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April 1, 2023
All is not Lost

Readings for today: [Ruth 1-4](#) [\(audio reading\)](#) [\(Introduction to Ruth\)](#)

I love the book of Ruth. It upends so many expectations and helps us understand the heart of God. Ruth is a Moabite. A foreigner. A sojourner. She married an Israelite named Chilion and became part of his extended family. This was forbidden by the Law of God but it took place during the time of the judges when everyone was doing right in their own eyes. Tragedy strikes. Her father-in-law, Elimelech, dies. Ten years later both her husband and his brother die as well. This puts the whole family in dire straights. There are no men to work. No men to protect them. So Naomi makes the decision to return home. She encourages her Moabite daughters-in-law to do the same. Start over. See if they have better luck with a new family because hers has brought them only grief. Ruth refuses. She makes this extraordinary declaration, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16) So powerful is her statement that we often hear it read at weddings thousands of years later!

Ruth not only returns with Naomi to Bethlehem, she cares faithfully for her mother-in-law. She puts her life at risk by going out to the fields to glean what was left after the reapers had made their way through. It was backbreaking, painstaking work. Women who did this were often molested, harassed, and abused. They were the poorest of the poor in the land. Completely without hope. In the providence of God, the field she chose belonged to a man named Boaz. A righteous man. A man who left the gleanings for the poor as the Law of God demands. (Lev. 19:9-10) A man who protected her from the men who worked for him. A man who included her among his own young women so she wouldn't be alone. Even invited her to sit and eat at his table. Boaz is a man who clearly honors the Lord. I love what he says to Ruth when she asks him why she has found favor in his eyes. "The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:12)

Naomi cannot believe their good fortune! Ruth has been led by God to the very fields of the man who can redeem them! (Lev. 25) A man who is a close enough relative to bring them into his family and continue the family line! Thus unfolds this beautiful courtship in chapter three where Ruth goes and lies at Boaz's feet to ask him to take them in. Boaz is humbled by the request and makes the necessary arrangements to become their kinsman-redeemer. They get married. Conceive a son. The family line continues which is important since her great-grandson is King David! Furthermore, many generations hence, her descendent Joseph will marry a young pregnant woman named Mary and they will have a son named Jesus. The Great Redeemer who will save His people from their sins!

After all the bloodshed and violence and suffering and pain, it is good to read that not all was lost in Israel. Even in the time of the judges, there were still faithful men and women who followed the Lord. It is a great reminder to us in our own time that the night is always darkest right before the dawn. No matter how bad things get, God is still at work. Sometimes in the most obscure places through some of the most ordinary women and men you know.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 3, 2023
Heartfelt Prayer

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 1-3](#) (audio reading) [Introduction to 1 & 2 Samuel](#)

Have you ever prayed a prayer from a place so deep it felt like it was wrenched from the depths of your soul? A prayer you prayed night after night? Day after day? Maybe even hour by hour? A prayer you prayed for years? A prayer you prayed through tears? A prayer you prayed with everything in you?

Hannah prayed such a prayer. Listen to how Eugene Peterson translates it in *The Message*... "Oh, God-of-the-Angel-Armies (literally Lord of hosts), if you'll take a good, hard look at my pain, if you'll quit neglecting me and go into action for me by giving me a son, I'll give him completely, unreservedly to you. I'll set him apart for a life of holy discipline." (1 Samuel 1:11) Hannah had endured so much pain over the years. She was tormented and abused by her rival Peninnah. She was ashamed of her barrenness. She felt cursed by God for not being able to bear children. Her suffering was so great she often lost her appetite. She constantly felt like she was letting her husband down. She was "crushed in soul" according to the account we read today. Thankfully, in her despair, she sought God. She cried out to Him. She brought her tears and broken heart and laid it at His feet. So distraught was she in prayer that Eli, the high priest, thought she was drunk!

Hannah's pain and Hannah's prayer were both real and authentic. "I'm a woman broken-hearted. I haven't been drinking. Not a drop of wine or beer. The only thing I've been pouring out is my heart, pouring it out to God. Don't for a minute think I'm a bad woman. It's because I'm desperately unhappy and in such pain that I've stayed here so long." (1 Samuel 1: 15-16) Clearly, Hannah holds nothing back and Eli honors her with his blessing and this changes everything for her. Her appetite returns. Her sadness lifted. She seems ready for whatever God has in store.

This is truly the purpose of prayer. Yes, Hannah will conceive and bear a son. Yes, Hannah will dedicate him to the Lord just as she promised. Yes, God will use Samuel in a powerful way to accomplish His will for His people. But the biggest answer to prayer was the change in Hannah's heart. In seeking the Lord, she exchanged sadness for joy. In honestly and authentically coming before Him, she exchanged despair for hope. In holding nothing back, not even her deepest pain and heartbreak, she exchanged anxiety and fear for peace. How was she able to do this? She kept her heart focused on God not just the answer God might provide. She trusted His will above her own. She surrendered her life into His sovereign hands.

What about you? What prayers do you pray? Do they come from the heart? From the place of deepest brokenness in your life? Are you willing to lay everything before the Lord, holding nothing back? Are you willing to relinquish your will into His hands? Trust Him for the answer He may provide? This is the essence of true prayer.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 4-8

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April 4, 2023
Putting God First

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 4-8 (audio reading)

Imagine you are living in ancient Israel during the time of the judges. You have no Bible. You have no synagogue. You have no centralized system of government. Every now and again, a charismatic leader rises up and for a time you have peace. For a time you seek after God. But pretty soon you lapse back into your old ways. You live in a very tribal culture. Every tribe around you has its own gods and goddesses and its own way of worship that seems to have been working for them. As you build your house and plant your crops and grow your family, you grow complacent. The incredible miracles God worked on your behalf recede further and further. You are preoccupied with the present. What you will eat. What you will wear. Will your wife get pregnant this year? How many lambs will be born this spring? What will the harvest yield? Sure, you go up each year to Shiloh to make your sacrifices but then it's back to normal. And "normal" doesn't really include God.

It's actually not hard to imagine, is it? This is familiar territory for all of us. How many of us own a Bible but rarely open it? How many of us belong to a church but rarely go to worship? We too live in a "tribal" culture whether it's our family, social group, political party, etc. Everyone of those tribes has its own "gods" and "goddesses" and different ways of worship. And if we aren't careful, we can get sucked in. We buy our homes. We grow our families. We work hard. We play hard. And we too can get complacent. The miracles and blessings of God can become commonplace in our lives as well. We too are preoccupied with the present. What we will eat. What we will wear. What kind of home we will live in. Will I get a raise this year? A promotion? Will my child make the team? Will I get into my dream college? Will I get my dream job? Will I meet the man or woman of my dreams? Sure, we go to worship on Christmas and Easter just in case but then it's quickly back to normal. And "normal" doesn't really include God.

Enter Samuel. A man sent by God to bring Israel back. To remind her of her covenant commitments. To have no other gods before God. To worship no idols. To honor God's name and keep the Sabbath. "Then Samuel addressed the house of Israel: "If you are truly serious about coming back to God, clean house. Get rid of the foreign gods and fertility goddesses, ground yourselves firmly in God, worship him and him alone, and he'll save you from Philistine oppression." (1 Samuel 7:3 MSG) Samuel led Israel during a very difficult period in her history. She had suffered a heartbreaking defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The ark of God had been captured. Her priests had been killed. All hope seemed lost. And then along came Samuel to remind her of God. To challenge her to return to God with her whole heart. To put aside all the other gods and goddesses. To cleanse herself of all the false worship she had engaged in. To come back to God and watch Him work yet another miracle on her behalf. This is exactly what happened. God brought them a great victory over their enemies. The Philistines were subdued. Territory was reclaimed. Hope was restored.

What enemies are you facing today? What battles are you fighting? Anxiety? Depression? Grief? Chronic pain? Is your marriage failing? Your family crumbling? Your work suffering? Are you facing a scary diagnosis? A terminal illness? Are you struggling with loneliness? A lack of deep friendships? Do you feel overwhelmed? Too busy? Under too much pressure? What enemies do you face? And are you willing to make the sacrifices necessary to reorient your heart towards God in the midst of it all? Are you ready for the radical shift you will need to put aside the "gods" you've been worshipping and return to the Lord with your whole heart? Are you ready to put God first in your life?

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 9-12

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April 5, 2023
The Danger of Politics

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 9-12 (audio reading)

We want a king. We want to be just like the nations around us. We want to play the world's game by the world's rules. We cannot break ourselves of our dependence on temporal power and wealth and influence. God delivers us. God saves us. God works miracles on our behalf. He provides for us. He protects us. He guides us. He nurtures us. But it is not enough. It wasn't enough for Israel and it's not enough for many Christians living in America today. Instead, we pursue political power. We chase wealth and influence. We place our trust in human beings or political parties or the next election cycle. We compromise our witness by supporting those of questionable character and selfish motives. We believe the ends justify the means. And the results are tragic. Society descends into chaos and confusion. Every one does what is right in their own eyes. We sacrifice freedom for tyranny. Truth for lies. Peace for violence. Grace and love for vengeance and hatred.

The same thing happened in Samuel's day. Though Samuel had led them well over the course of his lifetime and though God had provided victory after victory under his leadership, it was not enough. Though God had been faithful to raise up deliverer after deliverer throughout her history, the people still turned back to their sinful ways. They refused to remain faithful to God. They refused to trust God and walk in His ways. They refused to obey God and His commands. The result was continual cycles of fear and anxiety and injustice and oppression. Now a new threat appears on the horizon and Samuel is old. Rather than turn to God, the people call for a king. A strongman to save them. A warlord to lead them into battle and deliver them. They want to be just like the nations around them. Playing the world's games by the world's rules. It's heartbreaking.

Thankfully, God is gracious. Though His people have rejected Him, He will not reject them. Samuel says, "When you saw Nahash, king of the Ammonites, you said to me, 'No more of this. We want a king to lead us.' And God was already your king! So here's the king you wanted, the king you asked for. God has let you have your own way, given you a king. If you fear God, worship and obey Him, and don't rebel against what He tells you. If both you and your king follow God, no problem. God will be sure to save you. But if you don't obey Him and rebel against what He tells you, king or no king, you will fare no better than your fathers." (1 Samuel 12:12-15 MSG) God does what He consistently does throughout the Scriptures. He speaks to us in a language we can understand. He uses the cultural forms and norms of our day to bring about His will and His way. Yes, the people of the ancient near east all had kings and though God wanted Israel to look to Him as king, He was gracious and condescends to their weakness. He gives them what they want and promises to work through this new political/social structure as long as they remain faithful.

There is an important lesson here for us. Notice where Samuel lands his sermon. He continues to challenge the people of God to worship Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is the great Shema that Moses taught them so long ago and it remains relevant in our day as well. We cannot place our trust in human leaders. We cannot expect the right politics to save us. The right laws to save us. The right social and economic policies to save us. Yes, we need to be engaged in each of these areas and work to align them with God's Word but, at the end of the day, only God can bring about the transformation our society so desperately needs.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 13-16

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April 6, 2023
The Cost of Unfaithfulness

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 13-16 (audio reading)

When we left off yesterday, Samuel tells the people to “fear God and worship Him honestly and heartily.” (1 Samuel 12:24 MSG) Essentially, give God your whole heart. King or no king. Judge or no judge. Ruler or no ruler. Give God the worship He deserves and the worship He demands and things will go well with you. Samuel was speaking as much to the new king, Saul, as he was to everyone else. But Saul was a half-hearted man. He refused to take God seriously. He didn’t fear the Lord or worship Him honestly from the heart. He compromised. He let the king of Amalek and the best of the livestock live rather than devote them to destruction as God commanded. He acted out of fear rather than faith. He refused to wait on God at Gilgal and, as a result, placed his kingdom in jeopardy. He was rash rather than wise. He took a vow to not eat rather than sustain his men with food after a hard day of fighting.

Saul never did grasp the key to holy living. It’s found in 1 Samuel 15:22-23 MSG. “Do you think all God wants are sacrifices - empty rituals just for show? He wants you to listen to Him! Plain listening is the thing, not staging a lavish religious production. Not doing what God tells you is far worse than fooling around in the occult. Getting self-important around God is far worse than making deals with your dead ancestors. Because you said “no” to God’s command, He says “no” to your kingship.” We would do well to learn from Saul’s poor example.

I can’t tell you the number of Christians I know who worship him only occasionally. Usually when they have nothing “better” to do. I can’t tell you the number of Christians I know who go through the motions in worship. They’ve told me they don’t really believe but attend worship out of some kind of feeling of existential guilt. I can’t tell you the number of Christians who merge pagan or occult or cultural religious traditions with their worship, creating a syncretized religion that is sub-Christian at best. And then there are the many Christians I know who have merged their faith with their politics or social leanings. I don’t say these things in judgment but simply as data points collected over almost thirty years of ministry. And the truly tragic part is that so many of these people that I love have to eventually face the consequences of their unfaithfulness and it is costly. Sometimes it costs them their marriages. Sometimes it’s their family. Sometimes it’s their friendships or community. In almost every case it costs them their integrity. It’s heartbreaking.

What about us? In what ways have we broken faith with God? Remember, He doesn’t just look on the outward appearance. He looks to the heart. What does He see when He looks into your heart?

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 17-20, Psalms 59

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April 7, 2023
The Battle Belongs to the Lord

Readings for today: [1 Samuel 17-20](#), [Psalms 59](#) [\(audio reading\) Introduction to the Psalms](#)

Everyone loves the story of David and Goliath. David is the ultimate underdog going up against an overwhelming opponent. David represents the powerless overthrowing the powerful. The oppressed rising up against their oppressor. The weak and vulnerable finding the courage to fight back against the strong and tyrannical. He represents anyone who's ever felt marginalized, ostracized, persecuted or put down. And that's why we love it so much. It's also why we use it to describe upsets in sports or elections or even the clash of nation states in global diplomacy.

Of course, as is so often the case, we miss the main point of the story. The story is not about David. It's not about "slaying our giants." It's not about overcoming obstacles or adversity. It's about God intervening to make His name known and bring glory to Himself. Listen to how David describes it again, "You come at me with sword and spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel's troops, whom you curse and mock. This very day God is handing you over to me. I'm about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there's an extraordinary God in Israel. And everyone gathered here will learn that God doesn't save by means of sword or spear. The battle belongs to God—he's handing you to us on a platter!" (1 Samuel 17:45-47 MSG)

The battle belongs to the Lord. God is handing you over to me. I fight you in the name of the Lord of hosts. David clearly understands this fight has nothing to do with him. He's just the instrument God will use to bring about a victory. David doesn't need Saul's armor. Doesn't need a sword or shield. He fights using the same tools of the trade that preserved him in the wilderness as he watched over his father's flocks. A shepherd's staff. A sling. Some stones. David's confidence is not in his accuracy. Not in his agility. Not in his strength. David has complete confidence in God as he goes out to fight his enemy. And he is confident God will bring about the victory so the whole earth will know there's an extraordinary God in Israel.

Fast forward several hundred years. David's descendent fights a battle in a garden called Gethsemane. His fight is not against flesh and blood. It's against an enemy far more powerful and malevolent than a ten foot giant. Jesus is contending with the devil himself. Battling through prayer and anxiety as He begins His journey towards Golgotha. Like his forefather, David, Jesus doesn't place His trust in Himself but in His Heavenly Father. He knows His sacrifice is necessary to save the world from the tyranny of sin and death. He knows His victory will bring glory to His Father and the whole world will marvel at the great thing God has done in sending His only begotten Son. Today is Good Friday and this is what we celebrate. The victory of God Himself over the principalities and powers of this dark world.

Friends, God is still fighting on our behalf. Though the victory has been won and the decisive blow has been struck, the enemy will not go quietly in defeat. He still prowls around like a lion looking to devour everyone he can before he finally falls. Thankfully, we do not need to be afraid. We do not need to be anxious for the Lord of hosts is on our side! The great God of Israel is still fighting our battles and bringing glory to His great name!

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Samuel 21-24](#), [Psalms 91](#)

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April 8, 2023
Waiting on God

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 21-24, Psalms 91 (audio reading)

Imagine having everything you ever wanted within your grasp? Position. Power. Peace. You have the opportunity with a single stroke to bring it about. Imagine spending your life defending yourself against injustice. On the run for crimes you did not commit. Falsely accused by your enemy. And now you have the chance to end it. All you have to do is take matters into your own hands. A sudden strike in the darkness and you could lay hold of all God had promised.

The temptation to bring about the will of God in our own way and own time is very real. David faced it in the cave when Saul came in to relieve himself. Jesus faced it in the wilderness when the enemy offered him all the kingdoms of the world without the cross. You and I face it everyday as well in big and small ways. Yes, we know the will of God for our lives. We know His Word. We know His Truth. We know His Law. We know what He desires for us. But we get impatient. We get frustrated. We get anxious. We get afraid. And in our fear, we take matters into our own hands.

I remember vividly sitting down at a coffee shop one morning in Sun Prairie, WI. Kristi and I had been seeking God's will for many months. God had led us to resign from a difficult and painful ministry position. He had led us to a great church family who welcomed us in to help us heal. He had provided a sixty day severance package that we lived on while we waited for Him to reveal what was next. Through a mutual friend, God had connected us to a church in Parker, CO that was just beginning their search for a new senior pastor. But these things take time and I was growing anxious. I was afraid. The church in Parker was literally my only job prospect. I had no other options. How would I feed my family if it fell through? How would I pay the rent? Was my career in ministry over? Was it time to go do something else? All these thoughts ran through my head as the weeks passed and the wheels of the search process slowly turned. I was getting about two to three hours of sleep a night. I would pace the hours away praying and crying out to God.

One Saturday evening, I made up my mind. Enough was enough. I needed to expand my search. I needed to look at other ministry positions. I needed more options. So I told Kristi I would start looking the next morning. She and I went to bed. She tossed and turned all night, suffering from the sudden onset of a migraine. I did my normal pacing routine. We were both deeply unsettled. Eventually, morning dawned. I showered. Got dressed. Headed over to the coffee shop, laptop in hand to begin my day. I ordered my regular cup of black coffee. Sat down at my favorite table. Opened up the browser on my computer. Just as I went to type, I heard the word "NO" in my mind. It was clear. It was loud. It was startling. I looked around. Shook my head. Went to type. Again came the word..."NO!" This time I jumped a little. I looked around again. No one else was in the shop. Just me and the barista who was in the back. So I tried a third time to type. "NO!" I sat back. I looked out the window. I knew it was the Lord. Calling me to trust. Calling me to be patient. Calling me to wait on Him to reveal His will rather than make my own plans. I called Kristi. Told her what had happened. Told her God wasn't allowing me to apply to any other positions and that we just needed to wait for Him to reveal what would happen with the church in Parker. Immediately she felt the pain from her migraine lift and relief flood her body. It was frankly one of the most incredible moments in our lives.

In today's reading, we run across these beautiful verses from Psalm 91..."If you'll hold on to Me for dear life," says God, "I'll get you out of any trouble. I'll give you the best of care if you'll only get to know and trust Me. Call Me and I'll answer, be at your side in bad times; I'll rescue you, then throw

you a party. I'll give you a long life, give you a long drink of salvation!" (Psalms 91:14-16 MSG)
Friends, God can be trusted. God is always faithful. He will not let you go nor let you down. At the same time, we have to remember God's ways are not our ways. All of us would have counseled David to take Saul's life in the cave that day. Put an end to the running. Put an end to the civil war. Kill your enemy and take your rightful place on the throne of Israel. All of us would have counseled Jesus to avoid the cross. To accept the deal the devil was offering. Accomplish all the Father has sent You to do without the suffering and pain. We all compromise. We all rationalize. We all have our excuses for why we don't follow the will of God. Why we don't walk in His ways. Why we don't wait on His timing. The reality is we are always looking out for number one. We are always looking out for our own interests first before we look to the interests of others, even the interests of God! But David was a man after God's own heart. He refused to take matters into his own hands. He refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed even though Saul was an evil and corrupt king. He trusted all God had promised would be fulfilled in God's time and in God's way. Just like Jesus did in the wilderness. Just like Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just like Jesus did on the cross.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 10, 2023
Learning to Pray

Readings for today: Psalms 7, 27, 31, 34, 52 (audio reading)

The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. 150 prayers written by God's people. Written in times of celebration to commemorate great victories and triumphs. Written in times of grief to chronicle despair and exile and defeat. Written for use in worship like the Psalms of Ascent. Written for very specific occasions like when David sinned with Bathsheba. They are authentic and raw and real because they reflect real people bringing their deepest longings and questions and heartaches before God.

In today's selection, David is on the run. He is being pursued by his own people. Betrayed by his own king. Unjustly accused. He has lost his position. His home. His family. One would think such circumstances would lead to bitterness and despair. Anger and frustration. Fear and uncertainty. These are honest feelings and David doesn't shy away from acknowledging them. "'O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me, lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it into pieces, with none to deliver. (Ps. 7:1-2) "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away." (Psalms 31:9-130) One can hear in his words the anguish and heartbreak. He is afraid. He doesn't know what the future holds. There are no guarantees he will escape. So he brings these feelings authentically before the Lord. He humbles himself before his God. He knows the Lord sees his afflictions.

At the same time, David prays in faith for his very real needs. He prays for God's protection. "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!" (Psalms 31:1-2)

He prays for God's guidance and wisdom. "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock." (Psalms 27:4-5)

He prays for God's comfort and provision. "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." (Psalms 34:17-19)

Most of all, David lifts his eyes above his current circumstances to praise God for who He is! God is worthy of praise even when we find ourselves in the middle of the most difficult times of our lives. "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" (Psalms 34:1-3)

One of the greatest lies the enemy tries to tell us is that our needs don't matter to God. They are too small. Too insignificant to demand His attention. The enemy tries to convince us that we are a burden to our Heavenly Father and praying authentically somehow makes us unholy or unworthy. The Psalms teach us otherwise. They are raw. They are real. They are emotional. They are bold. The Psalmist - in

this case King David - enjoys such intimate fellowship with God that he can literally tell God anything. And that is what God desires from everyone of His children.

So what is your prayer life like? Is it real? Is it authentic? Or are there things you are afraid to share with your Heavenly Father? Areas of your life you try to hide? Do you fear coming into His presence? Afraid of what He might do? What He might say? What He might think? Do you trust God's gracious character? His unconditional love? Do you believe His mercies are new every morning? Do you believe God is generous towards you? Having an inexhaustible supply of time and attention? Do you know nothing is insignificant to God? Not one need. Not one desire. Do you bring your requests humbly before Him, trusting He knows best what you need? I'd encourage you to use the Psalms as a model, a guide, for your prayers. Let the Psalmist lead you to a deeper understanding of your relationship with God.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 56, 120, 140, 141, 142

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April 11, 2023
Take Refuge in God

Readings for today: Psalms 56, 120, 140, 141, 142 (audio reading)

It's a powerful thing to read the Psalms within the context of the person's life who wrote them. David is not in a good place. He is running for his life. He is living in the wilderness. He has gathered a pretty motley crew of people around him. He can never rest. He is never safe. He is never fully secure. Anxiety and fear are constant companions. This is not his fault. It's not something he brought on himself. He is not facing the consequences of his choices. No, it's the opposite. He is being unfairly treated. Falsely accused of crimes he did not commit. All David has ever done is try to serve his king faithfully and well. He has fought for Saul. Bled for Saul. Won victory after victory for Saul. When Saul was troubled, it was David who played the harp to calm his soul. All that for what? Betrayal? And now he's being hunted like an animal.

But how does David respond? Does he play the victim? No. He turns to God. "Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?...This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:1-4, 9-11) This is what I love about David. He honestly acknowledges his fears. He doesn't try to pretend like his life is going well. He's being trampled. He's being oppressed. He's being attacked by his enemies. However, rather than respond in kind. Rather than give into his fear. Rather than play the victim and rail against the betrayal and injustice of it all, David places his trust in God. He praises God. He keeps his eyes fixed on God. What happens as a result? David is filled with incredible confidence. What can man do to me? Take my life? Take my future? Take my possessions? Big deal. I trust in God. I place my faith in God. I know God is for me so who can stand against me?

We live in a world where it is common to play the victim. We seem to be unable to handle disappointment. We avoid responsibility. We blame-shift. We get wounded. We are hurt. We feel betrayed. And we believe this gives us license to end relationships. Avoid hard conversations. Escape the Biblical call for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Someone lets us down? We cut them off. We get confronted at work? We find another job. Someone holds us accountable? We stop talking to them. A friend hurts our feelings? We move on. Such behaviors are rampant both in our society and in the church. Study after study has been done on the lack of "resiliency" in our culture. We seem to be unable to handle suffering. Pain. Heartbreak. Disappointment. We seem to be ill-equipped to have hard, honest conversations. We seem to be too scared to face our own internal demons so we project them onto those around us. Especially those we are closest to. So marriages fail. Families break apart. Friendships end. All we are doing is perpetuating a cycle of brokenness.

Would that we would follow David's example! In the face of all the hardship and suffering and injustice and pain and disappointment and betrayal...David looked to God. He took refuge in God. He cried out to God. He asked God to search his own heart so that he may not sin. Most of all, he praised God for he recognized that it is often in the "wilderness" when we are "on the run" from our enemies that God does His best work in us. Shaping. Forming. Forging our character. Making us into the people He created and called us to be.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 25-27, Psalms 17, 73

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April 12, 2023
Seeking After God

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 25-27, Psalms 17, 73 (audio reading)

The hardest thing I have ever set my mind and heart to is seeking after God. Even as a Christian. Even as a pastor. I get so easily distracted. My fears and anxieties sometimes get the best of me. My selfish and greedy desires sometimes push me off course. Even my desire to serve God can get in the way of me seeking after God. That is why it's so critically important for me to spend time with God every day and invite the Holy Spirit to search my heart. Check my motives. Reorient my desires. Restrain my passions. Refine my thoughts and attitudes. Judge my words and actions.

I love how David describes this process in one of the Psalms we read today...“Go ahead, examine me from inside out, surprise me in the middle of the night— You’ll find I’m just what I say I am. My words don’t run loose. I’m not trying to get my way in the world’s way. I’m trying to get your way, your Word’s way. I’m staying on your trail; I’m putting one foot in front of the other. I’m not giving up.” (Psalms 17:3-5 MSG) Perhaps it’s because I’m getting older or my bladder’s getting smaller but I often find myself awake in the middle of the night. I used to get frustrated by it but I’ve learned over the years to turn that time to prayer. I seek the Lord in the quietness of my home when everyone else is asleep. There’s no one clamoring for my attention. No texts or emails to return. No phone calls to make. No demands on my time. It’s just me and my Lord and that seems to be when I hear Him best. In silence and solitude. In the peace and quiet. In the stillness when the noise of my life is at it’s lowest ebb.

I think of how much pressure David faced in his life when he was on the run. I think of the stress he must have felt as he did his best to care for those who followed him and their families. I think of the fears he must have fought along the way. The temptations he faced to take matters into his own hands. How many sleepless nights did he face? And still he sought God. He took it day by day. He put one foot in front of the other. He never gave up. That sounds about right. That’s how I’ve experienced prayer over the years.

The most important thing to remember in prayer is that it is less about getting an answer and more about spending time in the presence of the One who loves you most. It’s less about getting what you want in the time that you want it and more about cultivating a deep trust in God. It’s less about the content of our prayers - though God wants to hear everything that has us concerned - and more about the consistency of coming before Him with open hands and an open heart.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 35, 54, 63, 18

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April 13, 2023
God our Helper

Readings for today: Psalms 35, 54, 63, 18 (audio reading)

One of the more disappointing moments in my seminary career came during a preaching class. We were practicing delivering children's sermons and during the course of my presentation I made the statement that I believed God protects His children. The professor stopped the class. She asked me if I truly believed what I had just said. I told her I did. She asked how in the world I could believe that or make such a statement in a world where there is so much pain and suffering. Where children are abused and bullied. Where children are diagnosed with terminal diseases like cancer. Where children often die tragically. She asked me what I thought would happen if I told a child, "God would protect them" and then something bad happened. What would happen to that little child's faith? I have to admit I didn't have much to say. The whole conversation caught me completely off guard.

I have been in ministry now for over twenty years. I have walked with families through all kinds of pain and suffering. I have seen death up close. I have witnessed tragedy. I have experienced it myself. I am not blind to the reality of abuse. I am not blind to the reality of hardship. I am not blind to the struggles so many face. Nor was David when he penned these words in the Psalms, "Oh, look! God's right here helping! God's on my side, Evil is looping back on my enemies. Don't let up! Finish them off! I'm ready now to worship, so ready. I thank you, God—you're so good. You got me out of every scrape, and I saw my enemies get it." (Psalms 54:4-7 MSG) David knew pain intimately. Suffering was a constant companion. Death visited him regularly. This was the world he lived in and yet he still looked to God for help. Still looked to God for protection and strength. Somehow, somehow David was able to see beyond the horizons of this life to the life to come. He knew God intimately. He knew God could be trusted. He knew God was good. He knew God loved His people. And so He trusted God for His vindication even if it didn't happen in this life. Now it's important to note that David knew nothing of resurrection. Heaven and the afterlife were not categories he would have thought in. But there was an instinct deep within his heart that drew him to God and caused him to trust in His great faithfulness.

Unfortunately, the horizons of our world have shrunk to the point where they only include the boundaries of this life. Even Christians have lost sight of eternity. So focused are we on what happens to us in this life, we lose sight of the bigger picture and greater glory God is working to reveal in us. We lose perspective. We want more from this world than it can actually give. We expect more from this world than it can actually deliver. And because our expectations go unmet. Because our desires go largely unrequited. Because our hopes and dreams fail. We get disappointed. Disillusioned. And we blame God. O that we would learn from David! Rather than blame God, we would look to Him for strength. Rather than rage at God, we would see Him as our helper. Rather than accuse God of not being fair, not being just, not being true to His Word; we would look beyond our circumstances, beyond our feelings, and see the eternity God is preparing for us in His Kingdom.

Psalm 18 is one of my favorites. I love the imagery of smoke and thunder and hail and God literally "bending the heavens" to come to our rescue. When things were at their worst, God was at His best. When David teetered on the brink of death and destruction, God was there to pull Him back. And yet, we didn't read any of this in 1 Samuel, did we? I don't remember earthquakes and fire and God showing up in His chariot. What I remember is David faithfully placing His trust in God. What I remember is David literally making God His refuge. What I remember is David in prayer. David seeking God's face. David worshipping God even in the midst of His struggle. And because David did

these things, his eyes pierced the veil of this world and God gave him a glimpse of what actually happened when he escaped from Saul.

In the midst of your struggles, do you seek God? When life is at its most difficult, do you lean ever deeper on Christ? The disciplines of prayer, reading Scripture, and corporate worship become lifelines as we seek God's face. Daily submission to the will of God as revealed in His Word is essential for the believer who makes God her/his help. Daily discernment between good and evil, truth and error, is essential for the believer who makes God her/his refuge. Daily self-denial and taking up our cross is essential for the believer who seeks to follow Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Samuel 28-31, 1 Chronicles 10

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April 14, 2023
Importance of Waiting on God

Readings for today: 1 Samuel 28-31, 1 Chronicles 10 (audio reading)

Introduction to 1 & 2 Chronicles

Why do we wait on God? Why is it important to wait for God to move? God to speak? God to act? What does the fruit of a life look like when one waits on God? Today, we see it played out in stark terms. On the one hand, Saul refuses to wait on God and loses his life as a result. On the other hand, David does wait on God and is given a great victory. What a contrast!

Listen again to their stories. “Saul prayed to God, but God didn’t answer—neither by dream nor by sign nor by prophet. So Saul ordered his officials, “Find me someone who can call up spirits so I may go and seek counsel from those spirits.” (1 Samuel 28:6-7 MSG) This isn’t the first time Saul has gotten impatient. In fact, impatience seems to be the theme of his life. He will only wait for God so long. He will only wait for God while it’s convenient. He will only wait for God as long as he gets the answer he’s looking for. This is why the kingdom has been torn from his grasp. He didn’t wait for God but made an unlawful sacrifice. He didn’t obey God when He gave him the victory over his enemies. Over and over again, Saul compromises and now it will cost him his life, the life of his sons, and lives of many of those who followed him. “The Philistines made war on Israel. The men of Israel were in full retreat from the Philistines, falling left and right, wounded on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines caught up with Saul and his sons. They killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua, Saul’s sons. The battle was hot and heavy around Saul. The archers got his range and wounded him badly. Saul said to his weapon bearer, “Draw your sword and put me out of my misery, lest these pagan pigs come and make a game out of killing me.” But his weapon bearer wouldn’t do it. He was terrified. So Saul took the sword himself and fell on it. When the weapon bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. So Saul, his three sons, and his weapon bearer—the men closest to him—died together that day.” (1 Samuel 31:1-6 MSG)

David, on the other hand, patiently waited on God. He trusted God for His provision and protection. Believed God would prove faithful no matter what. Think of the challenge David faces in our reading today. His city has been raided and destroyed. His family and the families of those he loves have been captured and perhaps killed. He could have given into fear and the infighting among his own men. David’s life hangs on the edge here and still he waits on God. “David and his men burst out in loud wails—wept and wept until they were exhausted with weeping. David’s two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail widow of Nabal of Carmel, had been taken prisoner along with the rest. And suddenly David was in even worse trouble. There was talk among the men, bitter over the loss of their families, of stoning him. David strengthened himself with trust in his God. He ordered Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, “Bring me the Ephod so I can consult God.” Abiathar brought it to David. Then David prayed to God, “Shall I go after these raiders? Can I catch them?” The answer came, “Go after them! Yes, you’ll catch them! Yes, you’ll make the rescue!” (1 Samuel 30:6-8 MSG) What a powerful testimony! What a faithful witness! Is it any wonder David’s men were so inspired by his leadership? So willing to follow him and lay their lives down for him? They knew David’s heart. They could see David’s faith. They trusted David because he trusted God.

This is the key to godly leadership. The key to godly living. Wait on God. Wait for Him to speak. Wait for Him to act. Wait for Him to show you the way. Resist the temptation to take matters into your own hands. Resist the temptation to place conditions on God. Resist the temptation to try to force God’s

hand or make Him work according to your timeline. Don't limit God! Instead, open your heart and your mind and your hands to the wonders He will do in you and through you. After all, He has promised to do far more than you can ever ask or imagine!

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 121, 123-125, 128-130

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April 15, 2023
True Confidence

Readings for today: Psalms 121, 123-125, 128-130 (audio reading)

Perhaps it's because I'm preparing to kick off a new series on Sunday on the "Spirit-filled" life but I loved reading these Psalms today. I love the confidence the Psalmist expresses in God. I love that the Psalmist looks to God for his strength and help and hope in time of need. I love that the Psalmist trusts God to answer his prayers and come to his side no matter how dark the circumstances. I find myself reciting his words over and over again.

"I look up to the mountains; does my strength come from mountains? No, my strength comes from God, who made heaven, and earth, and mountains." (Psalms 121:1-2 MSG)

"I look to you, heaven-dwelling God, look up to you for help. Like servants, alert to their master's commands, like a maiden attending her lady, We're watching and waiting, holding our breath, awaiting your word of mercy. " (Psalms 123:1-3 MSG)

"God's strong name is our help, the same God who made heaven and earth." (Psalms 124:8 MSG)

"Those who trust in God are like Zion Mountain: Nothing can move it, a rock-solid mountain you can always depend on. Mountains encircle Jerusalem, and God encircles his people— always has and always will." (Psalms 125:1-2 MSG)

"All you who fear God, how blessed you are! how happily you walk on his smooth straight road! You worked hard and deserve all you've got coming. Enjoy the blessing! Soak in the goodness!" (Psalms 128:1-2 MSG)

"O Israel, wait and watch for God— with God's arrival comes love, with God's arrival comes generous redemption. No doubt about it—he'll redeem Israel, buy back Israel from captivity to sin." (Psalms 130:7-8 MSG)

When the Risen Christ ascended bodily into heaven, He left us a precious gift. The gift of the Holy Spirit. And with that gift comes divine power and authority. Power to overcome any adversity the evil one might bring your way. Authority to command even the demons to flee. It is the power to advance His Kingdom here on earth. The power to preach the gospel to all who do not yet believe. The power to be His witnesses - literally, his "martyrs" - in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

What does this mean for us? It means He has given us power to serve as His ambassadors wherever we find ourselves today. At work. At home. In our neighborhoods or schools. On vacation or enjoying retirement. Wherever you are, God has put you there. Wherever you are going, God has sent you there. He has given you His power and authority to accomplish all the work He has for you in that place. Believe this as the Psalmist did! Look to Him as the Psalmist did! Lift your eyes above your circumstances! Above your struggles! Above your challenges! Above your heartaches and heartbreaks! Trust in His grace, love, and power!

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 17, 2023
Raw Material

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 1-4 (audio reading)

Human beings are the raw material God has to work with to bring about His will. Perhaps nothing illustrates that truth more than today's reading. Political intrigue. Civil war. Assassinations. Israel was in chaos as different parties jockeyed for influence and power. An Amalekite lies about killing Saul in order to curry favor with David and ends up being executed. Abner tries to preserve Saul's legacy by marshaling Israel on Ish-Bosheth's behalf only to split with his master over a perceived offense. Joab and his brothers have it out for Abner, perhaps seeing him as a potential rival for position and power in the new kingdom. The sons of Rimmon take matters into their own hands to bring about the end of the civil war and gain favor with David only to suffer the same result as the Amalekite who killed Saul. It's a brutally honest account of the politics of the day and the only silver lining is that God is using even this sinful raw material to fashion His will for His people.

The same is true today. Our politics aren't much different. Human beings haven't made much progress. The intrigue and jockeying for power and influence and position continues. The civil war between Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and progressives is as brutal and hateful as it has ever been. Thankfully, mass violence has yet to break out in our country but we certainly see it in different parts of the world. Last evening, I was supposed to board a plane for Ethiopia. We were heading to the northern region to a city called Dessie to train church planters but violent protests broke out as one particular tribe pushes back against the decisions of the national government. Two aid workers were killed. All US State Department personnel were evacuated from the area as fears of a resumption of hostilities in the area grows. Our only hope is that the same God who was at work in ancient Israel bringing about His will through the sinful choices of human beings is still at work in our world today.

I love the line from Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28 ESV) All things. The good. The bad. The ugliness of life. God uses it all according to His sovereign power and wisdom to bring about His will for you, for me, for the world in which we live. No matter what circumstances you find yourself in. No matter what choices you made that brought you to this place. No matter what forces you find arrayed against you. No matter what lies in your control or outside your control. Trust that God is taking the raw material of your life to make you more and more into the image of His Son and prepare you to spend eternity with Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 6, 9, 10, 14, 16, 21

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April 18, 2023
Personal God

Readings for today: Psalms 6, 9, 10, 14, 16, 21 (audio reading)

One of the great dangers of studying theology is that God often becomes less of a Person and more of a philosophical construct. Take, for example, the theological idea that God is “impassible.” The doctrine of impassibility states that God is without “feelings or emotions” and that it’s impossible for Him to suffer. This is an idea based more in Greek philosophy than Biblical theology as God refers to Himself throughout the Scriptures as having emotions. In fact, one of His most enduring traits is His compassion which literally means “to suffer with.” If the Bible is God’s supreme and unique and authoritative revelation of Himself then one cannot help but conclude that God is “passible” and capable of feelings, emotions, and yes, even suffering.

At the same time, we know God is the “same yesterday, today, and forever” and that there is no “shadow or turning with Him.” He is immovable and unchanging so His emotions do not “force” Him into actions He has not already freely embraced. Suffering is not something enacted upon God from the outside. He is not at the mercy of anything in this world. He is not a victim nor is He helpless. He is not driven by His feelings. He is not overcome by His emotions. They do not enact a change in His being. He remains perfect in every way and He has freely chosen to be a personal God. A God engaged in intimate relationship with human beings. A God who loves and draws near the broken-hearted and crushed in spirit and shares in their pain. A God who binds Himself in everlasting covenant to His people.

This is why the Psalmist is so confident and so honest when he prays to God. He knows God personally. He knows God intimately. He knows God sees his broken condition. He knows God hears his cries. He knows God answers his prayers. This is why he thanks God in advance for all the wonderful things He has done and will do. He knows God is a refuge for those who are in trouble. A stronghold for those who are weak. A sanctuary for those in desperate need. He knows God opposes the proud and lifts up the humble. He knows God judges the unrighteous and fights against the wicked. He knows God acts within human history to save His people. Deliver them out of trouble. He knows God is his strength which is why he sings a new song.

The Psalms keep us from falling into the heresy of deism. The heresy of keeping God at a distance. The heresy of treating Him like an abstract idea. God has revealed Himself fully in the Person of Jesus Christ. He left heaven and came to earth to introduce Himself to us. He wanted us to see Him face to face. Hear His voice. Feel His touch. God refused to remain distant. He refused to keep Himself apart. He refused to let any walls or barriers stand in the way of a relationship with us. Re-read the Psalms for today and let them lead you to a deeper understanding of the relationship you have with God through Jesus Christ.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 1-2, Psalms 43-44

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April 19, 2023
Family Systems

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 1-2, Psalms 43-44 (audio reading)

The genogram is a tool that has become very popular in recent years. Invented by American psychiatrist Murray Bowen in the 1970's, it is designed to illuminate hereditary family patterns that are passed down to each generation. Those patterns can be positive or negative but they are often extremely helpful for individual who want to grow in their self-understanding as to why they think and feel and react the way they do. Families are emotional systems in which each individual plays a particular role. The more one understands the role they are called to play and why they are called to play it, the more they can help the system move towards greater health and wholeness. The less one understands about the role they play, the more apt they are to perpetuate it.

One can only imagine what might be revealed if we did a genogram of the first two chapters of 1 Chronicles! If you've been tracking with us through the Bible in a Year this year, you know the stories. They're not always pretty. It's one of the things I appreciate most about the Bible. It never seeks to white-wash any of the Old Testament saints. Their sinful tendencies are put on full display for all to see. Deception. Abuse. Violence. Suffering. Pain. Abandonment. Polygamy. Incest. It's all right there in the family tree. And yet God remains faithful. He chooses this particular people, despite their deep brokenness, to be His very own. They will bear the weight His glory. They will be entrusted with His Word. They will inherit the promises. They will be His covenant partners as He seeks to make Himself known to the world.

The same holds true for us today. I love how the Apostle Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "For we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." We are all jars of clay. Cracked and chipped in many places by the things we've experienced in this world. Into our hearts, God has deposited the treasure of the gospel and His desire is to make Himself known in us and through us despite our deep brokenness. It is through the cracks of our lives that God's light shines. It is in the mess of our lives that God meets us. He is not afraid to call His own. He is not afraid to adopt us as His sons and daughters. He is not afraid to make us covenant partners in the great work He is doing to reach the world with His message of grace, hope, and love.

All of us are products of the family system that produced us. All of us are shaped - good, bad, and otherwise - by the interactions we have with the generations who've gone before us and the ones who come after us. All of us have a role to play in our family system and the more we allow Christ to transform us in that role, the more we can leverage it to help our family system become a greater reflection of the gospel.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 49, 84, 85, 87

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April 20, 2023
Spiritual Renewal

Readings for today: [Psalms 49, 84, 85, 87](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

If you are like me, you long for the spiritual renewal of our country. The spiritual renewal of every single person in our country. You long for that spiritual renewal to spill beyond the borders into the nations around us. You long for the United States to live up to the calling to be a “city on a hill” and a “light to the world.” At the same time, if you are like me, while you celebrate the many ways we have succeeded in this venture over the centuries, you are also deeply aware of how far we have fallen short. You know the many ways we have failed throughout our history and you grieve over the challenges we are facing even now as a country. This is why I love these words from the Psalmist so much...

“I can’t wait to hear what he’ll say. God’s about to pronounce his people well, The holy people he loves so much, so they’ll never again live like fools. See how close his salvation is to those who fear him? Our country is home base for Glory! Love and Truth meet in the street, Right Living and Whole Living embrace and kiss! Truth sprouts green from the ground, Right Living pours down from the skies! Oh yes! God gives Goodness and Beauty; our land responds with Bounty and Blessing. Right Living strides out before him, and clears a path for his passage.” (Psalms 85:8-13 MSG)

You see, the nation of Israel faced some of the same challenges we face today. In fact, every nation throughout history has faced similar challenges. What begins with a glorious vision soon fades as the pressures of this world begin to force their way in on us. It doesn’t seem to matter whether one is talking about a Christian vision or not. Human society simply has this innate tendency to move from order to chaos. From unity to disunity. From passion to distraction. Israel started out so well under the leadership of David and Solomon though both had their issues but soon declined under a series of kings and rulers who sought their own well-being over that of the people and that of the Lord. However, all was not lost as revival did break out when certain kings returned to the Lord and sought Him with their whole hearts, minds, and strength. When that happened, the land was given rest from war. Blessings flowed. The people rejoiced. Righteousness and justice were restored. Love and truth reigned.

No matter how dark things get, friends, there is always hope. Jesus is the light of the world whom the darkness cannot overcome. If we seek His face and walk in His love and cling to His truth, we will find blessing and joy. If we fight for righteousness and advocate for justice and walk in His ways, we will find goodness and beauty. This is how God designed human life to respond and it is what we were truly made for so do not grow weary in your labor for the Lord! Know He fighting for you and with you to bring salvation to all who would call on His name and renewal to any nation that would humble itself before Him.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 3-5

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April 21, 2023
The Prayer of Jabez

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 3-5](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Almost twenty years ago, a best-selling book was published on the prayer offered by a rather obscure Old Testament figure named Jabez. He shows up in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 but no specific mention is made of how he fits into the family tree of Judah. He is described as a man of honor who was birthed in pain by his mother and who prayed a prayer God answered. That's it. Two verses total. Not much to go on. Not much to draw any conclusions from and yet the book written about him became an instant best-seller, selling millions of copies, launching an entire cottage industry.

Why the popularity? I think it has to do with the fact that Jabez' prayer fits the prevailing self-centered, "health and wealth" theology of so many Americans, Christian or not. "Jabez was a better man than his brothers, a man of honor. His mother had named him Jabez (Oh, the pain!), saying, "A painful birth! I bore him in great pain!" Jabez prayed to the God of Israel: "Bless me, O bless me! Give me land, large tracts of land. And provide your personal protection—don't let evil hurt me." God gave him what he asked." (1 Chronicles 4:9-10 MSG) Fundamentally, we believe we are worthy of God's blessing. Fundamentally, we believe we have earned the right to have our territory expanded. Fundamentally, we believe we should never experience evil or pain or suffering. Fundamentally, we believe life is about us and our comfort and the prayer of Jabez only reinforces this idea.

I was in seminary when the book came out and I remember church after church teaching on it. All of kinds of miracles were attributed to this prayer. Entire congregations would commit to praying this prayer for thirty, sixty, or ninety days and then report back on the ways God answered their prayers. Preachers, even from evangelical and mainline church contexts, would preach entire sermon series on this prayer and encourage people to memorize it and pray it daily. It seemed utterly crazy to me. After all, this was a verse ripped completely out of it's Old Testament context. It comes from a figure in the Old Testament we know almost nothing about. If we're going to memorize one prayer from the Bible and pray it fervently and daily, shouldn't it be the Lord's Prayer?

This highlights a danger for us as we read through the Scriptures. The Bible is not a magic book. It is not a book full of mantras that we can pray to get what we want. The Bible is not a self-help book meant to teach us how to have a better life. The Bible has one primary purpose and that is to reveal the character and nature of God. It tells the story of God's mission to reach His people with the gospel. As one rabbi famously put it, "The Bible is not the story of humanity's search for God but God's search for humanity." God is on a rescue mission to deliver us from the powers of sin and death and evil. His goals are far greater than material blessings or expanding our territory or giving us more influence in this world. He wants to save a people for Himself. He is growing His family through the conversion of women and men. He is building His Kingdom here on earth through His church made up of Jews and Gentiles together. This is His plan and this is what should be the focus of our prayers.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 6, Psalms 36, 39, 77, 78

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April 22, 2023
The Overwhelming Love of God

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 6, Psalms 36, 39, 77, 78 (audio reading)

I love how Eugene Peterson translates Psalm 36 in his paraphrased version of the Bible called The Message. “God’s love is meteoric, his loyalty astronomic, His purpose titanic, his verdicts oceanic. Yet in his largeness nothing gets lost; Not a man, not a mouse, slips through the cracks. How exquisite your love, O God! How eager we are to run under your wings, To eat our fill at the banquet you spread as you fill our tankards with Eden spring water. You’re a fountain of cascading light, and you open our eyes to light.” (Psalms 36:5-9 MSG) Isn’t that great? There’s just nothing like the love of God. We sing about it. We pray over it. We rest in it. We preach on it. We trust in it. It is literally the most powerful, life-transforming force in the universe.

Love is perhaps the most abused word in the English language. We throw it around all the time. Use it describe our desire for mundane things like different foods or activities or material possessions. We definitely use it to describe our connection to people as well but even there it gets a bit confused. When some people use the word “love”, they are speaking of something overtly sexual in nature. When others use the word “love”, they are talking more about friendship or companionship. Still others use the word “love” to describe an emotion so deep, it drives us to make huge sacrifices even to the point of laying down our lives. It is this last description of “love” that best fits the love God demonstrates for us on the cross. A love that would not let us go. A love that will not let us down. A love that never fails for it rests on a Savior who never fails.

Surely, there is nothing greater than the love of Christ for lost sinners like you and me? Nothing more amazing than His grace? Nothing as deep as His compassion? If you want to measure the width of the love of God, look to the outstretched hands of Jesus. If you want to measure the heights of the love of God, look to Jesus as He’s lifted up on the cross. If you want to measure the depth and the breadth of the love of Jesus, consider what He did in offering His perfect life to make atonement for the sins of the world. Reflect on the price He paid to secure our salvation. Consider the fact that God did not spare His own Son but sent Him to be a sacrifice for our sins. This is the love of God and it is indeed “meteoric”, “astronomic”, “titanic”, and “oceanic.”

Readings for tomorrow: None

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April 24, 2023
Spiritual Crisis

Readings for today: Psalms 81, 88, 92-93 (audio reading)

Spiritual crisis is real. The consistent witness of God's people throughout history testifies to the fact that there will be seasons when God seems so distant. When our lives seem so dark. When the light of Christ is hard to find. When the comfort of Christ seems long in coming. During such seasons, we feel overwhelmed by fear. Doubt. The cares and worries of this world press in on us. We feel trapped. Alone. Unable to be consoled.

St. John of the Cross, a 16th century Spanish Christian, famously coined the term, "The Dark Night of the Soul." It refers to particular seasons in the Christian life where we feel stripped of God's presence. It's not true, of course. God is still very much present in our lives but we do not feel Him. We do not experience Him. We do not sense His tender mercies and affections. During such seasons, we feel a void. An absence. And it causes us to wrestle on a deep, foundational level with our faith. As I said above, these experiences are not unusual. St. John of the Cross. St. Paul of the Cross. Mother Theresa. All testify to similar experiences, though their "dark nights" lasted decades. The author of Psalm 88 was clearly familiar with his own dark night. "God, you're my last chance of the day. I spend the night on my knees before you. Put me on your salvation agenda; take notes on the trouble I'm in. I've had my fill of trouble; I'm camped on the edge of hell. I'm written off as a lost cause, one more statistic, a hopeless case. Abandoned as already dead, one more body in a stack of corpses, And not so much as a gravestone— I'm a black hole in oblivion. You've dropped me into a bottomless pit, sunk me in a pitch-black abyss. I'm battered senseless by your rage, relentlessly pounded by your waves of anger. You turned my friends against me, made me horrible to them. I'm caught in a maze and can't find my way out, blinded by tears of pain and frustration. I call to you, God; all day I call. I wring my hands, I plead for help. Are the dead a live audience for your miracles? Do ghosts ever join the choirs that praise you? Does your love make any difference in a graveyard? Is your faithful presence noticed in the corridors of hell? Are your marvelous wonders ever seen in the dark, your righteous ways noticed in the Land of No Memory? I'm standing my ground, God, shouting for help, at my prayers every morning, on my knees each daybreak. Why, God, do you turn a deaf ear? Why do you make yourself scarce? For as long as I remember I've been hurting; I've taken the worst you can hand out, and I've had it. Your wildfire anger has blazed through my life; I'm bleeding, black-and-blue. You've attacked me fiercely from every side, raining down blows till I'm nearly dead. You made lover and neighbor alike dump me; the only friend I have left is Darkness." (Psalms 88:1-18 MSG) It's a depressing Psalm. One of the few with no resolution. No final ascription of praise. The psalmist seemingly feels God's absence on a visceral level and is left all alone in darkness.

So why does God allow the dark night of the soul? Why does God not rescue us from the depths of our spiritual crises? What are such experiences seemingly so common and even necessary for the Christian? I believe it is how we learn the meaning of true faith. True faith must move from the head to the heart to the gut. To the depths of our being. It must become the fundamental reality of our existence. It must transcend what we think. It must transcend what we feel. It has to come from a place so deep within us that it can never be overcome.

Mother Theresa endured her "dark night" from 1948 until her death in 1997. She once wrote, "Where is my faith? Even deep down ... there is nothing but emptiness and darkness ... If there be God—please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul." Some have suggested she lost her faith.

Not true! In fact, her suffering was very much like that of Jesus on the cross who cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In the end, Mother Theresa hoped her personal letters would be destroyed lest “people think more of me and less of Jesus.”

There’s no way to know the answer to such deep questions unless one is willing to walk through the valley of the shadow of death to the other side. Thankfully, at the end of my own dark roads, I found God waiting for me there. I found my faith renewed and strengthened in a way I could never have imagined. And I do not harbor any illusions that somehow my journey is at its end or that I won’t have to walk yet another dark road in the course of my life. What I do know is that God has driven my faith deep into my gut. Deep into the bedrock of my being. And though it can be shaken, it can never be destroyed because God is more real than my circumstances. God is more real than my feelings. God is more real than my thoughts. God is more real than my doubts. God is more real than my fears. God is the fundamental reality of my life and I am thankful.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 7-9

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April 25, 2023
Biblical Feminism

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 7-9 (audio reading)

Today's reading brings us to the end of the genealogies of Israel. Whew! These are some of the harder sections of Scripture to get through simply because they feel so remote. After all, we don't feel a connection to these people or these particular tribes or these particular families. Sure, we acknowledge they are our spiritual mothers and fathers but there's very little information about most of these names so it's hard to feel any kind of tie. However, a careful reading reminds us that behind every name is a story. And behind every story is a powerful testimony of God's faithfulness.

For example, consider the case of Zelophehad's daughters. "The sons of Manasseh: Asriel, whom his Aramean concubine bore; she bore Machir the father of Gilead. And Machir took a wife for Huppim and for Shuppim. The name of his sister was Maacah. And the name of the second was Zelophehad, and Zelophehad had daughters." (1 Chronicles 7:14-15) Their story is told in Numbers 27 right in the middle of another genealogical section of the Bible when Moses was dividing up the inheritance of the land. It's a remarkable testimony and worth recapping again.

Five women appear before the gathered leadership of Israel at the Tabernacle to present one of the earliest recorded lawsuits in history. Their claim? Their father died without a male heir which means his inheritance is now in jeopardy. He was not part of the rebellion of Korah so they have legitimate standing to bring his case before the Lord. And they ask Moses to grant them their father's property rights so they can preserve the family line.

I cannot imagine the courage this course of action must have taken. Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah (Zelophehad's daughters) knew very well that women did not have any rights in the ancient near east. Not in Israel and certainly not in the nations that surrounded them. Women were considered property in that time. Not even counted as human beings. At the death of their father or brothers or husbands, they were not entitled to any inheritance and were often left destitute. Fast forward a few centuries and we see this scene play itself out in the book of Ruth where Naomi loses not only her husband but also her two sons, leaving her to fend for herself.

So imagine you are one of these five women. Raised to believe you have no rights. Your primary value is to bear sons to your future husband so his family line can be preserved. Now imagine making the decision to approach Moses and the gathered leadership of Israel in front of the Tabernacle itself to present your case. You know what you are about to do has never been done. You know what you are about to ask for has never happened before. You know there's a good chance your petition will fail but you courageously step forward anyway. You argue persuasively for the preservation of your father's inheritance and you make the audacious claim to be counted among your father's brothers.

I would have loved to see the look on Moses' face. Was it shock? Confusion? Did he smile at the women's boldness? There is no indication in the text one way or another. What we do know is Moses recuses himself and takes their petition to the Lord. This, in itself, is a strong affirmation of the women. And then there is the response from God. I have to believe their courage brought a smile to His face and He issues a new law for Israel. From this point forward, "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter." (Numbers 27:8) A statute still used today as legal precedent by the American Bar Association.

The Bible is a history of God's interactions with many different human cultures. Human culture, by definition, is always corrupt and unjust. Thankfully, God is at work constantly bending the arc of human history towards justice. Towards righteousness. Here is a clear case where God honors the rights of women, granting them a unique status when compared to other ancient near east societies. There is a direct line between the daughters of Zelophehad and Deborah who served as judge and spiritual leader for all of Israel. A direct line between the daughters of Zelophehad and the female disciples who gathered round Jesus and remained faithful to Him even to the end when all the other male disciples had long since fled. A direct line between the daughters of Zelophehad and the women Paul affirms like Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia who was "excellent among the apostles." God is still doing this work today as women continue to be affirmed as strong and gifted leaders across all sectors of human society.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 5:1-10, 1 Chronicles 11-12, Psalms 133

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April 26, 2023
Cultural History

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 5:1-10, 1 Chronicles 11-12, Psalms 133 (audio reading)

The key verse in today's reading is 1 Chronicles 9:1, "So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith." Why are all these names important? Why are the generations laid down with such detail and specificity? Why record Israel according to their respective tribes? What's at stake here? Identity. Connection. History. Israel took their history seriously. Even after they were carted off to exile in Babylon and were faced with the temptation to intermarry and lose their connection to their past, Israel remained faithful. They knew God had set apart the Levites to serve Him as priests. So the Levites remained set apart as priests even in exile. They knew God had given authority to the tribe of Judah to reign and to rule. So the tribe of Judah continued to serve as princes and leaders for God's people. They knew David and Samuel had set apart certain families as gatekeepers, guardians of the Lord's treasury, etc. So they made sure these families retained those roles. And when Israel finally did return from exile, you see the descendents of these great men and women re-connecting to their glorious past.

Most of us have never experienced exile. Most of us have not had our cultural identities wiped out. We've not had our history erased. We've not had our connection to our ancestors severed. At the same time, many among us have had this terrible and tragic experience. I think of the Native American men and women I have known. Their people lived on this continent for hundreds of years before the arrival of the first European explorers. They lost their land. They were forcibly relocated. They were forced to forgo the key rituals and give up the key rhythms that connected them to their history and their tribal identity. Their stories are terrible and heartbreaking. I think of the African-American men and women I have known. Their ancestors brought over on slave ships across the Atlantic. Their connection to their land severed. Their connection to their history erased. Their connection to their past lost. They were given new names. They were forced to take on new identities. They suffered in slavery for hundreds of years including economic slavery after officially being emancipated during the Civil War. Their stories are terrible and heartbreaking.

It's vital for those of us who have not suffered at the scale of others to humble ourselves and listen to those who have endured such pain and loss. It is important for us to become advocates for them as they seek to recover their cultural identity. We must become allies with them in their fight to re-connect to their cultural past. We must pluck up the courage to face the difficult and complex issues that often arise as a result.

I certainly don't pretend to have all the answers. I know the way forward is difficult. But I have to believe as we work for the good of one another. As we celebrate the history and culture and diversity God has created among human beings on this planet. As we help each other re-connect to something deeper. A deeper identity. A deeper story. A deeper truth. I have to believe God will reveal Himself in that process in a powerful way because this "genealogical impulse" exists within all of us. In a very real sense, Israel's story is our story for all of us can ultimately trace our lineage back to the same common source. Adam and Eve. The first man. The first woman. Made in the image of God by the hand of God for the glory of God. This is truly our heritage.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 5:11-25, 6, 1 Chronicles 13-16

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April 27, 2023
The Worship God Demands

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 5:11-25, 6, 1 Chronicles 13-16 (audio reading)

What is true worship? Is it a feeling? A style? An experience? How do we know if we've engaged in true worship? Is it because we leave feeling inspired? The preacher's message warmed our hearts? We've eaten the bread and drunk of the cup? The music for the morning matched our musical tastes? What are the hallmarks of true worship? Authenticity? Sincerity? We're able to identify something we get out of it?

Sadly, all of the above are true. Worship in 21st century North America has turned largely inward. It is focused, evaluated, planned, produced for the human experience. It caters to the preferences and tastes of the worshipper. It is designed primarily to make the human being feel inspired, motivated, and connected. This "inward turn" is as true for the small church as it is for the mega-church and every church in between. And it's why we see so many American Christians bounce from church to church to church over the course of their lives. Long gone are the days when one would invest their entire lives into one community come what may. Long gone are the days when American Christians would heed the biblical command to actually practice forgiveness and reconciliation when relationships get hard. Long gone are the days when American Christians would die to self, laying aside the consumer tendencies of taste. Preference. Personal favorites. As a result, long gone are the days when the church produced robust, courageous, bold, self-sacrificing disciples of Jesus who would give their lives American for the sake of the gospel and the Kingdom of God in this world. Not that it never happens, it just is more than exception rather than the rule.

So what is true worship? It is the worship God both deserves and demands. Believe it or not, God cares deeply how He is worshipped. In 1 Chronicles 13, we see what happens when God's people - with sincere and authentic devotion in their hearts - fail to worship God in the way He commands. The people have gathered. They're excited to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. They call the priests. They call the Levites. They plan a huge celebration. The whole nation is present to witness this incredible moment. They build a new cart to carry the ark in the procession. David and all of Israel are celebrating, singing, dancing before the Lord with all their might. But then an ox stumbles. Uzzah, seeking to protect the ark, puts out his hand to keep it steady. The Lord strikes him down. One can imagine the shock of the crowd. In an instant, all the music and dancing and celebration stops. Silence. Long, prolonged, awkward silence as the people come to grips with what's just happened. David is angry. He pouts for three months, refusing to come to grips with the fact that he himself is somewhat responsible for what happened. His decision to do what was convenient (build a cart to carry the ark) rather than what God demanded (Levites carry the ark on their own shoulders) is ultimately what cost Uzzah his life. Fast forward to 1 Chronicles 15. A different picture emerges. David is ready. He is humble. He submits to God's will. He decrees that "no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him forever." (1 Chron. 15:2) Once again, the celebration commences. Singing. Dancing. Music. Right sacrifices. God is pleased. God accepts the worship David offers because it is singularly focused on honoring God.

What does true worship look like in our context today? Obviously, none of us know where the Ark of the Covenant resides. (Except Indiana Jones, of course!) The ceremonial laws that governed Old Testament worship have been fulfilled in Christ. Does this set us free then to worship as we choose? To do what feels good? To set the needs of the worshipper above the clear, biblical command to worship God and Him alone?

Pastors/worship leaders...is the primary thrust of your worship planning to bring honor and glory to God? To set Him high and lifted up? Or is it to meet the needs of your people? When you evaluate worship, do you measure it in terms of attendance and the emotional engagement of God's people or the clarity of the gospel message preached through music, Word, and Sacrament and the experience of God through the Holy Spirit?

People of God...is your primary goal in worship to get something out of it? To walk away feeling inspired, emotionally uplifted? Do you evaluate your own experience based on whether you liked the songs that were sung or felt moved by the experience? Do you evaluate the message based on its applicability to your own life?

Please hear me clearly...I am not saying these things are all bad or even that they should be divorced from our worship experience. I am simply saying they are secondary to our primary duty in worship which is to worship God as He both deserves and demands. This, in fact, is the chief end of our existence.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 15, 23-25, 47

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April 28, 2023

Peace

Readings for today: Psalms 15, 23-25, 47 (audio reading)

I am a “one” on the Enneagram. A perfectionist whose primal fears are corruption, deceit, imbalance, and immorality. These fears lead to stress which creates anxiety. When I am anxious, I tend to be resentful, even angry. My buttons get pushed and I literally can feel my blood begin to boil inside. In the face of these feelings, my temptation is to deny them. Play the hypocrite. Not acknowledge my anger because it is not morally good and therefore must be rejected. This results in continual self-recrimination. The critical voices in my head rise to a cacophony of shame and condemnation as I fail to live up to my own high ideals. It’s frankly exhausting.

“God, who gets invited to dinner at your place? How do we get on your guest list? Walk straight, act right, tell the truth.” (Psalms 15:1-2 MSG)

“Who can climb Mount God? Who can scale the holy north-face? Only the clean-handed, only the pure-hearted; Men who won’t cheat, women who won’t seduce.” (Psalms 24:3-4 MSG)

“Keep watch over me and keep me out of trouble; Don’t let me down when I run to you. Use all your skill to put me together; I wait to see your finished product.” (Psalms 25:20-21 MSG)

This stuff is music to my ears. It speaks my love language. Goodness. Righteousness. Moral uprightness. Holy perfection. All good things. All important things. And yet, none of these things actually lead me to health. They do not assuage my anxiety. They only serve to feed my fears. They throw me back on my own strength. My own effort. Which I already know is never enough. So what’s a “one” on the Enneagram to do? Continue playing the hypocrite? Continuing pretending he or she has it all together? Continue presenting an image to the world that is good and upright and moral and perfect?

By no means! The “one” must instead cling to message of Psalm 23. One of my favorites, by the way. “God, my shepherd! I don’t need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.” (Psalms 23:1-3 MSG) Peace comes as I trust in the Lord. Serenity comes as my soul rests in Him. All my stress. All my anxieties. All my fears fade away when I let the Lord be my shepherd. He takes care of all my wants. He makes me lie down and rest in green pastures, beside still waters. These words are balm to my soul.

This morning when I woke, I found my heart reset to its default position. (This happens pretty much every morning by the way!) As soon as I opened my eyes, the voices in my head start clamoring for attention. “Get up! You have so much to do! So much to accomplish! You’re already behind! You’re already letting people down! You’re already failing!” As I said above, my temptation is to argue. To fight. To try to silence those voices through my own Herculean efforts. But God charts a different path for me. The path of grace. And His Words became my words as I pray, “My head is high, God, held high; I’m looking to you, God; No hangdog skulking for me...He gives the rejects his hand, And leads them step-by-step. From now on every road you travel Will take you to God... Follow the Covenant signs; Read the charted directions...God-friendship is for God-worshippers; They are the ones he confides in...Keep watch over me and keep me out of trouble; Don’t let me down when I run to you.” (Psalms 25:1-2, 9-10, 14, 20 MSG) As God’s voice fills my head and heart, I find the other voices

retreating into the background. Yes, they are still there but it's more of a murmur than a roar and I can now go about my day filled with God's peace.

How does God speak to you? To your basic fears? Primal drives? Baseline desires? How does He lead you to health and wholeness and healing and peace?

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 89, 96, 100-101, 107

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April 29, 2023
The Greatness of God

Readings for today: Psalms 89, 96, 100-101, 107 (audio reading)

Our God is far too small. The human mind is simply too finite to fully comprehend the height and depth and breadth of His majesty and glory and splendor. His wisdom is higher than our wisdom. His ways are higher than our ways. His power is limitless. His knowledge unsearchable. His love unconditional. His grace knows no ends. There is no boundaries to God. No barriers. Nothing He cannot do. Nothing He cannot accomplish. Nothing stands outside His will. Nothing opposes Him. Nothing threatens Him. Nothing can move Him. “God! Let the cosmos praise your wonderful ways, the choir of holy angels sing anthems to your faithful ways! Search high and low, scan skies and land, you’ll find nothing and no one quite like God. The holy angels are in awe before him; he looms immense and august over everyone around him.” (Psalms 89:5-6 MSG)

Our God is far too small. In an effort to understand Him, we tend to cut Him down to our size. Reduce Him to a much more manageable state. We question His goodness. We question His omnipotence. We question His wisdom. Rather than stand on the truth that we are made in God’s image, we reverse engineer the process. We remake God in our image to our everlasting regret. For the god we “make” is an idol. Weak. Empty. Imperfect. A god who can do nothing, see nothing, accomplish nothing. A god who cannot be trusted or relied upon in the most difficult of circumstances. A god who is helpless in the face of our suffering. Recently, a progressive friend of mine rehashed an old argument on suffering. She wrote, “We have three options in the face of real suffering. 1) God is not good. 2) God is not loving. 3) God is not all-powerful.” Her argument is that surely a good and loving and all-powerful God would not allow all the suffering in the world therefore we must question either His goodness, His love, or His power. But this is a false premise. This is an argument made without all the facts. We see from such a limited perspective. Her god is too small.

Consider for a moment what my friend is really asking. If God had chosen to remove suffering and pain from the world at the beginning of time. If, even after Adam and Eve fell into disobedience, God would not allow human beings to suffer the consequences of the choices they make. What would that do to free will? What would that do to human agency? What would that do to human choices? It would destroy them. We would never grow into maturity. Never become the partners God created us to be. And even more fundamentally, it wrecks the whole purpose of the Cross. If suffering and pain is always evil and always to be avoided and always wrong, then the suffering and pain and death of Jesus also falls into that category.

Our God is far too small. And that’s we need to immerse ourselves in God’s Word. God’s Word declares clearly the goodness and love and power of God. “God-of-the-Angel-Armies, who is like you, powerful and faithful from every angle? You put the arrogant ocean in its place and calm its waves when they turn unruly. You gave that old hag Egypt the back of your hand, you brushed off your enemies with a flick of your wrist. You own the cosmos—you made everything in it, everything from atom to archangel. You positioned the North and South Poles; the mountains Tabor and Hermon sing duets to you. With your well-muscl’d arm and your grip of steel— nobody messes with you! The Right and Justice are the roots of your rule; Love and Truth are its fruits. Blessed are the people who know the passwords of praise, who shout on parade in the bright presence of God. Delighted, they dance all day long; they know who you are, what you do—they can’t keep it quiet! Your vibrant beauty has gotten inside us— you’ve been so good to us! We’re walking on air! All we are and have we owe to God, Holy God of Israel, our King!” (Psalms 89:7-18 MSG)

Friends, there is only one way to see God for who He truly is. Only one way to know God on His terms. First, we must trust His revelation of Himself. We must look to Jesus in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. He is the pre-eminent and unique and complete revelation of the One True God. Second, we must trust His Word. The Word of God is the unique and authoritative witness to the truth of God. We must trust God's Word and lean not on our own limited understanding. We must trust God's Word more than what we think or how we feel. We must believe God is who He declares Himself to be or we have so little hope. Finally, we have to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the eyes to see God for who He is and hearts to seek Him.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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