus is a refuge from divine wrath.
To kiss him is life; to dismiss him is death.
Peace with men is not worth displeasing God.

I choose life.

2. THE SPEAKING LORD IS A HEARING LORD

In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice, in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation (Psalm 5:3).

Having human enemies, we need a divine friend.
Our cries for help will lead to songs of joy.

1. A big part of prayer is requests."

For most of us the biggest part of prayer is petition.
That's wise for only the Lord can meet our needs.

2. A good time for prayer is "morning."

Pray early and the entire day goes better.
Before talking to others talk to the Lord.

3. A vital benefit from prayer is "expectation."

Prayer reduces our enemies and magnifies our Lord.
We expect him to hear and to answer our prayers.

Prayer assures the Lord's attention.
Prayer prompts the Lord's action.

3. WHAT IS MAN?

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:4).

Man is a little lower than angels.
Man is a little higher than animals.

1. Viewed in his environment man is not much.

He is dwarfed by the heavens.
He is devalued by his sin.

2. In light of his origin he is indeed significant.

He is made by God and he is made for God.
He is being remade as he turns to God.

3. His destiny pales all questions of his value.

He will outlive much that now dwarfs him.
The creator-redeemer will judge him.

Man's options: his will or God's will.
Man's outcome: heaven or hell.

4. WHAT TO DO WHEN AMBUSHED

*The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them (Psalm 11:4).*

The psalmist was being ambushed (v. 2).
Evil often comes as a surprise attack.

1. A victim's question: "What can the righteous do?"

He can flee the scene (v. 1).
He can find refuge on the scene (v. 1).

2. A more vital question: What is the Lord doing?

He is observing as a participant (vv. 4-6).
He is offering himself as a refuge (vv. 1, 7).

In his time God will separate the just from the unjust.
In his time God will judge the world in righteousness.

5. QUALIFICATIONS FOR WORSHIP

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? (Psalm 15:1).

To visit with God requires very little effort.

To live with God demands commitment to His will.

1. A pertinent question.

A pilgrim enroute to the temple raises the question.

It's a good question for someone on the way to church.

What kind of person must I be to have fellowship with the Lord?

2. A practical answer.

The answer is given in terms of walking and talking.

What one does and what one says must be congruent.

Truth must be planted in character and blossom in conduct.

Lack of integrity robs rituals of meaning and power.

Sunday worship can't substitute for everyday integrity.

Our relationship with God must govern those with people.

6. THE LORD IS OUR GOOD

I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing" (Psalm 16:2).

The Lord is our highest good.
Our highest good merits our greatest praise.

1. Nothing is good apart from Jesus.

Apart from Jesus all that is apparently good turns bad.
With Him, all that is apparently bad becomes good.

2. Nothing is bad when Jesus is Lord.

The Lord is good; what he allows is always for a good purpose.
This is true even when his purpose is hidden from us.

"God is my good" expresses a God-centered life.
"Good is my god" expresses a self-centered life.

7. SPEAKING GOD AND HEARING PEOPLE

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.... The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul: The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple (Psalm 19:1, 7).

The skies and the scriptures are voices.
Through them the Lord proclaims himself.

1. The skies proclaim a glorious creator.

The heavens "pour forth speech" by which God reveals himself.
Nature as a witness to God is denied by some, ignored by many.

2. The scriptures proclaim a glorious redeemer.

The scriptures name the creator as the savior.
They promise pardon and empower life changes.

These voices sound to all, but all do not hear and believe.
Those who hear and believe know God as rock and redeemer.

8. COMFORTING TRUTH

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

The Lord is with me on earth; I will be with him in heaven.
These truths deprive fear of its power to intimidate us.

1. A fear-destroying presence: "...the Lord is with me..."

He is with us as a shepherd is with his sheep.
He leads us, feeds us, guides us and defends us.

2. A fear-destroying prospect: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The Lord conquered death and confers eternal life.
We journey through death, not to death, to dwell with him always.

We follow our "shepherd."
His "goodness and love" follow us."

9. THE EARTH IS HIS NOT OURS

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1).

What God has made he still owns.
He gives us occupancy but not title.

1. In the light of this text every owner is a squatter.

We occupy what is truly the Lord's.
He made it and fitted it for human habitation.
We are here by his permission and for his pleasure.

2. In the light of this text death becomes an eviction.

We are hurled by death from what we entered at birth.
We are stripped, but not robbed, of all that we called ours.
We shall account to him for how we lived with what we had.

His people will re-enter a renewed and purified earth.
What we are taken from will one day be our home forever.
The creator of heaven and earth is a gracious, generous giver.

10. SHORT PRAYERS, LONG ANSWERS

O Lord, be my help (Psalm 30:10).

Scholars call this a psalm of thanksgiving.
God is praised for long answers to short prayers.

1. "Short prayers are long enough."

Some preacher once said that and I believe he was right.
Peter cried, "Save me, Lord," and was snatched from drowning.
What matters is the strength of our God, not the length of our prayers.

2. The Lord's help is strong enough.

He can snatch us from the edge of death.
One day he will even snatch us from the grave.
His power is the greatest; if he helps we can't lose.

Divine help will also be long enough.
The psalmist declares that "his favor lasts a lifetime."
That's as long as we will need the help for which we pray.

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth (Psalm 33:6).

This psalm is communal, not individual.
This psalm celebrates God as the creator.

1. God's words clothe his ideas.

Human ideas may exceed human words.
Divine words can always equal divine ideas.

2. God's power equals his words.

Human weakness may frustrate human plans.
Divine power is always equal to divine purposes.

3. God's love vindicates his power.

God's words and power express his unfailing love.
His love comforts our hearts and inspires our praise.

To behold his creation should excite our praise.
Our praise should exalt his person and his purpose.

12. DELIGHT CONDITIONS DESIRE

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:5).

God's promises are never blank checks.
The contexts always include some conditions.

1. God grants the desires of those who delight in him.

"Those" are persons who seek God's will in his word.
They are persons whose lives contrast the world's ways.

2. To receive his gifts you may travel some rough paths.

Wicked men with evil desires abound.
The righteous are always under fire.

Delight yourself in the Lord.
Devote yourself to his word and will.
Then and only then, the promise is yours.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God (Psalm 40:3).

God did "many things" for the psalmist.
The things were "planned," not accidental.

1. The psalmist praised the Lord for listening.

"[He] turned to me and heard my cry" (v. 1).
As a concerned Father, God hears our cries for help.

2. The psalmist praised the Lord also for lifting.

"He lifted me out of the slimy pit..." (v. 2).
The Lord gives us a hand up, not just a hand out.

3. The psalmist praised the Lord, above all, for loving.

"I do not conceal your love and your truth" (v. 10).
Love motivates his gifts to us and our praises to him.

Praising God gives heart to people.
Giving heart to people pleases God.

14. UPLOOK FOR THE DOWNCAST

Why are you downcast, O my soul? (Psalm 42:5, 11).

Dominating questions afflicted the downcast soul.
Delayed answers compounded the misery.

1. The thirsting: "My soul thirsts for God..."

He was alienated from the Lord's house.
He felt alienated from the Lord himself.

2. The taunting: "Where is your God?"

It became oppressive.
It was continuous.

3. The trusting: "I will yet praise him..."

He remembered better days.
He expected better days.

If you are downcast, look back.
You will soon be looking up.
Then you will look forward.

15. GOD'S HELP IS BASED ON GOD'S LOVE

*Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love
(Psalm 44:26).*

The psalmist boldly accuses God of injustice.
The psalmist wisely petitions God for mercy.

1. Redemption is rooted in divine love, not human merit.

Man's wrongs, not God's, make redemption necessary.
God's unfailing love is the only basis of our hope.

2. Jesus' death supremely illustrates that divine love.

Love alone took Jesus to his death on the cross.
His death alone atones for all our sins.

He delivers us from our worst situation.
He guides us to our best destination.

16. THE IRREPLACABLE

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end (Psalm 48:14).

The psalm exalts God and the city of God.
God can do without the city; the city can't do without God.

1. "Our God"--a confession.

He chooses us but we must choose him.
God is an active person, not an idle abstraction.

2. "Our guide"--a condition.

God and guide are inseparable.
His primary guidance system is his word.
We find our way in Scripture or lose it in culture.

Zion has changed; God has not.
Places can be replaced; God can not.

17. A ROYAL CONFESSION

I know my transgressions... (Psalms 51:3).

Psalm 51 is a royal confession.
It reminds us that God impartially judges.

1. God shows us our hearts.

His Spirit applies his word to us.
He leaves us no excuse for our sins.

2. God changes our hearts.

He provides a covering for sin.
Our salvation is his way or no way.

Contrition and confession are required of us.
Forgiveness and cleansing are provided by him.

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid (Psalm 56:3, 4).

Everyone fears something.
Everyone needs to learn to handle fear.

1. First, admit it.

The psalmist had his share of life-or-death moments.
In a one-against-many situation he could say, "I am afraid."
He didn't deny the reality of fear but denied the finality of fear.

2. Next, commit it.

"I am afraid" becomes "I will not be afraid" by trusting in God.
God's love is more constant than man's persecution.
God's word is adequate ground for trust.

Faith grows and fear withers through prayer.
A little trust in God defeats a large fear.

O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God (Psalm 59:17).

Ever have a bad night? If so, this psalm is for you.

1. The psalmist was having a bad night.

Brutal enemies snarled for his blood like wild dogs.
They robbed him of sleep but not of prayer.
Prayer increased his confidence.

2. The psalmist expected a good morning.

God is stronger than all that keeps us from sleep.
He is stronger than the people who oppose us.
He is stronger than all that threatens us.

Our strength is small and quickly spent, but his strength is limitless.
If you pray during a bad night you can have a good morning.

I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings (Psalm 61:4).

Though God is always near he doesn't always seem near.
He alone can bridge that distance and comfort us.

1. He is a shelter from all adverse circumstances

He shelters us during natural, political or spiritual storms.
In such times we long to live close to him and on his terms.

2. Were it not for the storms we would not seek the shelter.

Our most dangerous times are between the storms.
Our most comforting place is his sheltering "wings."

We cherish the song, "He came to me."
His consistent coming is our hope and strength.

*Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens
(Psalm 68:19).*

Want an easy life? Don't serve the Lord.
Want an easier life? Then do serve the Lord.

1. Daily life brings daily burdens.

Every day brings some kind of burden.
Ours is an everyday burden-bearing God.

2. All burdens are not created equal.

Some are heavier and longer-lasting than others.
No burden outweighs or outlasts the love of our God.

3. God puts his shoulder under our burdens.

God does not exempt us from burdens.
God does make them bearable by sharing them.

Our heaviest burden was borne by Jesus at Calvary.
We can't save others; we can bear another's burdens.

22. O LORD, HURRY!

Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me (Psalm 70:1).

A “giddy up” to God? How brazen. How common.

1. Urgent situations call for desperate prayers.

The psalmist was heaven-bent on salvation.
His enemies were hell-bent on his destruction.

2. We can't hurry God; we can't help trying to.

God doesn't need to be informed or spurred to action.
He knows when, how, with what and by whom to intervene.

3. Why then should we pray?

Pray because God acts in response to prayer.
Pray because it helps us to trust in God.

A reason the psalmist didn't have--Jesus told us to pray.

We give thanks to you, O God.... it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another (Psalm 75:1, 8).

Paul teaches us to give thanks for everything.
The psalmist teaches us to give thanks for something.

1. A good reason to give thanks. "It is God who judges."

God alone is qualified to be judge of all persons and nations.
Human judges are limited in knowledge and subject to biases and bribes.
Justice often miscarries in human courts, but never at the judgment seat of God.

2. God's judgment never miscarries. "He brings one down, he exalts another."

God sees all that is hidden from us and all that is hidden by us.
God can't be bullied or bribed; he exalts and dethrones as he wills.
God's rulings determine the ultimate fate of both nations and persons.

We should persist in learning and refrain from judging.
We should prepare today for judgment tomorrow.

This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse (Psalm 72:20).

There are times when prayers must end.

1. Prayers end when they are intended for publication.

This was true of David's collected prayers.
Some dislike prayer books; others benefit from them.

2. Prayers end when the praying person dies.

Perhaps prayer will be made in heaven or hell.
Death is "amen" to prayer as we know it on earth.

3. Prayers end when action must begin.

Prayer does not bring escape but enablement.
This was modeled by Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane.

Prayers often end too soon, for many of us do not pray enough.

Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? (Psalm 74:1).

“Why” is a question we often ask but God rarely answers.

“When” is a question we often ask but God rarely answers.

1. God is righteous.

The psalmist knew that God was right in judging his people. He thought it was time for judgment to end and rescue to begin.

2. Time is relative.

Decades can seem like “forever” when pain is heart deep. When pain persists and prayer fails, God seems unconcerned.

What can we do when God takes "forever" to answer prayers? We can keep hoping, praying and trusting that he will intervene.

He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance (Psalm 78:70-71).

“Sheep” is a humbling metaphor.

“Shepherd” is a comforting metaphor.

1. God suits our callings to our gifts.

As sinners we put good means to bad ends.

As servants we now put old means to new ends.

2. In serving God we do not “start from scratch.”

We utilize the skills we already possess.

We use the knowledge gleaned from experience.

God doesn't waste what we wrongly used.

Instead, he changes our motives and our goals.

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD--that you alone are the Most High over all the earth (Psalm 83:18).

The teacher is “the Lord.”
The students are his “enemies.”

1. God has a one-lesson school.

The lesson: God alone is “Most High over all the earth.”
This lesson constitutes compulsory education.

2. God has a two classroom school.

One classroom is mercy, the room less crowded.
The other is judgment, the room most used.

We can't choose teacher or lesson.
We can and will choose the classroom.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart... (Psalm 86:11).

The psalmist found that his ways were ruinous.
He found also that the Lord's way was redemptive.

1. To walk in truth is to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the truth."
He leads to pardon, freedom and heaven.

2. To follow Jesus two things are necessary.

We must have undivided hearts.
We must also have informed minds.

We must be taught by Jesus, not simply about him.
His presence and guidance keep us as we walk in truth.

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation” (Psalm 91:14-16).

Trouble is inevitable--a fact of life.

The troubled can be invincible--a truth of Scripture.

1. The best of persons may have the worst of troubles.

All who live for the Lord in this world will experience trouble.

They will share the forms and degrees of trouble common to mankind.

Added to these will be trouble that arises from the world's opposition to the Lord.

2. Trouble will come but it need not overcome.

The Lord's presence is our power when trouble comes.

That power-giving presence is ours as an answer to prayer.

He delivers us because we love him.

We love him because he first loved us.

30. GLORY TO HIS NAME

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name (Psalm 97:8).

God's name stands for all he is and does.

1. What God is and does deserves praise and honor.

He is the sovereign of the universe.

He is the creator of the universe.

He is the savior of the universe.

He is judge of the universe.

2. We ascribe glory to his name in two special ways.

The first is by worship given in special courts.

The second is by witness given to all nations.

We should glorify him individually.

We should glorify him communally.

...they fell heir to what others had toiled for... (Psalm 105:44).

Psalm 105 calls God's people to praise and witness.
The subject of this praise and witness is God's faithfulness.
Following their God his people had inherited riches from others.

1. An inheritance.

Israel lived in houses others had built.
Israel lived on crops others had raised.

2. A testimony.

Call me Israel, for I live daily upon the labor of others.
In my study I tap mines of knowledge that others have created.
At my computer I work with machinery and systems that others
devised.
At my dining table I eat nourishing food that others have raised and
processed.

3. A debt.

My life is enhanced by "what others had toiled for."
For them I thank God and from them I take courage.
Like them I seek to make the world better than I found it.

God's mercy has provided my rich inheritance.
My experience is that of every person serves the Lord.
Let us praise him for what we inherit from his other servants.

32. WHAT'S COMING WHEN YOU'RE GOING?

Good will come to him who is generous.... the longings of the wicked will come to nothing (Psalm 112:10).

Death brings your future when it comes.
What will be coming when you are going?

1. The psalm presents a sharp contrast in futures.

“Good” is coming for the righteous.
They will have “dawn” in the darkness.
They will be welcomed by “the light of the world.”

“Not so the wicked,” as the first Psalm says.
The wicked will lose everything and have “nothing”.
Their future is to be forever poor, lonely and miserable.

2. The psalm extols lives of compassion and generosity.

“A righteous man will be remembered forever.”
He will live in the memories of those he has helped,
He will live in the presence of the Lord who gives eternal life.

Not so the wicked.” They “come to nothing.”
Self-indulgent lives are both wicked and wasted.
“In the end” all that the wicked valued will be lost forever.

When you are going what is coming?
You are choosing “good” or “nothing.”

33. OUR GOD--WHO OR WHAT?

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their gods are silver and gold, made by the hands of men (Psalm 115:3-4).

“Our God.... their gods...”

Every one has a god, even the atheist.

1. The ultimate choice: “Our God... their gods...”

We will be God-made persons or god-making persons.

We will worship the creator or fashion gods for ourselves.

2. The superior God: Our God is in heaven.”

He is superior to all men, sovereign over all men.

As our superior the true God can do whatever he pleases.

Our idols are mindless and helpless, dependent on our decisions.

Man-made gods will perish with their makers.

God-made men will live forever with their maker.

34. A CALL TO PRAISE GOD

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD (Psalm 117:1-2).

Matthew Henry calls this “a gospel psalm.”

“We are among the persons to whom the Holy Spirit here speaks.”

1. This is the shortest of the psalms.

It can be easily memorized.

It can be too easily dismissed.

2. This short psalm has a long content.

It extols the loyal love of the Lord.

His love is global; it embraces “all nations.”

His love is faithful; it endures all circumstances.

His love is eternal; it is unconditional and unending.

The Lord deserves our constant praise.

His people need his constant faithfulness.

35. THE SHEPHERD GOD

I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant... (Psalm 119:176).

Strayed sheep are helpless to retrace their steps.
They cannot find the shepherd; he must find them.

1. Our God has a shepherd's heart.

He finds us before we can find him.
He chooses us before we can choose him.
His initiative in rescuing strays is the meaning of grace.

2 Jesus is God seeking his strays.

Jesus called himself "the good shepherd."
In Hebrews he is called "that great shepherd."
Peter, a notorious stray, called him "the Chief Shepherd."

Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost."
The seeking and saving God is the object of our faith.

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech (Psalm 120:5).

A common problem is good people in bad neighborhoods.
A common response is lamentation and intercession.

1. You can live as a stranger in your own neighborhood.

Having a home is not the same as being at home.
Neighborhood is not a synonym for brotherhood.

2. You can have speaking neighbors and a silent God.

God answers prayer but he doesn't answer to prayer.
God will deliver some time; we live in the meantime.

3. You can be for peace when you can't have peace.

Peace results from cooperation, not from coercion.
When cooperation is denied relocation is desired.

Pray, for God is always within hearing distance.
Trust, for God always knows what is best.

37. SCIENCE & SCIENTISM

*Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth
(Psalm 124:8).*

Many scientists are rejecting “the Maker.”
Denying “the Maker” is scientism, not science.

1. Scientism is false religion; it replaces God with godless men.

God is, whether scientists say yes or no.
Men are not gods, whether scholars or brutes.

2. Science helps us; scientism robs us of our most needed help.

Science has greatly improved our lives.
Scientism would rob us of our greatest help.

Science cannot save us--“the Maker” can.
Science will not judge us--“the Maker” will.

38. DOWN BUT NOT OUT

...they have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me (Psalm 129:2).

The nation affected the person.
The person reflected the nation.

1. This was Israel's history in a nutshell.

They were always oppressed, never destroyed.
Like Paul, they were "Knocked down but not knocked out."

2. God allows oppression but not destruction.

He limits the oppression that he permits.
Pray for greater strength, not for easier lives.

Remember, Jesus was oppressed for us.
Oppression need not result in depression.

He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins (Psalm 130:8).

To redeem is to purchase freedom for captives and slaves.
The psalmist speaks here of mankind's ultimate redemption.

1. God alone can redeem us from sin.

Sin makes us all part of the problem, not the solution.
God alone is mighty enough and wealthy enough to redeem.

2. The price he paid to redeem us is infinite.

It began with the incarnation of Christ.
It was finalized by the crucifixion of Christ.

Here is mystery enough to baffle any finite mind.
Here is power enough to unshackle any penitent soul.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever--do not abandon the works of your hands (Psalm 138:8).

The Lord's will is mightier than its opposition.
We live connected to his purpose through prayer.

1. The Lord's purpose for us.

His purpose for us is likeness to Jesus.
Our progress is embarrassingly slow at times.

2. The Lord's power to achieve his purpose.

His purpose is powered by his enduring love.
His love controls all he wills and allows in our lives.

3. Our prayer for the achievement of his purpose.

Prayer is not meant to remind God of anything.
Prayer reminds us of God as my source of power.

God keeps us from becoming unfinished projects.
Prayer keeps us from becoming ungrateful recipients.

41. DON'T LEAVE THE DOOR UNGUARDED

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3).

The Bible has a lot to say about talking.
Review your past or listen to others to know why.

1. The world's busiest door: "...the door of my lips."

To talk without thinking is easy and it causes much sorrow.
To think without talking is hard but it prevents much trouble.

2. The world's strongest guard: "O Lord; keep watch..."

The Lord is a watchman who never goes AWOL.
The Lord's words will keep ours fewer, kinder and simpler.

A good rule: Talk to God more; talk to people less.
A good reminder: Talk isn't cheap so budget it wisely.

42. PRISON BREAKS

Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name (Psalm 142:7).

Scholars think the prison was metaphorical, not actual.
The desire for freedom, however, was actual, not metaphorical.

1. Prison, here, could represent any situation that entraps us.

“My prison” may be home, work, illness or poverty.

“My prison” is anything that makes me feel trapped.

2. The Lord has lots of experience in getting his people out of prison.

Prime examples are Joseph, Peter, Paul and Silas.

His power can free us from sin, people and situations.

His freedom comes through prayer and issues in praise.

Do you feel trapped?

The Lord is present to deliver.

43. THE NEARNESS OF GOD

*The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth
(Psalm 145:18).*

God's nearness may be just a doctrine.
God's nearness can be a real experience.

1. Nearness refers to deliverance not distance.

God's nearness is our environment.
God's nearness is personal involvement.

2. Nearness results from prayer not performance.

A recital of our virtues alienates God.
A sincere cry for deliverance attracts God.

Effectual prayer is truth-conditioned.
Answered prayer is praise-producing.

44. GOD'S POWER ELICITS OUR PRAISE

He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart (Psalm 148:14).

The psalm opens and closes with an injunction to praise God. That is how each day and all life should be bracketed.

1. The horn: “He has raised up for his people a horn...”

Horn is a metaphor for strength of aggression and defense. Jesus fulfills the promise of God embedded in this psalm.

2. The heart: “the people close to his heart.”

Love is universal and particular, embracing sinners and saints. They are close to God’s heart who trust in God’s horn.

Praise is evoked “from heaven” and “from earth.”
Praise honors God as creator and savior.

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints (Psalm 149:1).

All the Israelites were not in the “assembly.”
All in the “assembly” were not “saints.”

1. A neglected gathering: “...the assembly of the saints.”

Our neglect betrays the example of Jesus.
Our neglect defies the command of Scripture.

2. A joyful gathering: “Sing to the Lord a new song...”

Music is a traditional feature of worship.
New songs imply new experiences of grace.

Small groups are not a substitute for the assembly of saints.
The assembly of saints does not preclude small groups.

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3).

The foundations of family life, school life, political life and even religious life are being destroyed. Hopes for national unity and for international peace are collapsing into the chaos.

1. What is God doing?

Before we ask, "What can the righteous do," we must ask, "What is the righteous Lord doing?"

He seems to be indifferent or helpless, and many despair of his love, even of his existence. "The Lord is in his holy temple" but cynics wonder if that temple has windows opening on the world.

The psalmist assures us that God "observes" and "hates" the evils that plague our lives. He "loves" justice. He will destroy the wicked and preserve the righteous.

When? We don't know. God marks his own calendar and calls his own shots. We can only say, "Sooner or later" the Lord will set things straight.

History gives hope. Calvary reminds us that God is involved; Easter assures us that God is triumphant.

2. What can we do?

The psalmist's answer: "In the Lord I take refuge." Every lesser refuge will fail. Only God is eternal. He is a refuge that will stand when all the storms of evil have spent their fury.

We who believe "will see his face." He will wipe the tears from our eyes and welcome us to endless fellowship in a perfect environment. Unbelievers sneer at this as "pie in the sky," but it's the

only pie anywhere. If, in our arrogance and unbelief, we dismiss this refuge, no other hope remains.

Trust in God whatever happens. He is our only hope of ultimate and eternal victory.

Samuel Young began a message with the question, "What can you do when you can't do anything?" He answered with Hebrews 12:3: "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." That's all we can do at times, but that is enough to bring triumph over despair.

47. THE ARCHER

Your arrows have pierced me (Psalm 38:2).

Metaphors can be flexible and versatile. Paul spoke of “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16), and here the psalmist speaks of the Lord’s arrows. Both the devil and the Lord are viewed as archers. I don’t want to talk about the diabolic archer; I want to talk about the divine archer.

1. The Lord always hits the target.

Ahab was slain in battle when an enemy archer “drew his bow at random” (1 Kings 22:34). The lucky shot caught the king in an unprotected spot, mortally wounding him.

The Lord does nothing by chance. He selects his targets wisely and hits them squarely. The psalmist speaks of “vigorous enemies” who “repay my good with evil” (vv. 19, 20). He speaks of some who “seek my life” and “set their traps” (v. 12). These were unable to drop him, but the Lord’s arrows pierced, the Lord’s hand struck him down (v. 2).

When the Lord has you in the cross hairs you are going to get hit.

2. The Lord wounds in order to heal.

The psalmist speaks of festering wounds and searing pain (v. 5). He speaks of failing strength and failing eyes and a heart filled with anguish (vv. 7, 8, 10). All of this had resulted as a judgment upon his sins (vv. 3, 5, 18).

His only hope is mercy and this he expects from the Lord, calling him “my Savior” (vv. 15, 22). God’s healing includes both the wounds and the sins that made the wounding necessary.

“The wounds of a friend can be trusted” (Proverbs 27:6). A friend will hurt you only to help you. How much truer is that of the divine friend!

Has the Lord wounded you? Has he laid bare your sin and guilt? Has he acted to make emphatic the truth that sin brings death? Then do what the psalmist did--pray and trust the heavenly archer to be your savior.

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1).

This psalm is a classic lament. It is the outpouring of a man who is deeply hurt, confused and saddened. He is undergoing a crisis of faith. Three things especially trouble him.

1. He is troubled by the arrogance of evil.

The “wicked man” who arrogantly and cruelly “hunts down the weak” distresses the psalmist. The wicked man “reviles the Lord” and “sneers at his enemies,” confident that he will escape retribution. “Nothing will shake me,” is his proud boast.

2. He is troubled by the impotence of good.

In contrast to the haughty wicked man, who plots and traps and kills “the innocent,” the victims of evil seem so utterly “helpless.” They are caught and crushed under the weight of their oppressor. It seems to them, as it seems to their oppressor, that “God has forgotten.”

3. He is troubled by the absence of God.

God seems remote, hidden and indifferent. While the wicked gloat and the helpless suffer, God seems to be doing nothing, though the afflicted cry out to him.

The psalmist rallies his faith, however. He affirms that God does see and does care and does hear and will take things “in hand.” The Lord will “arise” and call the wicked “to account.” He will encourage and defend “the fatherless and the oppressed.” “The Lord is King for ever and ever.” In his time and way he will bring justice to the nations.

The opening and closing words of the psalm are instructive. In times of trouble, the first words of the afflicted are, “Why, O Lord?” In times of trouble, the last words of God to the oppressor are, “no more.”

THE MEASURELESS

For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great (Psalm 25:11).

The psalmist declares that God is “good and upright” (v. 8). Because he is “upright” forgiveness is necessary. Because he is “good” forgiveness is possible. The wisest prayer a sinner can pray is our text.

1. The enormity of sin is measureless.

The psalmist calls his iniquity “great.” He doesn’t specify it but he does quantify it. Sin is the heaviest load that human life can bear. Paul called himself “the worst of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15, 16). Every sinner, when under conviction, feels that he or she has replaced Paul in that category. When awakened to the enormity of sin our instinctive cry is for mercy and pardon.

2. The abundance of grace is measureless.

With trust in the Lord (v. 1) the psalmist prays “forgive my iniquity.” He is confident that divine grace reaches deeper than human sin. John Bunyan entitled his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. That’s what grace does--it abounds. It isn’t dribbled out but poured out. God is more willing to forgive than we are to repent. “Take away all my sins,” the psalmist cried (v. 18). No sin is too great for grace to forgive.

3. The glory of God’s name is measureless.

The psalmist prays, “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive...” There is no reason in us for God to show favor. Our only hope lies in the fact that “God is love.” His name alone has saving merit and power (Acts 4:12). There are powerful names among men,

but none can deliver from sin. The glory of God's name shines brightest in His saving deeds.

Do you need to echo the psalmist's prayer today? The best time is now. The best place is here.

SERMON OUTLINES

ON

VARIOUS PSALMS

BY

W. E. McCumber

1. REFUGE IN JESUS

Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:12).

Everyone needs refuge from storms and from sin.

1. Unless we take refuge in God we have no refuge from God.

The almighty sovereign laughs at those who oppose his rule.
God's wrath flames against those who reject his chosen king.
The church has always identified this anointed king as Jesus.

2. Our options reduce to refuge or wrath.

Jesus is a refuge from divine wrath.
To kiss him is life; to dismiss him is death.
Peace with men is not worth displeasing God.

I choose life.

2. THE SPEAKING LORD IS A HEARING LORD

In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice, in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation (Psalm 5:3).

Having human enemies, we need a divine friend.
Our cries for help will lead to songs of joy.

1. A big part of prayer is requests."

For most of us the biggest part of prayer is petition.
That's wise for only the Lord can meet our needs.

2. A good time for prayer is "morning."

Pray early and the entire day goes better.
Before talking to others talk to the Lord.

3. A vital benefit from prayer is "expectation."

Prayer reduces our enemies and magnifies our Lord.
We expect him to hear and to answer our prayers.

Prayer assures the Lord's attention.
Prayer prompts the Lord's action.

3. WHAT IS MAN?

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:4).

Man is a little lower than angels.
Man is a little higher than animals.

1. Viewed in his environment man is not much.

He is dwarfed by the heavens.
He is devalued by his sin.

2. In light of his origin he is indeed significant.

He is made by God and he is made for God.
He is being remade as he turns to God.

3. His destiny pales all questions of his value.

He will outlive much that now dwarfs him.
The creator-redeemer will judge him.

Man's options: his will or God's will.
Man's outcome: heaven or hell.

4. WHAT TO DO WHEN AMBUSHED

*The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them (Psalm 11:4).*

The psalmist was being ambushed (v. 2).
Evil often comes as a surprise attack.

1. A victim's question: "What can the righteous do?"

He can flee the scene (v. 1).
He can find refuge on the scene (v. 1).

2. A more vital question: What is the Lord doing?

He is observing as a participant (vv. 4-6).
He is offering himself as a refuge (vv. 1, 7).

In his time God will separate the just from the unjust.
In his time God will judge the world in righteousness.

5. QUALIFICATIONS FOR WORSHIP

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? (Psalm 15:1).

To visit with God requires very little effort.
To live with God demands commitment to His will.

1. A pertinent question.

A pilgrim enroute to the temple raises the question.
It's a good question for someone on the way to church.
What kind of person must I be to have fellowship with the Lord?

2. A practical answer.

The answer is given in terms of walking and talking.
What one does and what one says must be congruent.
Truth must be planted in character and blossom in conduct.

Lack of integrity robs rituals of meaning and power.
Sunday worship can't substitute for everyday integrity.
Our relationship with God must govern those with people.

6. THE LORD IS OUR GOOD

I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing" (Psalm 16:2).

The Lord is our highest good.
Our highest good merits our greatest praise.

1. Nothing is good apart from Jesus.

Apart from Jesus all that is apparently good turns bad.
With Him, all that is apparently bad becomes good.

2. Nothing is bad when Jesus is Lord.

The Lord is good; what he allows is always for a good purpose.
This is true even when his purpose is hidden from us.

"God is my good" expresses a God-centered life.
"Good is my god" expresses a self-centered life.

7. SPEAKING GOD AND HEARING PEOPLE

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.... The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul: The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple (Psalm 19:1, 7).

The skies and the scriptures are voices.
Through them the Lord proclaims himself.

1. The skies proclaim a glorious creator.

The heavens "pour forth speech" by which God reveals himself.
Nature as a witness to God is denied by some, ignored by many.

2. The scriptures proclaim a glorious redeemer.

The scriptures name the creator as the savior.
They promise pardon and empower life changes.

These voices sound to all, but all do not hear and believe.
Those who hear and believe know God as rock and redeemer.

8. COMFORTING TRUTH

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

The Lord is with me on earth; I will be with him in heaven.
These truths deprive fear of its power to intimidate us.

1. A fear-destroying presence: "...the Lord is with me..."

He is with us as a shepherd is with his sheep.
He leads us, feeds us, guides us and defends us.

2. A fear-destroying prospect: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The Lord conquered death and confers eternal life.
We journey through death, not to death, to dwell with him always.

We follow our "shepherd."
His "goodness and love" follow us."

9. THE EARTH IS HIS NOT OURS

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1).

What God has made he still owns.
He gives us occupancy but not title.

1. In the light of this text every owner is a squatter.

We occupy what is truly the Lord's.
He made it and fitted it for human habitation.
We are here by his permission and for his pleasure.

2. In the light of this text death becomes an eviction.

We are hurled by death from what we entered at birth.
We are stripped, but not robbed, of all that we called ours.
We shall account to him for how we lived with what we had.

His people will re-enter a renewed and purified earth.
What we are taken from will one day be our home forever.
The creator of heaven and earth is a gracious, generous giver.

10. SHORT PRAYERS, LONG ANSWERS

O Lord, be my help (Psalm 30:10).

Scholars call this a psalm of thanksgiving.
God is praised for long answers to short prayers.

1. "Short prayers are long enough."

Some preacher once said that and I believe he was right.
Peter cried, "Save me, Lord," and was snatched from drowning.
What matters is the strength of our God, not the length of our prayers.

2. The Lord's help is strong enough.

He can snatch us from the edge of death.
One day he will even snatch us from the grave.
His power is the greatest; if he helps we can't lose.

Divine help will also be long enough.
The psalmist declares that "his favor lasts a lifetime."
That's as long as we will need the help for which we pray.

11. THE WORD THAT MADE WORLDS

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth (Psalm 33:6).

This psalm is communal, not individual.
This psalm celebrates God as the creator.

1. God's words clothe his ideas.

Human ideas may exceed human words.
Divine words can always equal divine ideas.

2. God's power equals his words.

Human weakness may frustrate human plans.
Divine power is always equal to divine purposes.

3. God's love vindicates his power.

God's words and power express his unfailing love.
His love comforts our hearts and inspires our praise.

To behold his creation should excite our praise.
Our praise should exalt his person and his purpose.

12. DELIGHT CONDITIONS DESIRE

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:5).

God's promises are never blank checks.
The contexts always include some conditions.

1. God grants the desires of those who delight in him.

"Those" are persons who seek God's will in his word.
They are persons whose lives contrast the world's ways.

2. To receive his gifts you may travel some rough paths.

Wicked men with evil desires abound.
The righteous are always under fire.

Delight yourself in the Lord.
Devote yourself to his word and will.
Then and only then, the promise is yours.

13. A LOT TO PRAISE GOD FOR

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God (Psalm 40:3).

God did "many things" for the psalmist.
The things were "planned," not accidental.

1. The psalmist praised the Lord for listening.

"[He] turned to me and heard my cry" (v. 1).
As a concerned Father, God hears our cries for help.

2. The psalmist praised the Lord also for lifting.

"He lifted me out of the slimy pit..." (v. 2).
The Lord gives us a hand up, not just a hand out.

3. The psalmist praised the Lord, above all, for loving.

"I do not conceal your love and your truth" (v. 10).
Love motivates his gifts to us and our praises to him.

Praising God gives heart to people.
Giving heart to people pleases God.

14. UPLOOK FOR THE DOWNCAST

Why are you downcast, O my soul? (Psalm 42:5, 11).

Dominating questions afflicted the downcast soul.
Delayed answers compounded the misery.

1. The thirsting: "My soul thirsts for God..."

He was alienated from the Lord's house.
He felt alienated from the Lord himself.

2. The taunting: "Where is your God?"

It became oppressive.
It was continuous.

3. The trusting: "I will yet praise him..."

He remembered better days.
He expected better days.

If you are downcast, look back.
You will soon be looking up.
Then you will look forward.

15. GOD'S HELP IS BASED ON GOD'S LOVE

Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love (Psalm 44:26).

The psalmist boldly accuses God of injustice.
The psalmist wisely petitions God for mercy.

1. Redemption is rooted in divine love, not human merit.

Man's wrongs, not God's, make redemption necessary.
God's unfailing love is the only basis of our hope.

2. Jesus' death supremely illustrates that divine love.

Love alone took Jesus to his death on the cross.
His death alone atones for all our sins.

He delivers us from our worst situation.
He guides us to our best destination.

16. THE IRREPLACABLE

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end (Psalm 48:14).

The psalm exalts God and the city of God.
God can do without the city; the city can't do without God.

1. "Our God"--a confession.

He chooses us but we must choose him.
God is an active person, not an idle abstraction.

2. "Our guide"--a condition.

God and guide are inseparable.
His primary guidance system is his word.
We find our way in Scripture or lose it in culture.

Zion has changed; God has not.
Places can be replaced; God can not.

17. A ROYAL CONFESSION

I know my transgressions... (Psalms 51:3).

Psalm 51 is a royal confession.
It reminds us that God impartially judges.

1. God shows us our hearts.

His Spirit applies his word to us.
He leaves us no excuse for our sins.

2. God changes our hearts.

He provides a covering for sin.
Our salvation is his way or no way.

Contrition and confession are required of us.
Forgiveness and cleansing are provided by him.

18. HOW TO HANDLE FEAR

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid (Psalm 56:3, 4).

Everyone fears something.
Everyone needs to learn to handle fear.

1. First, admit it.

The psalmist had his share of life-or-death moments.
In a one-against-many situation he could say, "I am afraid."
He didn't deny the reality of fear but denied the finality of fear.

2. Next, commit it.

"I am afraid" becomes "I will not be afraid" by trusting in God.
God's love is more constant than man's persecution.
God's word is adequate ground for trust.

Faith grows and fear withers through prayer.
A little trust in God defeats a large fear.

19. A BAD NIGHT; A GOOD MORNING

O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God (Psalm 59:17).

Ever have a bad night? If so, this psalm is for you.

1. The psalmist was having a bad night.

Brutal enemies snarled for his blood like wild dogs.
They robbed him of sleep but not of prayer.
Prayer increased his confidence.

2. The psalmist expected a good morning.

God is stronger than all that keeps us from sleep.
He is stronger than the people who oppose us.
He is stronger than all that threatens us.

Our strength is small and quickly spent, but his strength is limitless.
If you pray during a bad night you can have a good morning.

20. LONGING FOR LODGING

I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings (Psalm 61:4).

Though God is always near he doesn't always seem near.
He alone can bridge that distance and comfort us.

1. He is a shelter from all adverse circumstances

He shelters us during natural, political or spiritual storms.
In such times we long to live close to him and on his terms.

2. Were it not for the storms we would not seek the shelter.

Our most dangerous times are between the storms.
Our most comforting place is his sheltering "wings."

We cherish the song, "He came to me."
His consistent coming is our hope and strength.

21. THE GREAT BURDEN-BEARER

Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens (Psalm 68:19).

Want an easy life? Don't serve the Lord.
Want an easier life? Then do serve the Lord.

1. Daily life brings daily burdens.

Every day brings some kind of burden.
Ours is an everyday burden-bearing God.

2. All burdens are not created equal.

Some are heavier and longer-lasting than others.
No burden outweighs or outlasts the love of our God.

3. God puts his shoulder under our burdens.

God does not exempt us from burdens.
God does make them bearable by sharing them.

Our heaviest burden was borne by Jesus at Calvary.
We can't save others; we can bear another's burdens.

22. O LORD, HURRY!

Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me (Psalm 70:1).

A “giddy up” to God? How brazen. How common.

1. Urgent situations call for desperate prayers.

The psalmist was heaven-bent on salvation.
His enemies were hell-bent on his destruction.

2. We can't hurry God; we can't help trying to.

God doesn't need to be informed or spurred to action.
He knows when, how, with what and by whom to intervene.

3. Why then should we pray?

Pray because God acts in response to prayer.
Pray because it helps us to trust in God.

A reason the psalmist didn't have--Jesus told us to pray.

23. THANKS TO YOU, O GOD

We give thanks to you, O God.... it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another (Psalm 75:1, 8).

Paul teaches us to give thanks for everything.
The psalmist teaches us to give thanks for something.

1. A good reason to give thanks. “It is God who judges.”

God alone is qualified to be judge of all persons and nations.
Human judges are limited in knowledge and subject to biases and bribes.
Justice often miscarries in human courts, but never at the judgment seat of God.

2. God’s judgment never miscarries. “He brings one down, he exalts another.”

God sees all that is hidden from us and all that is hidden by us.
God can’t be bullied or bribed; he exalts and dethrones as he wills.
God’s rulings determine the ultimate fate of both nations and persons.

We should persist in learning and refrain from judging.
We should prepare today for judgment tomorrow.

24. WHEN PRAYERS END

This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse (Psalm 72:20).

There are times when prayers must end.

1. Prayers end when they are intended for publication.

This was true of David's collected prayers.
Some dislike prayer books; others benefit from them.

2. Prayers end when the praying person dies.

Perhaps prayer will be made in heaven or hell.
Death is "amen" to prayer as we know it on earth.

3. Prayers end when action must begin.

Prayer does not bring escape but enablement.
This was modeled by Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane.

Prayers often end too soon, for many of us do not pray enough.

25. SILENT GOD AND STRETCHING TIME

Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? (Psalm 74:1).

“Why” is a question we often ask but God rarely answers.

“When” is a question we often ask but God rarely answers.

1. God is righteous.

The psalmist knew that God was right in judging his people. He thought it was time for judgment to end and rescue to begin.

2. Time is relative.

Decades can seem like “forever” when pain is heart deep. When pain persists and prayer fails, God seems unconcerned.

What can we do when God takes "forever" to answer prayers? We can keep hoping, praying and trusting that he will intervene.

26. HOW GOD LEADS HIS PEOPLE

He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance (Psalm 78:70-71).

“Sheep” is a humbling metaphor.

“Shepherd” is a comforting metaphor.

1. God suits our callings to our gifts.

As sinners we put good means to bad ends.

As servants we now put old means to new ends.

2. In serving God we do not “start from scratch.”

We utilize the skills we already possess.

We use the knowledge gleaned from experience.

God doesn't waste what we wrongly used.

Instead, he changes our motives and our goals.

27. THE SCHOOL OF GOD

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD--that you alone are the Most High over all the earth (Psalm 83:18).

The teacher is “the Lord.”

The students are his “enemies.”

1. God has a one-lesson school.

The lesson: God alone is “Most High over all the earth.”

This lesson constitutes compulsory education.

2. God has a two classroom school.

One classroom is mercy, the room less crowded.

The other is judgment, the room most used.

We can't choose teacher or lesson.

We can and will choose the classroom.

28. WALKING IN TRUTH

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart... (Psalm 86:11).

The psalmist found that his ways were ruinous.
He found also that the Lord's way was redemptive.

1. To walk in truth is to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the truth."
He leads to pardon, freedom and heaven.

2. To follow Jesus two things are necessary.

We must have undivided hearts.
We must also have informed minds.

We must be taught by Jesus, not simply about him.
His presence and guidance keep us as we walk in truth.

29. A PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation” (Psalm 91:14-16).

Trouble is inevitable--a fact of life.

The troubled can be invincible--a truth of Scripture.

1. The best of persons may have the worst of troubles.

All who live for the Lord in this world will experience trouble.

They will share the forms and degrees of trouble common to mankind.

Added to these will be trouble that arises from the world's opposition to the Lord.

2. Trouble will come but it need not overcome.

The Lord's presence is our power when trouble comes.

That power-giving presence is ours as an answer to prayer.

He delivers us because we love him.

We love him because he first loved us.

30. GLORY TO HIS NAME

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name (Psalm 97:8).

God's name stands for all he is and does.

1. What God is and does deserves praise and honor.

He is the sovereign of the universe.

He is the creator of the universe.

He is the savior of the universe.

He is judge of the universe.

2. We ascribe glory to his name in two special ways.

The first is by worship given in special courts.

The second is by witness given to all nations.

We should glorify him individually.

We should glorify him communally.

31. A RICH INHERITANCE

...they fell heir to what others had toiled for... (Psalm 105:44).

Psalm 105 calls God's people to praise and witness.
The subject of this praise and witness is God's faithfulness.
Following their God his people had inherited riches from others.

1. An inheritance.

Israel lived in houses others had built.
Israel lived on crops others had raised.

2. A testimony.

Call me Israel, for I live daily upon the labor of others.
In my study I tap mines of knowledge that others have created.
At my computer I work with machinery and systems that others
devised.
At my dining table I eat nourishing food that others have raised and
processed.

3. A debt.

My life is enhanced by "what others had toiled for."
For them I thank God and from them I take courage.
Like them I seek to make the world better than I found it.

God's mercy has provided my rich inheritance.
My experience is that of every person serves the Lord.
Let us praise him for what we inherit from his other servants.

32. WHAT'S COMING WHEN YOU'RE GOING?

Good will come to him who is generous.... the longings of the wicked will come to nothing (Psalm 112:10).

Death brings your future when it comes.
What will be coming when you are going?

1. The psalm presents a sharp contrast in futures.

“Good” is coming for the righteous.
They will have “dawn” in the darkness.
They will be welcomed by “the light of the world.”

“Not so the wicked,” as the first Psalm says.
The wicked will lose everything and have “nothing”.
Their future is to be forever poor, lonely and miserable.

2. The psalm extols lives of compassion and generosity.

“A righteous man will be remembered forever.”
He will live in the memories of those he has helped,
He will live in the presence of the Lord who gives eternal life.

Not so the wicked.” They “come to nothing.”
Self-indulgent lives are both wicked and wasted.
“In the end” all that the wicked valued will be lost forever.

When you are going what is coming?
You are choosing “good” or “nothing.”

33. OUR GOD--WHO OR WHAT?

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their gods are silver and gold, made by the hands of men (Psalm 115:3-4).

“Our God.... their gods...”

Every one has a god, even the atheist.

1. The ultimate choice: “Our God... their gods...”

We will be God-made persons or god-making persons.

We will worship the creator or fashion gods for ourselves.

2. The superior God: Our God is in heaven.”

He is superior to all men, sovereign over all men.

As our superior the true God can do whatever he pleases.

Our idols are mindless and helpless, dependent on our decisions.

Man-made gods will perish with their makers.

God-made men will live forever with their maker.

34. A CALL TO PRAISE GOD

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD (Psalm 117:1-2).

Matthew Henry calls this “a gospel psalm.”

“We are among the persons to whom the Holy Spirit here speaks.”

1. This is the shortest of the psalms.

It can be easily memorized.

It can be too easily dismissed.

2. This short psalm has a long content.

It extols the loyal love of the Lord.

His love is global; it embraces “all nations.”

His love is faithful; it endures all circumstances.

His love is eternal; it is unconditional and unending.

The Lord deserves our constant praise.

His people need his constant faithfulness.

35. THE SHEPHERD GOD

I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant... (Psalm 119:176).

Strayed sheep are helpless to retrace their steps.
They cannot find the shepherd; he must find them.

1. Our God has a shepherd's heart.

He finds us before we can find him.
He chooses us before we can choose him.
His initiative in rescuing strays is the meaning of grace.

2 Jesus is God seeking his strays.

Jesus called himself "the good shepherd."
In Hebrews he is called "that great shepherd."
Peter, a notorious stray, called him "the Chief Shepherd."

Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost."
The seeking and saving God is the object of our faith.

36. PEOPLE MAKE THE PLACE

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech (Psalm 120:5).

A common problem is good people in bad neighborhoods.
A common response is lamentation and intercession.

1. You can live as a stranger in your own neighborhood.

Having a home is not the same as being at home.
Neighborhood is not a synonym for brotherhood.

2. You can have speaking neighbors and a silent God.

God answers prayer but he doesn't answer to prayer.
God will deliver some time; we live in the meantime.

3. You can be for peace when you can't have peace.

Peace results from cooperation, not from coercion.
When cooperation is denied relocation is desired.

Pray, for God is always within hearing distance.
Trust, for God always knows what is best.

37. SCIENCE & SCIENTISM

*Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth
(Psalm 124:8).*

Many scientists are rejecting “the Maker.”
Denying “the Maker” is scientism, not science.

1. Scientism is false religion; it replaces God with godless men.

God is, whether scientists say yes or no.
Men are not gods, whether scholars or brutes.

2. Science helps us; scientism robs us of our most needed help.

Science has greatly improved our lives.
Scientism would rob us of our greatest help.

Science cannot save us--“the Maker” can.
Science will not judge us--“the Maker” will.

38. DOWN BUT NOT OUT

...they have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me (Psalm 129:2).

The nation affected the person.
The person reflected the nation.

1. This was Israel's history in a nutshell.

They were always oppressed, never destroyed.
Like Paul, they were "Knocked down but not knocked out."

2. God allows oppression but not destruction.

He limits the oppression that he permits.
Pray for greater strength, not for easier lives.

Remember, Jesus was oppressed for us.
Oppression need not result in depression.

39. GOD HIMSELF REDEEMS

He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins (Psalm 130:8).

To redeem is to purchase freedom for captives and slaves.
The psalmist speaks here of mankind's ultimate redemption.

1. God alone can redeem us from sin.

Sin makes us all part of the problem, not the solution.
God alone is mighty enough and wealthy enough to redeem.

2. The price he paid to redeem us is infinite.

It began with the incarnation of Christ.
It was finalized by the crucifixion of Christ.

Here is mystery enough to baffle any finite mind.
Here is power enough to unshackle any penitent soul.

40. GOD'S PURPOSE, MY PRAYER

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever--do not abandon the works of your hands (Psalm 138:8).

The Lord's will is mightier than its opposition.
We live connected to his purpose through prayer.

1. The Lord's purpose for us.

His purpose for us is likeness to Jesus.
Our progress is embarrassingly slow at times.

2. The Lord's power to achieve his purpose.

His purpose is powered by his enduring love.
His love controls all he wills and allows in our lives.

3. Our prayer for the achievement of his purpose.

Prayer is not meant to remind God of anything.
Prayer reminds us of God as my source of power.

God keeps us from becoming unfinished projects.
Prayer keeps us from becoming ungrateful recipients.

41. DON'T LEAVE THE DOOR UNGUARDED

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3).

The Bible has a lot to say about talking.
Review your past or listen to others to know why.

1. The world's busiest door: "...the door of my lips."

To talk without thinking is easy and it causes much sorrow.
To think without talking is hard but it prevents much trouble.

2. The world's strongest guard: "O Lord; keep watch..."

The Lord is a watchman who never goes AWOL.
The Lord's words will keep ours fewer, kinder and simpler.

A good rule: Talk to God more; talk to people less.
A good reminder: Talk isn't cheap so budget it wisely.

42. PRISON BREAKS

Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name (Psalm 142:7).

Scholars think the prison was metaphorical, not actual.
The desire for freedom, however, was actual, not metaphorical.

1. Prison, here, could represent any situation that entraps us.

“My prison” may be home, work, illness or poverty.

“My prison” is anything that makes me feel trapped.

2. The Lord has lots of experience in getting his people out of prison.

Prime examples are Joseph, Peter, Paul and Silas.

His power can free us from sin, people and situations.

His freedom comes through prayer and issues in praise.

Do you feel trapped?

The Lord is present to deliver.

43. THE NEARNESS OF GOD

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18).

God's nearness may be just a doctrine.
God's nearness can be a real experience.

1. Nearness refers to deliverance not distance.

God's nearness is our environment.
God's nearness is personal involvement.

2. Nearness results from prayer not performance.

A recital of our virtues alienates God.
A sincere cry for deliverance attracts God.

Effectual prayer is truth-conditioned.
Answered prayer is praise-producing.

44. GOD'S POWER ELICITS OUR PRAISE

He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart (Psalm 148:14).

The psalm opens and closes with an injunction to praise God. That is how each day and all life should be bracketed.

1. The horn: "He has raised up for his people a horn..."

Horn is a metaphor for strength of aggression and defense. Jesus fulfills the promise of God embedded in this psalm.

2. The heart: "the people close to his heart."

Love is universal and particular, embracing sinners and saints. They are close to God's heart who trust in God's horn.

Praise is evoked "from heaven" and "from earth."
Praise honors God as creator and savior.

45. THE ASSEMBLY OF SAINTS

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints (Psalm 149:1).

All the Israelites were not in the “assembly.”
All in the “assembly” were not “saints.”

1. A neglected gathering: “...the assembly of the saints.”

Our neglect betrays the example of Jesus.
Our neglect defies the command of Scripture.

2. A joyful gathering: “Sing to the Lord a new song...”

Music is a traditional feature of worship.
New songs imply new experiences of grace.

Small groups are not a substitute for the assembly of saints.
The assembly of saints does not preclude small groups.

46. TAKE REFUGE

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3).

The foundations of family life, school life, political life and even religious life are being destroyed. Hopes for national unity and for international peace are collapsing into the chaos.

1. What is God doing?

Before we ask, “What can the righteous do,” we must ask, “What is the righteous Lord doing?”

He seems to be indifferent or helpless, and many despair of his love, even of his existence. “The Lord is in his holy temple” but cynics wonder if that temple has windows opening on the world.

The psalmist assures us that God “observes” and “hates” the evils that plague our lives. He “loves” justice. He will destroy the wicked and preserve the righteous.

When? We don’t know. God marks his own calendar and calls his own shots. We can only say, “Sooner or later” the Lord will set things straight.

History gives hope. Calvary reminds us that God is involved; Easter assures us that God is triumphant.

2. What can we do?

The psalmist's answer: "In the Lord I take refuge." Every lesser refuge will fail. Only God is eternal. He is a refuge that will stand when all the storms of evil have spent their fury.

We who believe "will see his face." He will wipe the tears from our eyes and welcome us to endless fellowship in a perfect environment. Unbelievers sneer at this as "pie in the sky," but it's the only pie anywhere. If, in our arrogance and unbelief, we dismiss this refuge, no other hope remains.

Trust in God whatever happens. He is our only hope of ultimate and eternal victory.

Samuel Young began a message with the question, "What can you do when you can't do anything?" He answered with Hebrews 12:3: "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." That's all we can do at times, but that is enough to bring triumph over despair.

47. THE ARCHER

Your arrows have pierced me (Psalm 38:2).

Metaphors can be flexible and versatile. Paul spoke of “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16), and here the psalmist speaks of the Lord’s arrows. Both the devil and the Lord are viewed as archers. I don’t want to talk about the diabolic archer; I want to talk about the divine archer.

1. The Lord always hits the target.

Ahab was slain in battle when an enemy archer “drew his bow at random” (1 Kings 22:34). The lucky shot caught the king in an unprotected spot, mortally wounding him.

The Lord does nothing by chance. He selects his targets wisely and hits them squarely. The psalmist speaks of “vigorous enemies” who “repay my good with evil” (vv. 19, 20). He speaks of some who “seek my life” and “set their traps” (v. 12). These were unable to drop him, but the Lord’s arrows pierced, the Lord’s hand struck him down (v. 2).

When the Lord has you in the cross hairs you are going to get hit.

2. The Lord wounds in order to heal.

The psalmist speaks of festering wounds and searing pain (v. 5). He speaks of failing strength and failing eyes and a heart filled with anguish (vv. 7, 8, 10). All of this had resulted as a judgment upon his sins (vv. 3, 5, 18).

His only hope is mercy and this he expects from the Lord, calling him “my Savior” (vv. 15, 22). God’s healing includes both the wounds and the sins that made the wounding necessary.

“The wounds of a friend can be trusted” (Proverbs 27:6). A friend will hurt you only to help you. How much truer is that of the divine friend!

Has the Lord wounded you? Has he laid bare your sin and guilt? Has he acted to make emphatic the truth that sin brings death? Then do what the psalmist did--pray and trust the heavenly archer to be your savior.

48. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1).

This psalm is a classic lament. It is the outpouring of a man who is deeply hurt, confused and saddened. He is undergoing a crisis of faith. Three things especially trouble him.

1. He is troubled by the arrogance of evil.

The “wicked man” who arrogantly and cruelly “hunts down the weak” distresses the psalmist. The wicked man “reviles the Lord” and “sneers at his enemies,” confident that he will escape retribution. “Nothing will shake me,” is his proud boast.

2. He is troubled by the impotence of good.

In contrast to the haughty wicked man, who plots and traps and kills “the innocent,” the victims of evil seem so utterly “helpless.” They are caught and crushed under the weight of their oppressor. It seems to them, as it seems to their oppressor, that “God has forgotten.”

3. He is troubled by the absence of God.

God seems remote, hidden and indifferent. While the wicked gloat and the helpless suffer, God seems to be doing nothing, though the afflicted cry out to him.

The psalmist rallies his faith, however. He affirms that God does see and does care and does hear and will take things “in hand.” The Lord will “arise” and call the wicked “to account.” He will encourage and defend “the fatherless and the oppressed.” “The Lord is King for ever and ever.” In his time and way he will bring justice to the nations.

The opening and closing words of the psalm are instructive. In times of trouble, the first words of the afflicted are, “Why, O Lord?” In times of trouble, the last words of God to the oppressor are, “no more.”

49. THE MEASURELESS

For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great (Psalm 25:11).

The psalmist declares that God is “good and upright” (v. 8). Because he is “upright” forgiveness is necessary. Because he is “good” forgiveness is possible. The wisest prayer a sinner can pray is our text.

1. The enormity of sin is measureless.

The psalmist calls his iniquity “great.” He doesn’t specify it but he does quantify it. Sin is the heaviest load that human life can bear. Paul called himself “the worst of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15, 16). Every sinner, when under conviction, feels that he or she has replaced Paul in that category. When awakened to the enormity of sin our instinctive cry is for mercy and pardon.

2. The abundance of grace is measureless.

With trust in the Lord (v. 1) the psalmist prays “forgive my iniquity.” He is confident that divine grace reaches deeper than human sin. John Bunyan entitled his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. That’s what grace does--it abounds. It isn’t dribbled out but poured out. God is more willing to forgive than we are to repent. “Take away all my sins,” the psalmist cried (v. 18). No sin is too great for grace to forgive.

3. The glory of God’s name is measureless.

The psalmist prays, “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive...” There is no reason in us for God to show favor. Our only hope lies in the fact that “God is love.” His name alone has saving merit and power (Acts 4:12). There are powerful names among men,

but none can deliver from sin. The glory of God's name shines brightest in His saving deeds.

Do you need to echo the psalmist's prayer today? The best time is now. The best place is here.

50. A HARD LESSON LEARNED

But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you (Psalm 39:7).

In this Psalm we hear the cry of a man who awakens to the fact that he has missed the true meaning of life. He had focused on the wrong goals and now seeks a course correction.

1. He looked for fortune but found disappointment.

Verse six implies that he sought identity and security in material wealth. He likely sought his fulfillment, as millions do, in an "upwardly mobile" life. For all his frenetic activity, what goods he accumulated did not satisfy. He awakened to the truth that he would lose or leave riches: "He heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it."

2. He looked for longevity but found illness that threatened death.

Verses 4-5, 10-11 implies that loss of health, perhaps as a direct result of his hurry and worry. The “rat race” had brought a sobering awareness of the fragility and brevity of life. He attributes his reversal of fortune to the Lord, who has imposed suffering and loss as means of discipline, as a “wake-up call” to their victim: “You are the one who has done this. Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand.”

3. Lessons learned, he looked to the Lord as life's ultimate meaning.

When first afflicted he bit his lip. He didn't want the wicked to hear him complain against God. But silence is hard to maintain when one is hurt, baffled and frustrated. The inward anger had to be vented: “As I meditated, the fire burned; than I spoke with my tongue.”

Realizing that God was his only hope, his speech became prayer: “Hear my prayer, O Lord, listen to my cry for help” (v. 12). He petitioned wisdom: “Let me know how fleeting is my life” (v. 4). He petitioned pardon: “Save me from all my transgressions” (v. 8). He petitioned healing: “Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more” (v. 13).

If we look for anything but God as ultimate reality and ultimate good we will self-destruct. When our relationship to God becomes our first and greatest concern we are on track for authentic life, here and hereafter.

GET YOUR EARS PIERCED

... my ears you have pierced (Psalm 40:6).

This is a difficult text of Scripture to translate and to interpret. It is as challenging as it is difficult. We can profit by giving it our attention.

1. Translations.

Literally translated from the Hebrew, the text reads, "You dug out my ear." Some English translations read, "You opened my ear." Isaiah 50:5 is cited as a parallel: "The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious..." The meaning would then be that God causes His servants to know his will. He speaks and they hear and obey.

Preferring the Hebrew text, some commentators insist that its background is the law found in Exodus 21:5-6. The slave who loved his master and refused the liberty provided in the seventh year would have his ear pierced with an awl and remain with his master in permanent servitude.

2. Applications.

The text is applied to Christ in Hebrews 10:5. There the Septuagint version is quoted: "a body you prepared for me." In his body Christ became a sacrifice for sin, doing the will of God that we might be saved. His devotion to the Father's will was total because his love for the Father was total. He refused to live except as the servant of the Father's will. Jesus was a servant with a pierced ear.

We must apply the text to ourselves. We must become servants with pierced ears. We must be so dedicated to the will of the Lord that we find our true liberty in complete obedience to him.

Let him pierce your ear. Let him prepare you a body in which to serve his purpose for your life. This he does by filling you with His Spirit and controlling your life from within. Give yourself without reservation to permanent service for the Lord.

Translated either way, the text summons us to complete consecration to God. God's response to that consecration is a cleansing and filling grace that enables us to say with the psalmist, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

FROM SHOCK TO SURETY

You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?

(Psalm 43:2).

This Psalm was probably joined to the previous one originally. The common theme and the identical closing words suggest that it was. We hear in the psalm the lament of a “downcast” and “disturbed” soul. The psalmist thirsts for God like a running deer thirsts for water. He recalls better days spent with the people of God in the house of God. Now he feels “forgotten” and “rejected.” He is “oppressed” and “mourning.” If you can’t identify with that your life has been sheltered.

1. His lament. “Why...”

God has allowed him to be pursued by “deceitful and wicked men” who seek his life. That he wants God to plead his cause suggests that he is the victim of undeserved oppression. In such circumstances, that people reject us is often surprising, but that God rejects us is always downright shocking. We can fathom the confusion and grief that wrings a tortured “why” from the psalmist’s lips.

2. His prayer. “Send forth... bring me...”

He knows that the very God who seems to have forgotten him is his only source of help. He is too deep in trouble to rescue himself. He pleads for a guide--“your light and your truth”--that will rescue from darkness and deception. He names a goal--“the place where you dwell”--where he will rejoice in worship with the “festive throng” again. Deliverance *from* is never enough; deliverance *to* is desired.

3. His hope. “Put your hope in God...”

He is talking to his own soul, and giving it sound advice. A man who can say “my Savior and my God” will emerge from trouble a victor. Three times in the two psalms this hope is confidently affirmed. The last word of the trusting soul is not “why” but “my”--my God, my--savior.

We may *feel* forgotten and rejected, but God never forsakes his people. We change, but he does not. He is the “rock” that winds cannot blow away, that floods cannot wash away. He is the “stronghold” that no assault can capture or crumble. He stands through all that knocks us down, and he will deliver us from oppression.

WEALTH AND DEATH

For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others (Psalm 49:10).

Psalm 49 is a “wisdom” psalm, a collection of reflections upon wealth with reference to death.

1. A call to hear (vv. 1-4).

The speaker was first a listener and then an expositor (v. 4). He speaks as a “wisdom teacher,” a man in Israel to whom God had given deep and true insights into the meaning of life. His speaking is marked by (1) urgency--“hear,” (2) sincerity--“from my heart,” and (3) clarity--“I will expound my riddle.” To such a man the wise will listen.

2. A message loud and clear (vv. 5-19).

His message is that (1) every person dies. Death respects no person. The rich and poor, the wise and foolish “alike perish” (v. 10). “They are destined for the grave” (v. 14). God accepts no ransom (vv. 7-9). Continued life is a gift but never a bribe.

His message is that (2) every person dies poor. What they leave behind may vary, but in every case all is left: “They leave their wealth to others.” Landed estates shrink to the size of graves (v. 11). Those who “trust in themselves” (v. 13) and “trust in their wealth” (v. 6) are being herded “like sheep” to their graves. In death none will be richer or poorer than others (cf. Isa. 14:4-17).

3. A conclusion that both brings and removes fear (vv. 5, 12, 16, 20).

The certainty of death makes the fear of men foolish and the fear of God wise. For commentary on these verses read the words of

Jesus in Matthew 10:28). We meet God and not our enemies beyond death. We should fear God and not men in life.

The psalm has universal application, typical of wisdom literature. It is addressed to all. It applies to all. Lessons for us: (1) Don't fear or envy the rich.

(2) Don't make wealth a priority. You will lose it or leave it. (3) Don't let death find you unprepared to face God. He can redeem you from death and take you to himself (v. 15).

A CLEAN HEART

Create in me a clean heart, O God (Psalm 51:10, RSV).

David had sinned deeply and now he prays earnestly. He realizes that his outward transgressions sprang from an inward corruption. He prays, therefore, not only to be forgiven but also to be purified.

1. The heart is unclean by nature.

“In sin did my mother conceive me” (v. 5). From conception and birth the human heart is unclean. Sin is a racial taint, an inherited depravity common to every member of Adam’s fallen race.

God created man in his own image. Man sinned and fell. Fallen man begat children in his marred image (Gen. 5:3). The inner life of every person is biased toward evil by nature.

2. The heart can be cleansed by grace.

David grounds his prayer upon God’s love and mercy (v. 1). He is helpless to cleanse or control the depths of his being. Only God’s power, exerted in a new creation, will cleanse the heart and renew the spirit.

He pleads for the Holy Spirit not to be taken from him. The Spirit, living and working within us, is the power that cleanses and renews (Acts 15:8-9). With God, man’s inner purging is possible.

3. The cleansed heart will prompt service.

David promises devoted service to God. “My tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance” (v. 14). “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee” (v. 13).

The sanctified believer is committed to bearing witness and winning others to Christ. The heart moves from pollution to purity to

passion for souls. Joyful, grateful and fruitful service is a mark of holiness.

Sin in your heart will bring disgrace to your life. Do as the psalmist did--come to God whose mercy and might are adequate for your cleansing from sin. Cry to him, rely on him, and you will find deliverance.

A PURE HEART

Create in me a pure heart, O God (Psalm 51:10).

This “penitential psalm” was ascribed to David by some early editor. It fits the occasion referred to--his adultery with Bathsheba and his rebuke from Nathan. Whoever wrote it, whatever occasioned it, the psalm delivers some crucial truths to our hearts.

1. Our sins are rooted in our hearts.

We can't justly blame them on external factors or other persons. They are our choices, our actions, arising from our hearts.

The power of negative influences is great. The psalmist was aware of a defective heritage and environment, as we are. We are sinners “by birth” and “sinful” from conception. We are members of a fallen race and inclined to evil from the inception of our lives.

Innate depravity and hostile environment make sin easy but not necessary. The fault lies not in our peers, our stars, our ancestors, our neighborhoods, but in us. The defiled life springs from a depraved heart.

2. Only God can radically change our hearts.

“Create” translates a verb (*bara*) that always has God for its subject. It first occurs in Genesis 1:1. Only the power that translated God's thought into the universe can make us inwardly clean and steadfastly loyal.

We can resolve and strive, but our efforts will only result in repeated failure and deepened frustration. Only God can make us “whiter than snow.” Our efforts merely rearrange the dirt.

What can we do? Cast ourselves upon God's "mercy," "unfailing love" and "great compassion." His creative power achieves the rest. We are the problem; he is the solution.

Bring to God a "contrite heart" in earnest prayer, and he will give you a "clean heart" from which a holy life may flow.