Summer Sermon Series: “Falling Into Greatness”

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“Falling Into Greatness: Reading, Studying and Praying the Psalms”

We will be taking a look at some of the Psalms that speak directly to the heart of our own selves. This sermon series is based on the book “Falling Into Greatness” by Lloyd John Ogilvie.

Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie (born September 2, 1930) is a Presbyterian minister who served as Chaplain of the United States Senate from 104th through 107th Congresses (1995-2003). He has been the recipient of numerous honorary awards and degrees. In 1996, Lloyd Ogilvie is one of 12 individuals named in Baylor University's worldwide survey, "Twelve Most Effective Preachers in the English-Speaking World."

He is the author of over 50 books, and hosted the former nationally syndicated radio and television ministry was called "Let God Love You." This weekly television ministry ran for seventeen years and the daily radio ministry spanned ten years. "Let God Love You" was recorded at and broadcast from First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood (Hollywood, California.)

This sermon series is “about how to fall into greatness.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9) Dr. Ogilvie writes: "In our fast-track race through life, problems trip us. We stumble and fall." (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9) The great news is this: like the loving heavenly Father that He is, God is ready to grab hold of us when we do fall. We are caught up and embraced in the everlasting arms of a loving God. We realize God’s true awesomeness. We experience His grace – unmerited, unearned, undeserved, YET unchanging, unqualified and unlimited. God is always there to turn our hurts and pains, our fears and frustrations, our discouragements and disappointments into a deeper awareness of our own possibility and promise at being great through God. God’s grace + our gratefulness = greatness.

However, Dr. Ogilvie is quick to point out that such “greatness grows when we are honest with God about our difficulties in our relationships and responsibilities.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9) The Psalms help us learn how to live our lives honestly before God. The early church father, Athanasius has said, “Most Scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9 emphasis mine) As we study these Psalms, we join with the experience of the Psalmist as he pours out his own heart to God.

The Bible is the Word of God. (Gunn, 1963, Introduction) It is in these pages that God best reveals His mercy, His redemptive grace and the release from the bonds of sin in our lives. It is in these pages that God best reveals Himself as a loving God who, through His Son – Jesus Christ – has taken upon Himself the whole burden of human sin, sorrow and suffering. This message cannot be cut off from God’s clear call to humanity to respond to His grace - so freely offered – and accept His invitation to establish such a personal relationship with each of us through faith, repentance and obedience.

The Psalms are the heart of God’s message of love.

Worship is perhaps the most appropriate, the most likely way of our receiving and understanding God’s offer of grace and mercy. Worship provides the power and the driving-force to fulfill His demand. It is in the Psalms that we find a most direct contact with God. It is in the Psalms that are drawn, along with the Psalmist, to attribute ‘worth-ship’ to God.

The Psalms are the heart of the worship.

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May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in His works.
Who looks on the earth, and it quakes and trembles, Who touches the mountains, and they smoke!
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have any being.
May my meditation be sweet to Him; as for me, I will rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!

Psalm 104:31-35 The Amplified Bible

Bibliography


“The Secret of Lasting Joy” or “Song of the Cynic Set Free!”

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1:1-6 NIV

1Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. 4Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Preamble
In your bulletins, you have an insert that introduces a series that we are beginning today called: “Falling into Greatness.” It is a series of messages based on a book written by Lloyd John Ogilvie. It is a study of the book of Psalms, a study which we hope will provide you with ‘food for thought’ and ‘direction for action’ over these next few weeks.

Falling is not something that we consider to be a profitable or positive action. Falling usually has connotations of decrease or decline or harm or even failure to remain in an upright position! Falling is seen more as a negative than a positive event in our lives. But it is our prayer that, as we look at this concept of ‘falling into greatness,’ you will see ‘falling’ as a positive and growing spiritual concept.

Falling into greatness seems contradictory. We associate falling with failing – so how can falling be connected with greatness! When we fall, we think we have failed! Here is the idea which we want you to consider over these next weeks: the secret of falling into the greatness of God!

When we fall, God is ready to catch us in His everlasting arms. That is when we discover His true greatness! That is when we experience His grace – his unqualified, unchanging, unlimited love.

If we have never fallen, we would never experience the reliability and strength of God’s arms of love. If we have never fallen, we would never experience discouragement or obstacles along the way or life challenges. If we have never fallen, we would never discover our own potential greatness enhanced by God’s unending grace. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 9)
That greatness grows when we are honest with God about our difficulties, and our
disappointments in relationships,
in people,
in responsibilities.
Deep down inside each of us there is an inner world of thoughts and emotions.
In this private world, we reflect on life around us,
on choices we have made,
on choices others have made that affect us,
on our deepest hurts and wildest dreams. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 10)

Unfortunately, far too seldom do we truly feel secure enough to share those most intimate
thoughts,
hopes,
dreams
or disappointments with others.
Our public face projects an image of security and sufficiency.
We defend ourselves from ‘getting too close’ so that no one knows the ‘private me.’
We become so accustomed to ‘having it all together’ that our prayers,
our thoughts,
our conversations,
our actions all take on self-regulated pretension.
When we fall, we blame others for our plight,
or beat ourselves up for our mistakes and failures, vowing to ‘do better next time.’
And we continue, striving – with our own power – to keep from falling,
to keep from failing.

Do you feel like you are falling today – or that you have fallen so many times you wonder if
you have the strength or the will-power to get back up again?
Do you wonder where God is when you fall and feel emotionally
or spiritually
or physically bruised and battered?
Are you concerned about someone else who is falling and you don’t know how to help?

The **Book of Psalms** is for anyone who has ever fallen,
anyone who has ever cried out to God in anguish and despair,
anyone who has ever struggles with the unfairness of life,
anyone who has ever experienced the ‘dark night of the soul,’
anyone who has ever wondered what God is like, or if there is a God,
anyone who has ever encountered God in the most unusual, unexpected moments
of your life,
anyone who has ever taken a breath.
This book is for real people with real struggles and real needs – people who are searching for
real answers.
If that describes you . . . then I invite you to allow yourselves to fall today . . . to fall from the
fortified defences of your life and be caught in the arms of our Lord and Saviour.

**Introduction**
“Blessed is the man [woman, boy, girl, teenager, young adult, middle adult, senior adult] who does not follow the advice of wicked people, take the path of sinners, or join the company of mockers. But they delight in doing everything the LORD wants; day and night they think about his law. They are like a tree planted beside streams—a tree that produces fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither. He succeeds in everything he does. But this is not true of the wicked. They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly. For the LORD watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.” (Psalm 1:v. 1—GOD’S WORD, vv 2-6, NLT)

The story is told of a guy who phoned his pastor one day, his voice filled with despair. He needed to see that pastor right now!
“I’ve fallen into a terrible thing that I just can’t seem to shake.”
“I desperately need to talk to you.”

The pastor rearranged his schedule for the day and went to see this guy. His mind was racing.
What could his parishioner have possibly done that was so terrible, so much of an emergency that he needed to come immediately?
He imagined many different scenarios as he drove to this guy’s place.
What had he done:
• cheated on his wife,
• stole from the company,
• arrested for breaking the law,
• some kind of shady deal . . .

Finally the pastor arrived and knocked on the door.
“Pastor, I’ve become a cynic.
I’ve become a negative, critical, and sarcastic man!”
My wife is threatening to leave me;
my fellow employees refuse to work with me;
my kids leave the room when I enter—I’ve become a cynic.”
This man went on to confess that pressures,
disappointments,
exhaustion—all were reasons that he stated that were making him become the man that he was.

And as the pastor listened he realized that there was a spiritual crisis going on in the man’s life.
Carefully, the pastor asked him about his current relationship with Christ.
The man admitted that he no longer took the time to read Scripture,
to pray
or to participate in anything that would enhance his spiritual relationship.
Instead, he raged that God didn’t answer his prayers anyway, so what was the use.
He had little time for God because of all his other obligations.
“If God cared at all about me,” he argued, “then God would do something to make things better!” (Ogilvie, 1984, pp. 15-16)
Ever felt that way?
What’s the use?
The cup of life is always half empty.
The outlook on life is always ‘poor me.’
My life is this way because of God,
    my parents,
    my pastor,
    my family,
    my job,
    my . . . and the list goes on as we pour venom on everyone else because we
ourselves have become so cynical.

“Blessed is the person who . . . does not . . .”
The word ‘blessed’ means happy or joyous.
It comes from a verb meaning to ‘go forth, to advance, to lead the way.’
The psalmist is suggesting that a blessed person is one who is pressing on in a life of clearly
defined goals,
    one whose life has direction and purpose.
The blessed person is one whose eyes are focused on God,
    not on people around him who offer ‘free’ advice about anything and everything!
A blessed person expects that each day will offer new possibilities
    and new challenges
    and continuing hope. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 17)
A blessed person does NOT participate in certain activities.
A blessed person does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly,
    does not stand in the path of sinners,
    does not sit in the seat of the scornful. (v. 1)
“A person will be truly happy if he doesn't follow the advice of bad people
    and doesn't live like sinners and doesn't feel at home with people who don’t
    respect God.” (ERV, v. 1)
A blessed person makes choices which will improve life rather than weaken it.
“To be, or not to be: that is the question: . . .” (Shakespeare, 2010)

To do or not to do . . .
There is a progression towards cynicism which begins when we start losing our focus,
    stray from ‘the game plan’,
    lose sight of God’s purpose and plan.
It begins when we start ‘hanging around’ in the ‘counsel of the ungodly’ . . . listening to the
    advice of people who live in their own strength and resources,
    who see life from a materialistic perspective,
    who feel they don’t require any need or input from God.
‘Ungodly’ is the intentional choice to live life horizontally with no vertical dependence on God.
(Ogilvie, 1984, p. 19)
The ‘ungodly’ may have had a relationship with God at some point in their lives, but choices,
    circumstances,
    excuses have gradually removed them from an intimate spiritual relationship.
Their focus has changed.
Their goals are altered.
The ungodly are easily discouraged and negative.
Their attitudes are contagious.
Before we realize it, our lives have become infected by their negativity and sour attitudes.
Their ‘cup of life’ is always half empty.
There is little hope in their world because nothing can possibly change or improve.

There are ungodly, critical people in our churches,
our homes,
our places of employment,
our friends – people who have replaced their relationship with God with ‘props’ that enable them to maintain critical and destructive lifestyles.

That’s the first step to cynicism.

The pattern continues.
It’s just a short step from ‘walking with the ungodly’ to ‘standing with sinners.’
See how the journey is beginning to slow down?
Throughout the Bible, ‘sinners’ are described as folks who have never had a desire to depend upon God.
They completely exclude God from their lives.
To stand with sinners is to go in a direction completely away from God and then completely stay there.

Walking with the ungodly influences our attitudes,
but standing with sinners affects our behaviour.
We become like the people with whom we associate.
Cynicism starts with our thoughts,
is expressed by our attitudes,
and becomes a part of our being.

The downward spiral continues.
We have begun to ‘walk with the ungodly’ and their thoughts and attitudes have infected ours;
We then ‘stand with sinners’ who have no interest in God,
but we finally ‘sit with the scornful’ – scoffers, those who mock God.

This is subtle.
At the heart of scorn is pride.
Pride which elevates itself above God,
questions His ways,
challenges our faith,
lives life according to their own values.
“Cynicism is scoffing in its worst state.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 19)
The cynic focuses on the negative in order to maintain a reason for the failing,
the falling of society.
The cynic focuses on the misery of others in order to ignore his own failure to thrive.
The cynic sees each new catastrophe in his life as a reason to discount God’s activity, a reason to condemn others, a reason to see the world through hopeless lenses. “When we sit with the scornful, before long, there will be a permanent chair, reserved just for us.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 19)

We are no longer active participants in our spiritual journey. We have become spectators, criticising and condemning others for our ‘fall.’

BUT . . . there is hope! There is an antidote to cynicism: Blessed is the person who DELIGHTS and MEDITATES on the law of the Lord. Blessed is the person who has an assurance of God’s love, assurance of God’s forgiveness, assurance of God’s presence in the daily bits of life, regardless of the situation.

This person is not a cynic. This person is as strong as a tree, planted by streams of water. This person has spiritual roots which go way down to the “Living Water” of God’s provision, ensuring constant spiritual nurturing, so that when the crises of life threaten to break us, we can stand our ground, safe on the solid rock of God’s redeeming love.

Cynicism yields fruit of negativity, scorn, rejection, critical attitudes, hopelessness, malice, anger, bitterness, . . . the list goes on and on.

We read that those who delight and meditate on God’s Laws also produce fruit – and the leaves of this tree will not wither, will not experience the stain of contamination from the consequences of making poor spiritual choices.

The fruit of the Water of Life in us is a new mind in Christ, a righteous character, a godly disposition.

Paul encourages us to “be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that we will no longer have any desire to ‘conform to the pattern of the world.’” (Romans 12:2 NIV)

The fruit of Christ’s indwelling, artesian waters is the development of His character traits in us. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 23)

We know them as the ‘fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.’ (Galatians 5:22-23)
Just as the attitudes and actions of the cynic and the blessed are different here on earth, so too are their destinies. What a contrast between the blessed who are rooted and strong, fruitful, successful, useful, and the wind-driven chaff of the cynic. Unstable, without fruit, easily blown by the shifting ways of adversity or negative opinions.

The psalmist continues: not only will the wicked be ‘blown away’ but they will not ‘stand in the assembly of the righteous.’ If we choose to live without Christ in this life, we will live apart from Him in eternity.

But this also has an implication for our daily choices. The cynic chooses to deny the fellowship and acceptance of the body of believers. ‘Too many hypocrites in this place,’ they proclaim. It is almost impossible to measure up to a cynic’s harsh criticism or endure his bitterness.

The psalmist forces us to see not only the dangers of walking, standing or sitting among the company of the cynics, but he also shows us their fate. “The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the ungodly shall perish.” (v. 6, NIV)

Who are the righteous? Those folk who have chosen to accept God’s free gift of salvation through faith. “The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17 NIV) By faith alone we are accepted as the righteous, blessed men and women of God. Faith is the missing ingredient of the ungodly cynic. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 26)

Is there hope for a cynic? Can people change their minds, their attitudes, their actions? Thomas, one of the hand-picked of Christ’s disciples, was a cynic. In fact, he is the patron saint of cynics who are transformed by the power of God’s unconditional love!

What does a cynic crave more than anything else? A desperate need for love. A cynic’s bitterness and critical attitude ensure that people will not see the real person deep down. It is a defence mechanism for all the failures, all the disappointment, all the times when it seems that people and God have failed him. It is a protection against all the times he has failed himself.

Are you a cynic today?
Are you hiding behind critical and bitter attempts to make some meaning of your life? Do you think that God can’t possibly love you? Somehow you must change first so that He can help you. I am here to tell you today that God specializes in healing hearts that are broken and wounded by life.

Blessed is the person who is so rooted and nurtured by streams of life that he or she can love and encourage and be an example to the cynic, without being sucked into their whirlpool of negative thinking.

Pray for the cynic who recognizes that the negativity and criticism and bitterness of their lives will ruin and destroy not only their own lives, but the lives of those around them and realizes that there must be change.

Blessed is the cynic who knows that he or she desperately needs a rebirth, a new beginning, and cautiously, carefully begins to move towards God, towards love, towards acceptance, towards peace and hope.

Have you become critical and bitter about life? Does your life need a rebirth? A new direction? A new purpose?

Let the waters of the river of life replace the parched soil of your heart. Leave the seat of the scornful and turn your life over to the Lord, so that you, also, can be called ‘blessed.’

AMEN

**Bibliography**


“Triumph IN Trouble” or “Let the Nation Rejoice!”

**Scripture Reading**: Psalm 46:1-11 NIV For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah.

1. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
2. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.
3. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
4. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.
5. Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth.
6. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.
7. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”
8. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

**Preamble**


We will be taking a look at some of the Psalms that speak directly to the heart of our own selves.

This sermon series is “about how to fall into greatness.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9)

In his introduction to the book, Dr. Ogilvie writes: “In our fast-track race through life, problems trip us. We stumble and fall.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9)

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We realize God’s true awesomeness.

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God is always there to turn our hurts and pains, our fears and frustrations, our discouragements and disappointments into a deeper awareness of our own possibility and promise at being great through God.

**God’s grace + our gratefulness = greatness.**

However, Dr. Ogilvie is quick to point out that such “greatness grows when we are honest with God about our difficulties in our relationships and responsibilities.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9)

The Psalms help us learn how to live our lives honestly before God.

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The early church father, Athanasius has said, “Most Scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 9 emphasis mine)

Also, . . . today – this weekend – is a special time when we celebrate this wonderful nation of ours we call Canada. And I believe that this particular Psalm – the 46th Psalm – is most appropriate to bring together, our national celebration as well as a reminder of God’s grace and goodness.

**Introduction**

On Friday, I was watching much of the Canada Day celebrations taking place on Parliament Hill in Ottawa in the presence of their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

About 300,000 people flooded into downtown Ottawa and the grounds of Parliament Hill to join with thousands more all across this great nation to celebrate Canada’s 144th birthday.

We are a funny bunch – we Canadians.

I read this quote, and I want to share it with you:

> For 364 days a year, Canadians are demure, quiet, stoic. We don’t toot our own horns, or, to quote Roberto Luongo, ‘pump our own tires’. We get really defensive if someone takes a shot at a Canadian, but otherwise we’re happy to let our neighbours to the south do all the talking while we do the walking. That attitude is often confused for shyness, politeness, or decency. But that ain’t it. The truth is, we’re smug. We’re conceited, and we bask in our silence, because we know we’re better than them. It’s an honourable trait, to be able to sit back quietly while some dimwit makes another joke about back bacon, poutine or coloured money. But we do, because we know our money’s worth more, back bacon tastes better than grits or Jimmy Dean sausages, and poutine was sent here by God himself to thank us for being the greatest people on earth. July 1 is Canada Day; has anyone ever heard of U.S.A Day? Exactly. (Mckay, 2011)

Friday was all fun and celebration.

But a more sombre, traditional occasion took place on Thursday.

Pastor Joyce and I were guests of Major Michael Allan and the padres who are currently serving the Land Force Central Area Training Centre and the change of command ceremony between LCol Darryl A. Mills and LCol William (Bill) G. Cummings that took place on Thursday morning.

It was a ceremony steeped in tradition.

On parade were 7 companies of troops – each company consisting of about 100 soldiers.

Five of these companies of soldiers are in training for overseas duty – men and women – Canadian soldiers – warriors all.

The most amazing aspect of the day was the realization of how young these men and women are.

In his speech as part of the Canada Day celebration, Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, emphasized the important focus of the Canadian Forces.

“Our [Canadian] Armed Forces have always led the world in rallying to the defence of freedom,” he said. "From Vimy Ridge and Juno Beach, through Korea and the
Balkans to Kandahar province, the sacrifice of Canadians has been universally revered and respected."

I read this editorial just yesterday.

We are Canada. At 144 years we are neither young nor old, as nations go. And nations do come and do go, it bears remembering. You don’t have to be very old to appreciate that the world map that occupied a corner of your childhood classroom is a relic of another age; that borders once drawn in blood aren’t indelible at all, they are just lines to be moved, or bent or erased by popular will. Yet, here we are, still in this together, and doing rather well.

Like any worthy anniversary, it is deserving of celebration but also of the appreciation that future years together aren’t guaranteed, they must be earned, and mutually agreed upon. Back when Canada was a mere pup of 115 years, Ralph Klein, then the brash young mayor of a brash young Calgary, called Canada, "perhaps the only country in the world held together by curiosity." He asked if such a confederation of interests and regions can endure. "[N]o one is quite prepared to give up on her yet," he said, "as if we all have some lingering desire to see how this ongoing exercise in nation-building ends."

And why not? No. 143 was not the easiest of years, but it was largely free of any soul-sucking existential debate on Canada’s future. There was a federal election, and no one died in the process. Economic uncertainty lingers, but we emerged stronger than the year before, and healthier in most every sense than a long list of wealthy, developed nations. And, yes, let’s not lose sight of that inarguable fact: we are rich. (MACLEANS.CA (Ken MacQueen, Cathy Gulli, Alex Ballingall, Cigdem Iltan, Kate Lunau, Anne Kingston, Emma Teitel), 2011)

We have had our troubles:
1. Vancouver, 2011 (after the Stanley Cup final game)

We have overcome our difficulties:
1. Of all G20 countries, Canada has been least affected by the recent recession.
2. PEACE: We’re more peaceful than the Swiss and Aussies (MACLEANS.CA (Ken MacQueen, Cathy Gulli, Alex Ballingall, Cigdem Iltan, Kate Lunau, Anne Kingston, Emma Teitel), 2011)

For a long time, a Canadian flag on a traveller’s backpack has been nearly as valuable as travel insurance: its wearer would be treated with respect no matter the locale, a privilege growing out of Canada’s peaceful reputation. Some think that comforting truth had faded. In 2009, Louise Arbour, the former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and former UN Human Rights Commissioner, put it this way, in speaking of Canada, post-Afghanistan: “There is a bit of a loss of innocence that the [Canadian] public is perhaps not aware of. We think of ourselves as the ‘few that everyone loves.’ But I am not certain that’s always the case. The flag on the backpack has run its course.”

More recently, however, we seem to have nudged our way back into the good books. The Global Peace Index just ranked Canada the eighth most peaceful nation out of 153 countries, its highest ranking since the survey was established in 2007, and up six places from last year. Iceland took the top spot this year, while the U.S. placed 82nd. Despite a rise in the likelihood of violent demonstrations, improvements in relations with neighbouring countries and respect for human rights led to Canada’s rise in the rankings.
We have come out on top:
1. Vancouver, 2010 (Winter Olympic Games)
2. IMMIGRANTS: We attract the brightest newcomers. (MACLEANS.CA (Ken MacQueen, Cathy Gulli, Alex Ballingall, Cigdem Iltan, Kate Lunau, Anne Kingston, Emma Teitel), 2011)
3. BUSINESS: We’re more entrepreneurial than the U.S.
4. HEALTH: We’re leading the way in medical research
5. FOOD: We have cheese that’d make the French jealous
6. ENVIRONMENT: We have the most cities that care

As a nation, we have triumphed over trouble.
And as individuals, we, too, can triumph over trouble.
That is what the psalmist talks about here in this 46th Psalm.
And his purpose for sharing this Psalm with us is to “help us get the best out of our troubles.”
(Ogilvie, 1984, p. 83)

But you might just want to stop me right here and say, “But, pastor, I want to know how to get rid of trouble, not hear how to get the best out of trouble – there is no best in trouble – it is just, well . . . trouble.”
“How can there be any ‘best’ in trouble anyway?”

Now, you and I both know that the chances of having a trouble-free life are slim to none.
The secret we need to discover is this:
1. how we need to react when troubles hit us
2. what we can learn from the experience, and
3. how God helps us in the middle of the troubles.

Jesus never promised us a life completely free of troubles.
What he did talk about was an untroubled heart.
Jesus challenged us:
“DO NOT let your hearts be troubled (distressed, agitated). You believe in and adhere to and trust in and rely on God; believe in and adhere to and trust in and rely also on Me.” (John 14:1 The Amplified Bible)

“An untroubled heart can triumph over troubles based on three firm convictions: the Lord is on our side, by our side, and gives us peace inside.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 83)

He is our Partner, our Protector and our Peace-giver.

This was a nation that had seen hard times.
This was the southern kingdom and Hezekiah was king over Judah.
The prophet Micah was God’s man who helped the king know and trust God.
King Hezekiah brought about much reform to his kingdom:
1. re-established the Passover,
2. reopened the Temple for worship of the One True God, and
3. recalled the people to faithfulness and obedience.

The northern kingdom had already fallen into the hands of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib.
Now this great army was on the march moving down toward Egypt to conquer and capture everything in his path.
And this little kingdom of Judah was in his way.
This Assyrian army had pillaged and plundered and raped and killed in one city. And word was sent to Hezekiah, “... watch it boy, this is what’s going to happen to you if you don’t surrender right now.” “That is exactly what is going to happen to Jerusalem.”

Was Hezekiah in trouble or not? But the way he responded to this threat shows us the first step involved in triumphing in times of trouble.

King Hezekiah took the threat seriously. He took that threatening letter and laid it out before the Lord in the Temple. The prophet warned him not to trust in a political allegiance, but to trust only in God. And that is exactly what Hezekiah did.

On marched the Assyrian army. They camped around the city walls and made their preparations to attack the city itself. H-hour was midnight. Everyone inside the walls of Jerusalem waited, gripped by fear.

Then it happened! A baffling affliction swept through the Assyrian camp and one hundred eighty thousand of them died. Just like that! And by five minutes to H-hour, -- 11:55 P.M. -- those who were still alive left in a mighty hurry. The mighty Assyrians slunk back home -- defeated. Defeated, not by fighting against the army of Jerusalem, but by the intervention of the Lord.

After the siege was over and the Assyrians gone, “the psalmist sang a song of uncontrollable praise.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 84) We have just read it together. And understanding the circumstances around this psalm, we can be grateful for what this psalm expresses and what it can mean to each of us before, during and after that siege of trouble comes into your own life.

A. God is Our Partner – He is On Our Side.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” (vs. 1) God – our Lord – is one on whom we can go to for safety and security. He is our refuge – it is there we can retreat for safety. He is our reserve – it is there we can find renewal for strength. Just as King Hezekiah laid out that letter before the Lord, the first things we should do when trouble comes is PRAY.

Prayer makes it possible to see the issues of our struggles clearly. Prayer helps us look for God’s guidance and direction. More often than not, we are the cause, the source of our own set of problems. And we may need to ask God for forgiveness even before he can help us. This is a crucial step in getting the best out of the worst.
But some of our troubles are caused by other people
And we need to ask God for his direction in solving the trouble those who are involved.
Troubled people beget troubled circumstances.
God may be using you to be the living object lesson of his love to that one individual.

When we begin to set aside our own preconceived notions and let God take over, he shows
us how to communicate his love and forgiveness effectively.
God is our partner.
He is on our side.
And God loves people as much as we may be ‘turned off’ by those same people.
When we pray – earnestly, honestly seeking his plan,
  his purpose – he gives us a vision of how we can act and what we can say.
God also begins to prepare the way before us, opening doors of opportunity to us.
And we begin to understand things – and people – in his time – and in his way.

To go beyond his leading, striking out on our own, is to miss the best opportunity.

How do we know all of these things?
God is our refuge and strength!
Moving away from the trouble into fellowship with God makes available his wisdom, his
insight, and his courage.
We need to know what to do and when to do it.
Often, like King Hezekiah, there is little we can do except trust God to take over and fight for
us when it is too impossible to us in our own strength.

God is our “ever-present help in trouble.”
God is the “One willing to be found.”
  “So you should look for the LORD before it is too late; you should call to him
  while he is near.” (Isaiah 55:6 NCV)

Our longing to seek the Lord is directly related to the fact that he has found us and calls us to
belong to him so that we can be free to call on him.

B. God is Our Protector – He is By Our Side
This is the next thought of the psalmist.
God is refuge; now he is strength in middle of it.
We are compelled – and wonderfully so – to meet the adequacy of God head-on for whatever
happens.
  “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall
  into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains
  quake with their surging.” (vv 2-3)

Ann Kiemel tells the story of a time, while she was in Southern California, she received a call
to speak on a large high school campus.
I want to read her words from her book, I Love the Word Impossible. (Kiemel, 1976, p. 161ff)
  [ read excerpt from I Love the Word Impossible P. 161-166 ]

Expectation!
God wants us to be filled with great expectation. “He delights to bless us when we surrender our troubles to Him, trust what He will do, and confidently anticipate how He will utilize the snarled mess we’ve gotten into.” (Ogilvie, 1984, pp. 87-88)

The Lord is by my side!

Say it in your own heart. Say it often. **The Lord is by my side!**

C. God is Our Peace-giver – He is Inside
Ah, now comes the best part.

God is not only on our side, and by our side, but he gives us peace inside.

The psalmist reviewed the awesome way that God intervened on behalf of the kingdom of Judah.

Not gleeful celebration over the deaths of 180,000 enemy soldiers – however ungodly they may have been.

Rather, God spoke to the psalmist: “**Be still, and know that I am God.**”

> “Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.” (vv 8-9)

And suddenly God speaks and we tremble to the very depth of our being.

"**Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.**" (vs 10)

What does this mean? **How does this affect our triumph in trouble?**

“Magnificently this: What the Lord does for us by intervening to extricate us from seemingly insolvable trouble is to excavate a greater place in our hearts for his indwelling Spirit. He wants to have our awe over what He has done presently to produce adoration for what he will do in the future. When the Lord helps us triumph in trouble, He does not want us to glory in the triumph but in Him.” (Ogilvie, 1984, pp. 89-90)

And all he wants us to do is soak in all the wonder of his blessings in the stillness of his grace.

"**Be still, and know that I am God . . .**." (vs 10)

AMEN

**Bibliography**


"The Apple of God’s Eye"

Scripture Reading: Psalm 17:1-15 NIV  A Prayer of David

1 Hear, O Lord, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer - it does not rise from deceitful lips. 2 May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right.
3 Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin.
4 As for the deeds of men - by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. 5 My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped.
6 I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.
7 Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.
8 Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.
9 They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance.
10 They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground.
11 They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover.
12 Rise up, O LORD, confront them, bring them down; rescue me from the wicked by your sword.
13 O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life.
You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children. 15 And I - in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

Introduction
He was the youngest son of a large family of sons.
He was small in stature – a puny sort of kid.
His country was at war against the Philistines.
His three oldest brothers were fighting in the King’s army, but the only fighting experience he had was defending his father’s sheep against prowling wild animals.
He was pretty accurate with a slingshot!

He was also the ‘go-between’ or ‘go-fer’ for his father and his brothers, and frequently he travelled to their camp, bringing care packages from their father.
As he drew near the camp, he heard it – the taunting challenge of a Philistine, echoing across the valley.

"Do you need a whole army to settle this? Choose someone to fight for you, and I will represent the Philistines. We will settle this dispute in single combat! “If you lose, you will serve us. If we lose, we will be your servants.” I defy the armies of Israel! Send me a man who will fight with me!"  (1 Samuel 14:8-10, NLT)

“When Saul and all the Israelites heard what this Philistine said, they were gripped with fear.” (1 Samuel 17:11, NLT)

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As this young shepherd boy listened to the taunts of Goliath, a plan was forming in his mind. This was a gigantic threat from a giant of a man.

“Goliath . . . was over ten feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore a bronze coat of armour scales weighing 125 pounds. On his legs he had bronze shin guards and on his back a bronze javelin.” (1 Samuel 17:4-6, GOD’S WORD)

The shaft of his spear was like the beam used by weavers. The head of his spear was made of 15 pounds of iron. The man who carried his shield walked ahead of him.

Do you have any giants in your life – circumstances which seem way too massive, too inflexible, and too terrifying to even begin to know what to do?

Or you have done the same thing for so long – with the same negative results – that you do not know how to change the pattern.

Ever been there?

Ever been taunted by giants of addictions or sickness or losses or failures or disappointments or discouragements?

Are you gripped with fear because of those giants in your life?

David challenged this giant who was ‘defying the living God.’ (17:26)

You can imagine the loathing that Goliath must have experienced as he saw this young, undersized, scrawny kid – without any protective covering, armed only with a slingshot – coming towards him.

“You’ve got to be kidding. Is this the best that the Israelite army can do – sending out a runt? This will be like throwing a steak to a hungry lion!”

"Am I a dog that you come to attack me with sticks?" So the Philistine called on his gods to curse David.” (1 Samuel 17:43 GOD’S WORD)

David continued to advance.

"You come to me using a sword and two spears. But I come to you in the name of the LORD All-Powerful, the God of the armies of Israel! You have spoken against him. Everyone gathered here will know the LORD does not need swords or spears to save people. The battle belongs to him, and he will hand you over to us.” (1 Samuel 17:45, 47 NCV)

And with one well-thrown stone embedded in the forehead of this giant; Goliath, the extraordinary weapon of the Philistine army – toppled to the ground – dead!

David became a valued person to King Saul, and “whatever Saul sent him to do, he did it successfully.” (1 Samuel 18:5)

So successfully, in fact, that David was given a high rank in the army.
And wherever David went, there was great celebration and rejoicing, because of his military ability – “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” people chanted. (1 Samuel 18:7)

Sometimes conquering the giants in our lives takes a strange twist of fate in the lives of others. Saul became very jealous of David, and his mission became one of anger and hatred towards this person who had delivered the Israelites from the Philistines. He wanted David dead, because he felt challenged by David’s competency.

Have you ever been hurt by what people have said to you or about you to others when you know in your heart that you have acted with integrity?
Have you ever felt misinterpreted, misunderstood, mistreated because someone is criticizing you for your actions?

Oh, there are times when people talk and you know that they have a valid reason to do so, but there are also those times when you know that you have not done wrong, and yet gossip and malicious criticism assassinate your character.
Or maybe you are the source of gossip and malicious criticism as you assassinate the character of another, because you are jealous or envious or fearful or unsure . . . because you see giant-sized problems instead of practical solutions.

Such is David’s dilemma.
Have I acted without integrity?
Is Saul justified in his criticisms of my actions?
Did I bring my king dishonour and disrespect?
Was I wrong?

When our motives are questioned, when our reputations are challenged, when we have searched our hearts and we know that we are innocent . . . take it to the Lord in prayer!

**Psalm 17** is such a prayer.
It is a cry from the heart of someone who has been maliciously and spitefully criticised.
It is a cry from the heart of David because King Saul was jealous of and threatened by his own growing popularity.
It was a cry from the heart because a price was placed on his head and David had to flee for safety.
Probably, during one of those long nights of exile, David turned to God for strength and courage in the midst of hostile accusations and charges of treason against the king and blasphemy against God. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 42)

David desired to be a man of integrity before God.
So he takes his case to the Heavenly Supreme Court: “O Lord, hear my righteous plea.” (Psalm 17:1a)
His motives are pure; his prayer “does not rise from deceitful lips.” (17:1b)
He invites God to “probe his heart and examine him” because David is confident that God “will find nothing” in his words or in his deeds that is sinful.
“I have resolved with my mouth not to sin.” (17:3b)
“My feet have not slipped” (17:5)

James talks about the mouth a bit more graphically:

“no person can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse others,
who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth comes
blessings and cursing.” (James 3:9-10)

I would suggest that the mouth is one of the big culprits when it comes to committing sin.
With our mouths, we are quick to judge
... to cut
... to hurt
... to lie
... to gossip
... to tear down.

I read this somewhere: Did you know that the average person spends one-fifth of his or her
life talking?
If all of our words were put into print, in ONE (1) day, those words would fill a 50-page book.
In ONE (1) year’s time; the average person’s words would fill 132 books of 200 pages each!
(Source unknown)

Think about that for a moment...
What if YOUR words were put into a book?
Would it be a best seller or would it be a ‘how-to-destroy another’ in ten well-chosen words or less!

Before we make any response to what people might be saying to or about us, we need to look
God in the eye.
We need to spread out the situation before Him, . . . let Him examine the motives behind the
accusations,
the details,
the reactions
the mixed emotions,
the deeper reasons behind the hurt. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 42)

Lord, what can I learn from this?
Is there any truth in what is being said?
Your evaluation and judgement in this matter is really important to me, Lord.

And that is what David did.
He examined himself under the penetrating eyes of the Lord.
“Let my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right.” (17:2)
David did not try to justify himself.
He did not make excuses.
He did not criticize his accusers.
He did not retaliate.
Rather, he presented his case before God and waited for God’s vindication and affirmation.

David opened himself to the eye of the Lord.
He wanted God to see him as he really was.

“Hear me; listen to my cry; give ear to my prayer; answer me; show me the wonder of your love; vindicate me.”
I wonder if we would be able to have the same openness before God that David does. I wonder if we would be a little nervous about God looking very closely at our lives . . . at our words . . . and our actions...

Is your life an open book before God?
Or are there parts of your life that you try to keep hidden?
Are we as willing to allow God to "probe [our] hearts and examine [us] at night?"
Can we say, with David, "Though you test me, you will find nothing"?
Can we say, with David, that in word and deed I have done no wrong?

David expresses to God that he is in danger.
His “mortal enemies were surrounding him.”
“Their hearts were calloused; they spoke with arrogance; they tracked him down like a lion hungry for prey . . .” (see 17:9-12)

And when we have enemies . . . we are vulnerable; there is a risk that we may lose our integrity. The temptation is to respond to our enemies in the same way that they have attacked us.

David continues to plead before the Lord.
“Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings.” (17:8)

Have you ever looked at a person in the eye from a very close range?
Did you know that you can see the image of yourself in their eye?
Apply that to an intimate relationship with God and it means that He is looking at us, we are the focus of His attention, and that we can see ourselves as we are only when we see ourselves in His eyes.
As much as we value our eyes and the wonder of sight, so, also, God cherishes each one of us. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 45)

"Keep me as the apple of your eye"
This is figure of speech is used elsewhere in the Bible.
In a desert land he found him,
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye.” (Deuteronomy 32:10)

Think about how that applies to us when the hurts and accusations of life threaten to destroy us. We are the apple of God’s eye.
He is looking at us;
He is caring for us;
He will not forsake us.
His unqualified love heals our hurts.
His unlimited grace pours over our wounded spirits.
We are reflected in God’s eye, not as the person we’ve been, but as the miracle we can become. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 45)

As the apple of God’s eye, we are cherished, even when our enemies threaten to surround us. After the long night of soul-searching, when David’s heart was breaking because of . . .

“. . . arrogant mouths and ‘calloused hearts’ and enemies waiting like a ‘lion crouching in cover’ he was able to declare: “I—in righteousness, will see your face. When I wake up, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.” (17:15)

Do you feel cherished by God this morning?
Are you the apple of His eye?
Is He the apple of your eye?
When God looks at you, does He see His reflection in your eye?
When others look at you, do they see the reflection of God in your eye – in your life?
Can you declare, like David of old that I, in righteousness,
in right relationship with God, will see His face some day?

Not only did David ask God to keep him as the ‘apple of His eye’, he also sought shelter in the ‘shadow of His wings.’ (17:8)
Have you ever watched a hen and her chicks?
If there is perceived danger, she quickly gathers them in under her feathers.
Confidently, little chicks will poke their heads out between her feathers, safe and secure that mom is taking care of them.

So it is with our Heavenly Father.
The Lord hovers over us and guards us from that which would threaten to incapacitate us.
David sought and found shelter beneath the wings of God Almighty.
Resting in the Lord’s loving-kindness makes our sleep a surrender of our hurts to the Lord and awakening to a new day and a new beginning in the adventure of becoming more like Christ. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 47)
Jesus is the manifestation of both the apple of God’s eye and the shadow of His wings.
In Christ, we experience healing love and forgiveness.
He is the love of God’s protecting arms shadowing and sustaining us.

Just as David cried out to God to ‘hear his plea’, so Christ calls out for us to give Him our hurts,
our bruised egos,
our wounded spirits.
“Come unto me. I will give you rest. I will heal your hurts. Trust me. I will love through you the very people who have hurt you so much. I will give you the freedom to forgive them and depend less on their opinions and more on my faithfulness.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 47)

Are you focusing on the storms around you?
Are your "eyes on the prize"?
The writer of the book of Hebrews said it well: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus." (Hebrews 12:2)
David's desire was to be an open book before God. He knew that when he lived in the center of God's will, he was the apple of God's eye. And, in spite of any dangers that he faces . . . God will provide just what is needed for David to persevere. And to finally make heaven his home.

What about you?
Is your life an open book?
Are you keeping your integrity in spite of the dangers and trials that you are facing?
Are your eyes fixed on Jesus?
AMEN

Bibliography
“When God Seems Absent”

Scripture Reading: Psalm 22:1-11 NIV

1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.  
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?  
3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"  
4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.  
5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon - from Mount Mizar.  
6 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.  
7 By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life.  
8 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"  
9 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"  
10 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.  

Introduction

Where was God, when, between January, 1933 – when Adolph Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany – and April, 1945 – when this evil man took his own life – 5.9 million Jews, as well as 2-3 million Soviet prisoners of war, about 2 million ethnic Poles, 1.5 million Romani (Gypsies), 250,000 disabled persons, 80,000 Freemasons, 25,000 Slovenians, 10,000 homosexuals, and 4,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses – a total of 12 million, 775 thousand individuals were killed to rid Europe – and the world – of a second-class population. And people ask the questions: Why should such a holocaust have to happen? Where was God in all of this?

Where was God, when, on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, terrorists crashed jet passenger planes into the World Trade Center’s twin towers and the Pentagon -- and killed thousands – forever changing our sense of safety and security all around the world. Why should such a tragedy have to happen? Where was God in all of this?

5 All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
Where was God, when a child is murdered in Canada (CBC News, 2004), it's usually at the hands of a relative, not a stranger,

where family members were to blame in almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of the 1,990 solved cases of children and youth homicides in Canada between 1974 and 1999, according to Statistics Canada.

Where twenty-seven per cent (27%) of the murders were committed by acquaintances, and only 10 per cent (10%) by strangers.

And people ask the questions: When any child dies, when a child is murdered, why should this have to happen?

Where was God in all of this?

Where was God, when, about four and a half years ago, on Friday, January 19, 2007 – with snow blowing into white-out conditions and slushy roads – FIVE (5) teens were killed just east of Meaford on Highway 26 as their SUV struck an oncoming van.

Former principal, Lori Wilder is quoted as saying, "These were all good kids -- not ones you would see in the office. But you would see them laughing and goofing in the halls." (McLaughlin, 2007)

Another teacher, Mike Page from Georgian Bay Secondary School stated: "They shone, . . . They glowed. These boys really enjoyed life ... they did it all."

And people ask the questions: Why should such a tragedy have to happen?

Where was God in all of this?

Where is God when disasters kill thousands in Haiti

and the Indian Ocean basin

and Japan

and Bangladesh?

Why should this have to happen?

Where is God in all of this?

Where is God when teens go on a shooting rampage in Columbine, Colorado and kill many of their classmates?

Why should this have to happen?

Where is God in all of this?

Where is God, when each and every one of us – and no one is excluded – goes through severe circumstances that shake us to our very foundations.

Health issues,

career setbacks,

family crisis,

death – we have all been smacked down.

And we ask the question: Why does this have to happen?

Where is God in all of this?

Where is God when we pray and pray and pray and pray and our tears pour out and our heart is broken and our prayers don’t seem to rise above the ceiling of our rooms;

when the sky seems to be made of brass and nothing seems to get through to heaven

Where is God in all of this?
How does God allow people to get away with the things they seem to get away with – when bad things happen to good people? Where is God then?

“The feeling of the absence of God is one that we’ve all had at times. That experience is most poignant in our personal spiritual lives. We know times of great joy and companionship with God, then suddenly, life changes. We are faced with new challenges, difficult surroundings, new people and problems we’ve not dealt with before. Only then do we realize that our experience of God has been dependent on sameness, familiar surroundings, and a carefully ordered life.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 74)

You are not alone. Even though the circumstance may be uniquely yours, people – past, present and future – have gone through the valleys as you go through yours. The psalmist – David – went through a time when god seemed absent. We read it in our Scripture reading this morning. And through his experience, David discovered that God is dependable – God is always there. That God is the ultimate and most reliable source of hope there is.

Biblical historians tell us that, when David wrote this psalm, he was in the region of Mount Hermon. He was a long way away from Jerusalem. He was a long way away from the temple – the center of worship. He was a long way away from family and friends. And in his distance from everyone and everything and everyplace that he loved, he remembers the good times. He remembers the joyous processions of worship. He remembers the fabulous feast and festivals. He remembers the stirring worship that meant so much to him. He always remembers.

I am not sure why David found himself so far away from what was normal in his life. But i am sure of this one thing – it wasn’t what David wanted. He didn’t plan this set of circumstances. It was not on his agenda.

But as we read this Psalm 42, we realize that David is just like us when God seems to be so absent from us. He asks much the same question we would ask: “How can I find God away from the people and the familiar surroundings . . . where I have known and loved Him?” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 75)

And not only does he feel the torment of his soul within, but his enemies – those people who don’t have any appreciation for his love for God – begin to taunt him: “Where is your God?” Isn’t that the same type of question we hear all around us today “If God is a God of love, why did he let so many people get killed in Haiti?” “Why did He let my child die?” “Why did He let my friends get killed?”
If you say God loves us so much, why do bad things happen to good people?"

And we feel the panic that these questions arouse deep down inside us. And God seems absent from our situation.

There comes a time when, like the psalmist David, we cannot escape the question any longer. Look at verse 5 of Psalm 42:

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? . . .”

Hey, . . . just wait a minute preacher! What do you mean? Why shouldn't I feel this way? It's not like everything is coming up roses right now? Life stinks! Don't I have a right to feel upset to say the least?

“Why am I discouraged? Why [am I] so sad?” (NLT)

Then David does the strangest thing – he gives himself a severe ‘talking-to’. Can't you just picture it – here is David . . . and he is talking to himself. Like those 2 little characters that sit on your shoulder – one a little devil and the other a little angel. "Man if things could get worse I'd be dead.”

"Hey, wait a minute, why am I so discouraged?"

"Just when things seemed to be going along so great, whammo! – I get hit with this.”

"Hey self, why are you so sad?"

"Why do bad things happen to good people – I'm a good Christian, aren't I? Why are you so disturbed?”

"Life isn't fair!”

"[Now David] . . . Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

Remember that story of Elijah, just after the great and awesome display of God's power in sending down fire to burn up the sacrifice and the slaughter of the prophets of Baal? [ read 1 Kings 19:1-18 ]

And David, too, is brought to a place in his own mind and heart where God can begin to speak to him, a place where he will hear God, a place where God is present.

"My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon - from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life.”

Mount Herman is the only mountain that has snow on it.
They even have built a ski resort on its slopes – the only area for winter skiing in all of the Middle East.
A just like in our Rocky Mountains, snow melt creates streams and water cascades down the mountain in thunderous waterfalls and the river Jordan is formed.

You know the words:

O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder  
Thy pow'r thru'out the universe displayed

*Then sings my soul* - *My Savior God to Thee*  
*How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*  
*Then sings my soul* - *My Savior God to Thee*  
*How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

When thru the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.

"How Great Thou Art" Words by Stuart Hine

And in that place, David knew that God was right there with him.  
His experience provided answers to the questions that disturbed him so much.  
God had not left him  
God is here.  
Hallelujah!

God had not caused the distance – the separation anxiety – in David’s life, but God certainly used it.  
And God does not cause the difficult circumstances – whatever they may be – in our lives, but he will use them.

Think about this: the sense of the absence of God is really the chance to grow.  
*"When God begins to penetrate our lives, the action often creates a feeling of His absence. He is penetrating areas of character, behaviour, understanding, commitments, and values. He never leaves or forsakes us, but a temporary emotional feeling of his absence occurs when there is something in our lives that is blocking us from Him or we are unwilling to obey Him in some area of our lives."*  
(Ogilvie, 1984, p. 76)

These are the times when we can learn something about God and His love and grace and mercy and goodness that we have never understood before.

And using this **Psalm 42** as a foundation of prayer  
*"Praying . . . this psalm, making it our own plea can set us free to grow."* (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 77)

At first, David wanted everything to be normal again, back to what things used to be,
back to the ‘good ole’ days’.
But eventually David became thankful that this awesome God did not permit things to get back to the “same ole’, same ole’.”
Instead, David experiences a new and more in-depth understanding of God’s sovereignty and God’s grace.
David learns that God will always be with him, to help him to keep on, no matter what circumstances might happen
and what difficulties David might find himself involved.
That developed soul-muscle.
That strengthened David’s faith.
He was given the opportunity to experience greatness.

Understand this:
“There is a great difference between the god of our own making, limited to past experiences of growth, and the present experience of God, the holy Lord God. Many of us cherish memories of God’s previous goodness. Some of us have sentimentalized our faith, being dependent on the way we knew Him back home, at some retreat centre, in some wonderfully warm experience of inspiration, or in some time of need when He intervened to help us. We need to get up-to-date with Him.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 77)

The sense of God’s absence can be – quite simply – the “flip-side of God demanding to be contemporary, to be vital with us where we are.” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 77)
Because God forces us to let go of our ‘security blankets’ that hold us to the past, we often feel that he is not there.

But He is – be sure of that!
Difficult times have not erased Him.
Strange circumstances have not made Him void.
Troubling situations have not dismissed Him.
He is here!
He is with us in all of those difficult times,
in all of those strange circumstances,
in all of those troubling situations.
He is here!
He is with us in them
and through them
and in spite of them . . . and will use them for our growth in greatness.

So, how should we pray?
Perhaps something like this:
“Dear God, I claim Your presence and power right now where I am. The contradiction of [my] circumstances has not changed You. Reveal more of Yourself to me. Help me to know You more intimately than ever before. I place my hope in You, not in the strange, different circumstances in which I find myself. I long to grow in the greatness You have intended for me. [Amen.]” (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 77)

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Scripture Reading: Psalm 84:1-12 NIV For the director of music. According to Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

1How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!
2My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
3Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young - a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.
4Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.
5Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. 6As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. 7They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.
8Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob.
9Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.
10Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
11For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.
12O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Introduction
The great autumn festival is at hand. The long year’s toil in field and vineyard is over, the produce of the land is gathered and the cycle is about to begin once more with solemn ritual and stately ceremony. The ground is parched; the wadis are dry; summer is nearly at an end. From every village in the country comes a train of pilgrims, as they draw near to their journey’s end they burst forth in praise (Tate 1990, p. 356):

“How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord Almighty. My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1)

This is a “Psalm of Pilgrimage”.

Every year crowds would flock to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Pilgrimages to the tabernacle were a grand feature of Jewish life. Families journeyed together, making bands which grew at each halting place; they camped in sunny glades, sang in unison along the roads, toiled together over the hill and through the slough, and as they went along, stored up happy memories which would never be forgotten. (Spurgeon)

This Psalm is the reflection of an unnamed pilgrim as he makes his way up to Jerusalem.

6 All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
He yearns to arrive at God’s house – his desire is so intense that his heart is almost aching with homesickness to be in the company of God’s people, God’s family, those who are worshipping and praising the Living God.

He can hardly wait to arrive at the temple.
He can hardly wait to be in the presence of God.

Did you catch that thought?
“*My heart yearns, even faints . . . my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God*” (v.2).

Have you ever been so excited about seeing someone that you could hardly wait until the day of arrival?
Have you ever been so excited about spending time with God that your spirit ached with anticipation?
You could hardly contain yourself; you wanted so desperately to be in the presence of God!

Have you ever been to a music concert – everyone is there for one purpose and one purpose only – to celebrate,
to sing along,
to be part of a throng of people – to experience the excitement and passion of the event.
To see and hear your favourite group.
To have a first-hand, personal description of something bigger than you!
Such an encounter sticks in your mind;
changes your perspective;
directs your activities.

“For this pilgrim, as much as he yearned to be in the temple in Jerusalem, his true longing was for God Himself. His purpose was to be in God’s presence, to worship Him, and to order his entire life as an expression of praise.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 119)

As the pilgrim travelled along the road, his thoughts turned to the physical structure of the temple.

“*Even the sparrow and the swallow have built safe nests in the corners and crevices of the temple, places where their young can be hatched and protected. The pilgrim contemplates – even the birds are truly blessed, for they have found a safe residence in the house of the living God. From their privileged position in the nooks and crannies of the temple, the birds fill the air with joyous song. The birds are like the temple singers, whose ‘hallelujahs’ are never ending.*” (Tate 1990, p. 358)

“*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You*” (v. 4).

The purpose of this pilgrimage was to ‘get home’ so that he could be in the presence of the Lord in the temple.
In order to get there, however, a journey had to be made.
In order to make the journey, objectives and goals had to be set.

What is the purpose of your pilgrimage?
Because you *are* on a pilgrimage, you know.
Maybe your purpose in life is survival, just making it through today because tomorrow is going to throw another monkey-wrench at you.
Or maybe it is security.
Or freedom from worry.
Or maybe your purpose is happiness, whatever that may mean to you.
Or excellent health.
Maybe your purpose in life is a successful career
   or lots of money
   or a big house
   or a great vacation to some exotic spot.

None of those purposes is wrong.
Each is, in some way, important.
The problem is that they are inadequate as the ultimate purpose of our life.
Whatever we determine to be our purpose in life will create the fabric of our value systems, as well as our actions and reactions to life. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 120)

So let me ask you again: what is your purpose in life?
What is that passion,
   that drive,
   that underlying force which determines what you do to be so necessary and what you think to be so important?
What is it that sets your priorities?
What controls how you react to life’s circumstances?
On what basis do you decide to do one thing and not another? (Ogilvie 1984, p. 120)

As a Christian, what is your purpose in life?
What is your spiritual passion,
   that divine drive,
   that underlying devout force which determines what you do to be so necessary . . . for God, and what you think to be so important . . . for God?
Who or what is it that sets your priorities?

Until we understand our purpose as Christians;
   until we have personally experienced God’s unqualified love and grace and felt the power of His presence;
   until we have developed a deep relationship with Him, grounded in prayer and faithfulness;
   until we know the joy of the presence of the living God;
   until we are able to experience the fullness of God’s forgiving love – our purpose in life may waver from moment to moment or experience to experience.
Lack of purpose may challenge us or even defeat us when the journey passes through ‘the valley of Baca.’

On the way to Jerusalem, pilgrims crossed the valley of Baca.
This is a scorched and bone-dry valley.
It is hot.
It is desolate.
This was a journey through a difficult, dry valley that offered no water for tired and thirsty travelers. It was a journey that offered little shade as the sun beat down on weary travelers.

But the pilgrim does not despair.
His focus is on his objective.
His pilgrimage is his purpose.
His purpose is his pilgrimage.

“Blessed is the person whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage” (v. 5).

Blessed is the person who keeps the purpose of their pilgrimage always on their mind, who is able to endure the difficult, problematic situations that confront us in the pursuit of our purpose.
Blessed is the person who is so focused on God – that even in the dry, thirsty, barren times of their lives – they can see springs in the desert.
They can see parched valleys turned into oases and barren slopes clothed with flowers, whether it rains or not.

Why?
Because their strength comes from God.
Blessings are poured down wherever the pilgrim goes, because they are looking to God whose presence is in Zion (see v. 6-7).

Can you imagine the joy of experiencing God’s blessing in your life when your health is failing? Can you imagine the joy of experiencing God’s blessing in your life when you lose your job?
Or your marriage falls apart?
Or your loved one dies?
Or you are financially broken?
Can you imagine the anticipation of resting in the oasis of God’s love, of experiencing a living hope through Jesus Christ?
In times of crisis, that possibility seems almost unthinkable.
This pilgrim is focused on the knowledge that his strength is wrapped in God’s strength.

Consider this: pilgrims passing through the valley expected that God would provide rain to quench their thirst and food to ease their hunger and strength to continue their journey to Jerusalem.

What do you expect from God?

Remember the story of the encounter Jesus had with the woman at the well while he was travelling through Samaria?
At about the hottest time of day, Jesus and his disciples had stopped to rest at this spot and, as the disciples had gone ahead to get some food, this outcast woman came to this country well to draw water.
And Jesus asked her for a drink.
The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:9-14)

What do you expect from God?
Do you believe that He can create springs of living water in the desert moments of your life?
If you do not expect God to provide, you will likely go thirsty!
God will bless us to the extent of our expectation.
He usually gives us no more than we dare ask.

What do you expect from God today?
A tiny shower that barely wets the ground or a cloudburst of blessing because you believe that God is a God of impossibilities!
What do you expect from God who is bigger than the driest, darkest valley in your life?

What do you expect from God today?
Do you expect God to walk with you through the valleys of your life because those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

Do you expect that God will provide such strength for you on your journey?

What do you expect from God on your spiritual pilgrimage?
What is it that God is trying to teach you today?
What does He want you to dare to ask and expect.
When we seek His will and His specific direction in our lives, He will give us exactly what we need to sort through the problem, take it apart, grapple with it as a stepping stone to greater growth, and allow God to show us a solution.
Our optimism is not based on our own creativity or resources; it is based on the fact that the Lord God Almighty hears our prayers (see v. 8). (Ogilvie 1984, p. 123)

Pilgrimage begins in the heart and with the first steps into the unknown.
The essence of pilgrimage walk is the encounter with and between yourself and God as you walk step by step along the path.
"For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield; the Lord bestows [present] grace and favor and [future] glory [honor, splendor, and heavenly bliss]! No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."
"O Lord of hosts, blessed [happy, fortunate, to be envied] is the man who trusts in You [leaning and believing on You, committing all and confidently looking to You, and that without fear or misgiving]!" (v. 11-12  The Amplified Bible)

"The pilgrim, witness to a strong and living faith, longing for the living God" (Tate 1990, p. 362) as he journeys to Jerusalem, foreshadows another Person who journeyed to Jerusalem – only His journey was for the redemption of our sins. . . In Jerusalem, “Jesus was both pilgrim and servant. Jesus was so sure of His purpose that He could humble Himself as a servant and wash His disciples’ feet.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 126) He was so sure of His purpose that He was able to declare: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

If we, pilgrims passing through this life, are sure of our spiritual purpose;
    if we, like Jesus, can say, without strings attached: “Father, not my will but Yours be done in everything I do,
    everywhere I go,
    every person I meet,
    everything I say, . . .”
    if we know where we have come from and where we are going, then we are free to express our pilgrims heart for others.

That means giving of ourselves to meet the needs of others.
That means walking through the valley of Baca with someone else and daring to envision springs in the desert of their lives!
That means facing life head-on, with a positive attitude based on God's power in our lives.

If we have a pilgrim’s purpose,
    heart,
    and power, . . . then, in the valleys of life we will see extraordinary opportunities to be a servant . . . sometimes like the Master, to ‘wash the feet’ (bring comfort) of the very people who betray,
    deny
    and misunderstand us.
But, also like the Master, we know where we are going. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 126)

The pilgrim is so sure of his purpose,
    so satisfied with presence of the Living God in his life, that he declares that he would rather spend one day in the courtyard of the Temple than 1000 years anywhere else!
He would rather be a doorkeeper of the Temple than live in the most beautiful houses of the wicked.

Why such a strong desire:
    1. “The Lord is a sun:" He dispels darkness, comforts, warms, and gives life.
    2. He is a shield: The Defender and Protector of his followers.
    3. He gives grace, to prepare for heaven.
    4. Glory, to crown that grace.
    5. He is all-sufficient. "He will withhold no good thing." (Clarke 1832)
The road to the Temple is the process of inner spiritual development which is crowned by a vision of God in His place on Mount Zion. (Tate 1990, p. 362)

Where are you on your spiritual pilgrimage?
Are you on the mountaintop or are you in the valley of Baca.
Is your heart yearning to be in the presence of God,
or have you grown faint and weary on your journey.
Are you waiting by the roadside, feeling spiritually hungry and thirsty, with no sight of provisions in the dryness of your life?

“"The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!"
Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."” (Revelation 22:17)

Do you need to start---or do you need to resume your spiritual pilgrimage today?
Come.

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“Have a Great Day”

Scripture Reading

1Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. 2Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. 3For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.
4In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.
5The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.
6Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, 8do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, 9where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. 10For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." 11So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

Introduction

Last Sunday, Pastor Joyce led us on a pilgrimage to the house of God.
She shared with us from Psalm 84, the Psalm of Pilgrimage, and focused our attention, our longing for the wonder of worship and being in the very presence of Almighty God.

“My heart yearns, even faints . . . my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:2).

She drew our attention to the excitement about spending time with God, so much so that our whole inner being ached in anticipation;
where we can hardly contain ourselves; we want so desperately to be in the presence of God!

This pilgrimage has taken us out of the hot, dry, tiresome, heart-wrenching valleys of pain, disappointment, strife, loneliness, and sickness into the grand and glorious presence of Yahweh – Almighty God.

And today is the day.
This is the day of celebration.
This is the day of worship.
This is the day of thanksgiving.
This is a great day!

We all want our days to be great, don’t we?
We meet each new day with anticipations, plans
and hopes – don’t we?
We want very much to see problems resolved – don’t we?
We yearn to achieve triumph over our troubles – don’t we?

7 All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
We don’t know what this day will bring, but most of us are optimistic enough to believe that today will be different . . . and better . . . than yesterday.

Today is the day!

The pilgrimage is complete.
We have arrived.
And here we are – together – in the very presence of the living God to offer him our worship and praise for all that he has done for us.
Aren’t you glad you are here today?

This psalm that we read this morning is a **Psalm for the Heart**.
It is a call to worship.
It is a call to celebration.
It is a call to praise.
It is a call to thanksgiving.

Last week, Pastor Joyce told us that the people of Israel were headed to the Temple for worship because it was Thanksgiving Sunday.
It was the Feast of Tabernacles – the time to celebrate the end of harvest.
Every October, we do much the same in our church.
We get together as families to thank God for all the good things with which he has blessed us.
We gather together to ask the Lord’s blessing.
We praise God for his goodness to us.

Last Sunday, Pastor Joyce told us that:
“For this pilgrim, as much as he yearned to be in the temple in Jerusalem, his true longing was for God Himself. His purpose was to be in God’s presence, to worship Him, and to order his entire life as an expression of praise.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 119)

So we “**come before him with thanksgiving . . . for the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.**” (vs. 2, 3)
And in the presence of such a God, we can only worship and adore.
“**Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.**” (vs 6-7)
Such “**true and acceptable worship begins and ends in adoration of the glory of God . . . His varied ways of self-manifestation to [us].**” (Gunn 1963, p. 37)

A. **The Affect of Praise – the External Expression**

By definition, the affect of praise refers to

1. the influence of somebody or something: to act upon or have an effect on somebody or something
2. stir of somebody’s emotions: to move somebody emotionally
3. pretend to be something: to give the appearance or pretense of something
4. adopt something: to adopt a use, style, or manner of doing something
5. act like somebody: to imitate somebody else’s style or character
6. come to be or have something: to assume a particular form or state, or
7. a feeling associated with action: an emotion or mood associated with an idea or action, or the external expression of such a feeling.
Let me read the first portion of this Psalm to you again.

**Psalm 95, verse 1-7.**

I am reading this time from the *New Century Version.*

> 1Come, let's sing for joy to the LORD. Let's shout praises to the Rock who saves us. 2Let's come to him with thanksgiving. Let's sing songs to him, because the LORD is the great God, the great King over all gods.
> 3The deepest places on earth are his, and the highest mountains belong to him. 4The sea is his because he made it, and he created the land with his own hands.
> 5Come, let's worship him and bow down. Let's kneel before the LORD who made us, because he is our God and we are the people he takes care of and the sheep that he tends.” (NCV)

Don`t you just love it?
Come, let us sing!
Come, let us shout praises!
Let us come to Him with thanksgiving!
Let`s sing songs to Him!

In *Exodus 33:18,* we find Moses, weighed down with the heavy and often thankless business of leading the people of Israel from the land of slavery to the land of promise, pouring his heart out to God.

> “Then Moses had one more request. ‘Please let me see your glorious presence," he said.’ ” (NLT)

Open my eyes, Lord, show me your glory!

We want to enjoy the glorious presence of God – and God *will* reveal as much of himself as we can bear or understand.

But we cannot fulfill our lives **unless** we see the glory of God.

Look around you.
Don’t you see God?
Don’t you see him in the faces of those sitting close to you?
Don’t you feel the very presence of God in this service this morning?

Don’t you see God in your world and all of its beauty – when you are picking blackberries, or tending your flower beds, or walking along the Bruce Trail, or biking on the Georgian Trail, or swimming or picnicking at Memorial Park?

What about:

> O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
> Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
> I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder
> Thy pow’r thru’out the universe displayed
> When thru the woods and forest glades I wander
> And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
> When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur

44
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze
And when I think that God His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

“How Great Thou Art” Words by Stuart Hine

And like the Psalmist,
like this hymn-writer,
like so many others – doesn’t your soul begin to sing, “My Savior, my God . . . how great Thou art!” (Hine 1949. 1953)
God’s glory fills the whole earth.
God’s glory is declared in the heavens.
God’s glory is even yet above and beyond the heavens.
God’s glory is . . . everywhere!

The Scottish Shorter Catechism (Westminster Shorter Catechism (July 1648) asks, as the very first question of faith: “What is the chief end of man?”
And the response taught to all believers is this: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism (July 1648)

In their distress, the heart-cry of every man, woman and child is for “. . . God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name’s sake.” (Psalms 79:9)
In their joy, the heart-cry of every believer is to “Praise the LORD . . . for great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.” (Psalm 117)

C.S. Lewis, in his book, Mere Christianity, wrote:
“A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself.” (Lewis 1952)

God’s great love and His faithfulness to us – this is what we begin to realize and understand when we are lifted up to the very peak of divine revelation – the very practise and the presence of God.
And we lift our hands,
and our heads,
and our hearts before God as a token of our love.
The focus is on God.

Our focus,
our attention on anything or anyone else other than God Himself demonstrates our own obvious deficiency in our ability to trust.
God – the “Creator of the human ear must be a perfect hearer, and the Creator of the human eye a perfect (see-er.)” (Gunn 1963, p. 39)
In Psalm 115:3-8, we read these words:
“3Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.  
4But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. 5They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; 6they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; 7they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. 8Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”

We can easily get caught up in the highly emotionally-charged atmosphere of praise and worship. It can easily be an emotion or mood associated with an idea or action, or the external expression of such a feeling. Such praise is “here today and gone tomorrow”. And we are only fooling others around us, sometimes ourselves, but never God.

“He who brings an offering of praise and thanksgiving honors and glorifies Me; and he who orders his way aright [who prepares the way that I may show him], to him I will demonstrate the salvation of God.” (Psalm 50:23 The Amplified Bible)

B. The Attitude of Worship – the Internal Ignition

Our expressions of praise may be fervent, vibrant, lively, joyful, emotional.

“Outward forms of worship are worthless and harmful unless there is a sincere inwardness of spirit behind them.” (Gunn 1963, p. 41)

Gunn goes on to say this:

“The peril of all external forms of worship is that they tend to take on a value all for themselves, and then they no longer express life. At that point people come to be satisfied just with minimum requirements and performance; and this is an ever-present, deadly danger of every worshipping community.” (Gunn 1963, p. 41)

True worship must come from somewhere deep inside the heart of all of us.

The second portion of this 95th Psalm (verses 7d-11) is a challenge to actively involve ourselves to hear the message of God.

Psalm 95: 7d-11.

“7Today listen to what he says: 8“Do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were at Meribah, as they were that day at Massah in the desert. 9There your ancestors tested me and tried me even though they saw what I did. 10I was angry with those people for forty years. I said, ‘They are not loyal to me and have not understood my ways.’ 11I was angry and made a promise, ‘They will never enter my rest.’ ” (NCV)

We – the worshippers of today – are warned that the hardening of our hearts (like the Israelites did at Meribah) could just as easily happen now as it did then. Meribah!
“And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7)

“These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he showed himself holy among them.” (Numbers 20:13)

“The hardening of the heart refers . . . to the stubborn and rebellious will of those who followed their ‘wayward hearts’ and refused to learn the ways of God for them.” (Tate 1990, p. 503)

The testing of any ‘Meribah-generation’ is the questioning of “the reality of the presence of Yahweh.” (Tate 1990, p. 502)

Don’t question the presence of God in our service, in our lives today.

*He is here, hallelujah!*
*He is here, Amen!*
*He is here holy, holy; I will bless His name again*
*He is here, listen closely, hear Him calling out your name*
*He is here, you can touch Him, you will never be the same.*

*He Is Here* Words and Music by Kirk L. Talley

This is not something happening in the days of old. ‘Hardening of the heart’ is as just as serious an illness today as it was yesterday. This issue still lives on and we could still be at Meribah again.

‘Contention’ seems to be much more in line with the “hard-hearted Christian” than obedience and ‘testing’ is more well-known than faith.

Worship is more than an act of formal praise and a remembering of the ‘good ole’ days’ gone by.

Verse 10 tells us that God “was angry with those people for forty years . . . 'They are not loyal to me and have not understood my ways.'” (v. 10 NCV)

God loathed the wilderness generation which would not trust His demonstrated works of deliverance.

God abhorred those whose wayward hearts would not let them commit themselves to His ways.

[God] was angry and made a promise, 'They will never enter my rest.' ” (v. 11 NCV)

The writer to the early church encouraged us in this:

11“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.” (Hebrews 4:11)

God’s rest! – a place of freedom from fear,
freedom from distress,
freedom from pain and suffering,
freedom from weariness,
freedom from want.

**Conclusion**

As I introduced this message, I asked you: “We all want our days to be great, don’t we? We meet each new day with anticipations, plans and hopes – don’t we?
We want very much to see problems resolved – don’t we?
We yearn to achieve triumph over our troubles – don’t we?
We don’t know what this day will bring, but most of us are optimistic enough to believe that
today will be different . . . and better . . . than yesterday.
Today is the day!”

The Psalmist calls us to thanksgiving.
He calls us to celebrate the glory of God.

1Come, let’s sing for joy to the LORD. Let’s shout praises to the Rock who
saves us. 2Let’s come to him with thanksgiving. Let’s sing songs to him,
because the LORD is the great God, the great King over all gods.
6Come, let’s worship him and bow down. Let’s kneel before the LORD who
made us, because he is our God and we are the people he takes care of and
the sheep that he tends.” (vs. 1-3, 6-7)

Let us show the affect of our praise – that external expression of glory and honour to God.
But let us also be in possession of the attitude of worship – that internal ignition, that ‘heart of
worship’ that honours God through our obedience to
and trust in Him for all the things He has done for us.

The pilgrimage is over.

“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You.”
(Psalm 84:4)

AMEN

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Scripture Reading: Psalm 8:1-9 NIV For the director of music. A psalm of David.

1 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.
2 From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?
5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.
9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Introduction

“Oh Lord, Our Lord, how majestic, how excellent, how mighty, how glorious is your name in all the earth!” (v. 1)

God’s name and God’s majesty are synonymous, for the majesty of both God’s person and creation are revealed to humanity in the divine name and all that it implies. The majestic name of God permeates the earth and transcends the heavens, swelling the psalmist’s heart with words of praise. (Craigie, 1983, p. 107)

Imagine, if you can, David, sitting under a clear night sky, gazing up into the heavens. He is overwhelmed by the majesty, the beauty, the awesomeness of the universe. He looks up and bursts into praise: "O Lord, our King, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

In Psalm 19 we read these words:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies declare the works of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech and night after night they declare knowledge.” (19:1-2)

Even the organic world has a voice that continually sings God’s praises.

The majesty of God’s creation is stamped on the seasons of the year, the sunrises and sunsets, the Milky Way, the stars, and the planets;

God’s majesty is stamped on a big harvest moon which hangs in a night sky.

The majesty of God’s creation is stamped on the tides of the sea, the mountains and valleys, the warble of a bird,

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8 All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
the scent of a flower – the majesty of God’s creation is stamped on the brilliant colour of a weed!

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!”

Jesus said a similar thing to the Pharisees. They were annoyed that folks were worshipping and praising Christ as he rode through Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. They demanded that Jesus shut down the rabble. He responded: "I tell you, if [my followers] were silent, the stones would shout out." (Luke 19:40)

Creation displays the hand of and worships the Creator.

As the Psalmist contemplates the majesty of the universe, he declares that the praise of infants and children is powerful enough to silence the enemy. Enemies symbolize human strength. The essence of the ‘enemy’ is that they do not recognize the name of God or the revelation that comes through that name. Children, on the other hand, symbolize human weakness and humility, but they seem to have an inner strength which enables them to accept and understand the majesty and revelation of God. God uses the weak of this world, even the child, to establish His strength . . . reflected in His nature and in His creation.

Though the universe is vast and imparts to mankind a sense of insignificance, God has given to us a position of extraordinary strength within the universe. (Craigie, 1983, p. 107)

Remember, as a child, sitting under a night sky, counting the stars?
- Trying to identify the planets and the constellations.
- Spotting the Big and Little dippers.
- Watching a meteor shower?
- Wondering how far the Milky Way stretched across the sky.

Remember the fascination and the excitement of seeking the Northern Lights dance across the sky?

It might be possible for an adult to look up at the stars with mild interest. But a young child will be blown away by the same sense of wonder as David expresses. It is that innocent acknowledgement of God’s glory that defeats the hardness of the sophisticated heart.

The weakness and gentleness of infants is often the chosen defence of God against the arrogant and powerful.

As David continues to gaze at the stars, meditating and contemplating the majesty and glory of the universe, he is overcome by his own sense of insignificance. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers . . ."

Did you catch that?
It is not “the work of your hands, . . . just your fingers.

“In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny, pushed and prodded into shaped by divine digits; but in contrast to the heavens, which seem so vast in the human perception, it is mankind who is tiny.” (Craigie, 1983, p. 108)

This huge expanse, mind boggling in its breadth, is the result of God’s fine motor skills!
David could probably see about 5000 stars on a clear night. With a four-inch telescope, we can see about 2 million stars. Our Milky Way galaxy of stars is so huge that even at the speed of light it would take 100,000 years to travel across it! The Sun is so far away that it would take the Space Shuttle seven months to fly there. That's why the Sun, which is a hundred times the diameter of the Earth, looks so small! (Dr. Roy Gould - Exec Producer)

If the universe is so big, “. . . what is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him?” (v. 4) The Psalmist expresses astonishment that God even knows about planet Earth, let alone cares for the creature, man, who lives upon it. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 32)

The universe is beyond our comprehension!
Yet what to us is overwhelmingly immense is finger work for God.
If God is that big, what does that make us?
We fade into insignificance by comparison.
It puts humanity into perspective . . . can we be so proud of our ability to control technology when we compare it to what God has done?

How big is God, how big and wide His vast domain
To try to tell these lips can only start
He's big enough to rule His mighty universe
Yet small enough to live within the heart

Though man may strive to go beyond the reef of space
To crawl beyond the distant glimm'ring stars
This world's a room so small, within my Master's house
The open sky but a portion of His yard

How big is God, how big and wide His vast domain
To try to tell these lips can only start
He's big enough to rule His mighty universe
Yet small enough to live within the heart

As winter's chill may cause the tiny seed to fall
To lie asleep 'til waked by summer's rain
The heart grown cold, will warm and throb with life anew
The Master's touch will bring the glow again

How big is God, . . .

And so David cries out, "what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"
His wonder at God's creation now spills over into wonder at God's care of us insignificant mortals. God has made us just a little lower than Himself, and crowned us with glory and honour – the very attributes of God, Himself!

Glory means value and magnitude of potential. Ability and power are implied.
Honour is recognition of status and strength. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 32)

But there is more!
Not only are we created in the image of God and made just a little lower than the angels,
not only are we crowned with honour and glory, . . . we have been given authority over the
works of your hands. (v. 6)
That we have been entrusted with dominion over the created world is an expression of the
honor and glory God has given us.
We are nearer to God than the heavens, . . . and the earth was created for us!
How should we respond?
Worship!
Only praise and adoration will suffice. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 33)

Like the Psalmist, as we linger in adoration, we are struck with the realization of our
responsibility.
If God has given us dominion, then we are responsible to Him for our choices.
We do not own the world, but we have been given dominion – roles and responsibilities.
We have been instructed to take care of our piece of this world.
The Lord, as King, has called us to be viceroy of His delegated management.
We have no authority or power apart from a dependent relationship with Him. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 33)

The witness of Christ’s life, the purpose of His death was to make the promise of this psalm a
reality.
The Kingdom of God is His realm,
Reign
and rule within us.
We enter the kingdom by spiritual rebirth,
we grow through constant reliance on God,
and we realize the full impact of the kingdom as we seek and do His will.

God has given us glory and honour as His agents to be stewards of life.
He has endowed us with intellect,
emotion
and will to enjoy the delights of living.
We are responsible to Him for what we do with the potential that He has given us.
Psalm 8 is a call to live life fully, to live out the glory and honour that God has bestowed upon
us. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 35)

So:

1. Claim your realm.
   That is your assignment – to take care of that which you have been given.
The responsibilities of life are the essence of creative living.
Your realm is a combination of the relationships and responsibilities of life.
You are the ultimate jewel of creation for you are created in the image of God.
You have been crowned with glory and honour – you have been created to live life
joyfully and fully and gloriously!

2. Consecrate your realm.
All that we have and are is a gift from God. He entrusts our realm to us so that we might consecrate it to Him. That means surrendering our lives and our relationships to His guidance and direction. Our purpose is to discover and do His will in our world. Consecration of our realm begins with us.

Have you ever completely surrendered yourself to God?
Are you allowing Him to empower you to live life at its fullest?
Does anyone see His glory and honour through you?
We are to be reproducers of our faith in our relationships.

But we also have a social responsibility in the places where we have been planted. We have been called to be intercessors for our homes, our churches, our communities, and our country. We were meant to be the servants of the earth, the stewards who care for God’s precious creation. But humanity after the fall has turned service into enslavement, care into exploitation, and as a result the world suffers.

In Bible Study, we talked about creation groaning as it waits to “be liberated from its bondage of decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (see Romans 8:21-23) Those groans are the result of us failing in our responsibility to the earth. That responsibility for caring for the creation has not ended. We are still responsible for our action and our inaction.

Have you consecrated your life, your relationships, your responsibilities and your realm to God?
What are you doing to make a difference in your world?

Commit yourself to excellence in your realm.

We have been crowned with glory and honour.
We are forgiven, we are redeemed and we are adopted into the family of God when we give our lives to Him.
In return, He forgives the past, guides the future and gives us today to live with excellence.

Problem is, we often settle for second or third best. God calls us to a life of excellence, a commitment to responsibilities and relationships. God has given us this great honour and dignity.
He’s made us a little lower than himself.
He’s crowned us with glory and honour, setting us over all the works of his hands.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

Jesus took the path of humility,
of submission.
He lowered Himself to the status of a slave.
He humbled Himself to death on a cross.
But God raises him up.
He restored to Him the glory and honour that is meant for all of us who believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.
And now . . .

“. . . we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels . . . crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” (Hebrews 2:9)

We are made in God’s image, made just a little lower than God himself, but Jesus has come to show what that really means.
Jesus has come to bring us salvation,
to make it possible for us to be restored to the image of God as it was in the beginning.
Jesus has brought us back to the Father,
given us new birth,
raised us up to new life,
given us new hope of a creation restored to what God intended for it in the beginning.

What is man, woman, boy or girl that you are mindful of him?
We have been given the tools we need to live life fully, with excellence, glory and honour.
How can we not cry out, as the psalmist of old:

“Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:1)

**Bibliography**


"Lord, Let Me Out of This!" “Stop the World! I Want to Get Off!”


1Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; 2hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger.
4My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. 5Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.
6I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest - I would flee far away and stay in the desert; 8I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."
9Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city. 10Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. ¹¹Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets. ¹²If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him.
¹³But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.
¹⁵Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them.
¹⁶But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. ¹⁷Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. ¹⁸He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.
¹⁹God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them - men who never change their ways and have no fear of God.
²⁰My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. ²¹His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.
²²Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.
²³But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days. But as for me, I trust in you.

Introduction
“Stop the World – I Want to Get Off” (Stop the World 2011)
This is the title of a musical with a book – later adapted for a movie. The music was composed and the lyrics written by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley.

The story is set against the backdrop of a circus. It focuses on ‘Littlechap’, whose first major step towards improving his lot is to marry Evie, his boss’ daughter.

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Saddled with the responsibilities of a family, he allows his growing dissatisfaction with his existence to lead him into the arms of various women – the Russian Anya,
the German Ilse,
and the American Ginnie – as he searches for something better than what he has, only to realize in the twilight of his life that what he always had – the love of his wife – was more than enough to sustain him.

I am sure that is what the psalmist David was feeling when he said, “I wish I had wings like a dove, so I could fly far away and be at peace.” (Psalm 55:6 CEV)
Stop the world, I want to get off!

Have you ever felt this way before?
We have all felt that way at one time or another.
Maybe you feel that way right now – that overwhelming desire just to escape – to get out from under that difficult,
   painful,
   upsetting,
   disappointing,
   frustrating circumstance or relationship.
Maybe you believe that life for you has no meaning,
   makes no sense,
   provides no sense of worth.
Maybe you feel that you are drowning in hopelessness.
Maybe you feel that, well . . . what is the use of going on?
   Why is this happening?
   Why?
   Why?
   Why?

What do you do when you feel there is no escape?
What do you do when life flashes you a ‘No Exit’ sign?
What do you do when you just want to get away from it all – yet God seems to call you back to the fray?
What do you do?

David is in pain.
His heart is broken.
He knows the feeling of having no escape.
He is not alone.

The apostle Paul, when he was in prison in Rome:

   “21For me to live is Christ’s life in me, and to die is to gain of the glory of eternity. 22If, however, it is to be life in the flesh and I am to live on here, that means fruitful service for me; so I cannot choose, 23But I am hard pressed between the two. My yearning desire is to be free of this world and be with Christ, for that is far, far better; 24But to remain in my body is more needful and essential for your sake. 25Since I am convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and stay by you all, to promote your progress and joy in believing,
So that in me you may have abundant cause for exultation and glorying in Christ Jesus, through my coming to you again.” (Philippians 1:21-26 The Amplified Bible)

In other words, ‘It’s too hard -- stop the world, I want to get off!’

But Paul didn’t get what he wanted.

This was only his first imprisonment.

After his release from jail, he had several more years of ministry before he was imprisoned again, then executed.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, American writer and poet of the mid-19th century:
“What other dungeon is so dark as one’s own heart! What jailer so inexorable as one’s self!” (Hawthorne n.d.)

At the height of the American Civil War, Hawthorne stated:
“Lord, it is too present with me, too persistent, too painful. I want out of this.”
In other words, ‘It’s too hard -- stop the world, I want to get off!’

The prophet Jeremiah, had these same feelings:

1 Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. 2 Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people. 3 ‘They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me,” declares the LORD. 4 ‘Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers. For every brother is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer. 5 ‘Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning. 6 ‘You live in the midst of deception.” (Jeremiah 9:1-6)

In other words, ‘It’s too hard -- stop the world, I want to get off!’

Kurt Cobain, American singer-songwriter, musician and artist, best known as the lead singer and guitarist of the grunge band Nirvana – despairing of what his life had become, stated:
“If you die you’re completely happy and your soul somewhere lives on. I’m not afraid of dying. Total peace after death, becoming someone else is the best hope I’ve got.” (Cobain n.d.)

During the last years of his life, Cobain struggled with heroin addiction, illness and depression, his fame and public image, as well as the professional and lifelong personal pressures surrounding himself and his wife, musician Courtney Love.

On April 8, 1994, Cobain was found dead at his home in Seattle, the victim of what was officially ruled a suicide by a self-inflicted shotgun wound to the head. (Wikipedia n.d.)

In other words, ‘It’s too hard -- stop the world, I want to get off!’

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane:

41 And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw and knelt down and prayed, 42 Saying, Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but always Yours be done. 43 And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him in spirit. 44 And being in an agony [of mind], He prayed all the more earnestly and intently, and His sweat became like great clots of blood dropping down upon the ground.” (Luke 22:41-44 The Amplified Bible)

In other words, ‘It’s too hard – Father, if it is at all possible -- stop the world, I want to get off!’
But, Father, in spite of what I want to do, I – even more – want to do what you want.’

What is it that causes this feeling of wanting to get away from it all? Fatigued by the pressures of life? Overwhelmed by the excruciating pain of sudden heartaches and broken relationships? Drowning in a sea of hopeless tears and fears?

What do you do when you feel like that? “Oh, how I wish I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest!” (vs. 6 NLT)

1. Rest
We all long for the peace and quiet in getting away from people and problems, from the demands that life places upon us. We want to get away . . . and rest.

Understand this: be sure you know what you mean by rest. In biblical terms, rest is not some geographical place like a favoured campsite, a grand hotel, a comfortable den, a private place of serenity. Rest is a condition of the soul. Rest is a relationship with the Lord. It is God’s peace dwelling in us.

I remember hearing a story told of a juried art exhibition. The theme of the exhibition was ‘Peace.’ The competition came to two finalists – both experts in composition and style. Their brushstrokes were perfect. Every detail was placed in proper dimension on the canvas.

The first finalist had presented a most wonderful picture . . . a pastoral, quiet, serene . . . you could almost feel the gentle breeze, and hear the hum of a bee or the flutter of a butterfly. You were pulled into the serenity of the painting, to that place where all is beautiful and perfect.

The other painting was quite the opposite. Here was a picture that was dark and foreboding. It was a picture of a rocky cliff on a mountain side. The sky was dark and overcast – torrential rain beating down against the barren rock face. Lightning flashed and thunder crashed all around. A few ragged, gnarled, scrub trees clung to the rock. And in the crook of the branches of one of those scrub trees was a nest with a mother bird sitting quietly and safely at home – at peace – undisturbed by the sights and sounds of the storm.

Jesus said:
Almost all of the references to ‘peace’ in God’s Word are noted in the context of turmoil, and hardship, and tears. Peace, and therefore, rest – is a condition of the soul, not of our environment. It is in direct proportion to the quality of our relationship with God, the Father.

“If you can't have that quality of peace in the battle, you can’t have it at all!” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 93)

I am the first to realize that we all need times of vacation rest. We need those times to renew our strength. We also need regular times of Sabbath rest – (no, not what we often call the ‘Nazarene Nap’) times when we renew our spirits. We enjoy the lakes or mountains or seas or desert places that give us encouragement and hope.

But we are not born for these. We were born for the battle. We are here to live. And life happens in the valley, not on the mountain top. Life grinds itself out where the ‘rubber hits the road.’

2. Removal
When we want to ‘get away from it all’, we must remember that wherever we get too, we have brought along our worst and greatest problem with us. I don’t know who you see in the mirror, but most people see their worst enemy. Very few see a good and close friend.

Yet each one of us is a child of God, made in His image, filled with his Spirit, infused with His life and love.

Yet sin, and a selfish determination to rule our own world, has contaminated, coated, camouflaged, and calloused the wonder of God’s creation. We no longer see the inner beauty of God’s image in us; rather, all we see is the ugliness of our own making.

Paul, in his letter to the church folk at Rome, stated:

'I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of all the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies – presenting all
your members and faculties – as a living sacrifice, holy, devoted, consecrated and well pleasing to God, which is your rational and intelligent service and spiritual worship. “Do not be conformed to this world, in this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs, but be transformed or changed by the entire renewal of your mind by its new ideals and its new attitude, so that you may prove for yourselves what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect in His sight for you.” (Romans 12:1-2 The Amplified Bible)

Adam Clarke, in his commentary of Romans 12:2, writes;

“Be ye metamorphosed, transfigured, appear as new persons, and with new habits, as God has given you a new form of worship, so that ye serve in the newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. The word implies a radical, thorough, and universal change, both outward and inward.” (Clarke 1832)

He goes on to add:

“Let the inward change produce the outward. Where the spirit, the temper, and disposition of the mind, are not renewed, an outward change is of but little worth, and but of short standing.” (Clarke 1832)

There is something you cannot get away from – and that is yourself.

3. Reason

One of the major effects that a crisis event achieves is that it pulls the people together in a cause greater than any one person.

In World War 1, a young nation came into its own as young men from all across our dominion answered the call to serve for king and country. In World War 2, once again we stood tall and proud on the world stage – matured and strong.

There have been other national events that have pulled this nation and its people together as one.

- 1967 – Centennial Year
- 1972 – Team Canada and Paul Henderson in the Summit Series of Hockey
- 1981 - The Terry Fox Marathon of Hope.
- 2010 – The Winter Olympic Games

If I were to poll most of our people here this morning, and ask you, “What is the most exciting time of your life?” – most would recall the time of World War 2.

To those who lived in it – those were exciting times.

They were terrible, but exciting.

And most would say, “At least we had something to fight for that was worthy of the battle.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 94)

Do you have such a reason to stay in the battle that is greater than [yourself], greater than your comfort, greater than your satisfaction, greater than your desire? (Ogilvie 1984, p. 94)

We have become a people who want to be comforted rather than committed.

We have become a people who want to ‘sit back’ and not ‘set to’. 
We have become a people who would rather ‘pull out’ instead of ‘pitch in.’
We have become a people whose motto is “let George do it” rather than “altogether now, on three!”

Whatever happened to the raw-boned spirit of commitment that believes God is Lord and that we have been called to minister?
Where is that kind of spirit where we get to work instead of asking others to work for us?

The wonderful thing about **Psalm 55** is the point of change we notice in verse 22.

"22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”
(vs. 22)

The psalmist goes from “stop the world – I want to get off” to “let’s get on with it.”

“When our trust is ultimately [on God], and we dare to live out His will in the crisis of life, He will give us what we need.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 96)

Ogilvie states that” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 96)

God wants to give “there is a great difference between ‘the wings of a dove to fly away’ and ‘the wings of an eagle’ that give power to soar until we get perspective.” each one of us – no matter how young or old we may be – the strength and grace to face life as it is and receive His power to change it.
And we begin with ourselves.
AMEN.

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“God Is There to Meet You” “Ready or Not, I’ll Find You!”

Scripture Reading\(^{10}\): Psalm 139:1-24 NIV  For the director of music. A psalm of David.

1 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. 5 You hem me in - behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

19 If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! 20 They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? 22 I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Introduction
I’m here.
No, I’m over here.
Here I am.

As a child, did you ever play Hide-and-Go-Seek?
The ‘seeker’ would cover his eyes and count while the ‘hider’ or ‘hiders’ would scurry away, trying to find such a good spot that the ‘seeker’ would be unable to find him without a voice finally taunting, “you’re getting warmer.”

“No, you are really cold – that’s not where I am.”
“I’m over here.”
“No, there I am.”

\(^{10}\) All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
If the ‘hider’ was really creative at finding a hiding spot, the seeker could spend quite a long time trying to find him.

But David is not playing Hide and Seek with his Lord.

“Where can I run from You? You are everywhere! I cannot hide from You!”

(Psalm 139:7, my paraphrase).

Such is the setting for Psalm 139.

David has once again been falsely accused by people and he, once again, is driven to a profound time of prayer.

In communion with God, he discovers two powerful aspects of God’s nature – His omniscience and His omnipresence. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 198)

God knew all about him, knew his thoughts, his fears, his dreams, his failures and his successes – and there was no place he could go on the face of the earth, or into the universe or under the depths of the sea – there was nowhere to hide, because God was already there!

Remember Jonah?
He tried to run away from God.
His task was to be a missionary to the Ninevites, arch enemies of the people of Israel.
He didn’t want to do it.
So he ran away in the opposite direction.

You know the story.
Sometimes God uses extraordinary measures to get our attention.
This time, Jonah found himself in the stomach of a huge fish,. . . and for three days and nights, God has his undivided attention as Jonah wrestled with God’s task for him. (Jonah 2:1-10)

Are you playing Hide and Seek with God today?
What are you running from?
Who are you running from?
Where are you going?
What do you hope to find when you get there?

At some point in our lives, we have tried to escape both God’s judgment and therefore, His love. At some point in our lives, we, as Christians, may have thought and acted like people who were seeking to flee from God’s seeing and knowing eye. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 198)

Here is a sobering thought: wherever I plan to go, God is already there to meet me.
Whatever I plan to do, God already knows both the plan . . . and the outcome.
Whatever I am thinking about another person does not escape God’s knowledge of me.

If we were to carefully consider the implications of those thoughts and ideas, would our choices be different?
Would we be more careful about our speech and our thoughts?
Would we act more and talk less?
Would our lives be different if we truly thought about the fact that God is all-knowing, all-seeing and all-present? Would we as Christians, if we truly believed that God was everywhere, knew everything, saw all that we did, – would we live life differently?

I read an article recently. It was called “Winging it.” It was a bit disturbing, not because the author was talking about ‘them’ – he was talking about ‘us’. We know that an atheist is someone who denies the existence of God, who denies the divine attributes of God and because of that unbelief, they neither honour Him as God nor give thanks to Him. And we believe that the wrath of God will judge them.

But here’s the disturbing part: Paul says failure to honour God or give thanks is a symptom of that unbelief. (Romans 1:18-21) The author suggests that we, as Christians, often lack the same quality. We live in a ‘have’ nation. We have food, shelter, a bank account, fairly good health, . . . and if we don’t, we have Health Care. We have comfort, security, friends, family. We witness God’s divine nature and eternal power and yet – we are not grateful. We are not thankful for what we have. We want more. This lack of belief in the divine nature of God puts us in the category of the practical atheist. We say we love God; but way too many times we live or feel or act as if He is not there, He does not exist. (Smith, 2011)

“Lord, you have examined me and You know all about me. You know thoroughly everything I do. Where can I run from You? You made me and all the days planned for me were written in Your book before I was born!” (Psalm 139:1, 3b, 7b, 13, 16b NCV)

If, in the daily activities of our lives, we truly believed that God was all-seeing, all-knowing, all-present – would we live our lives differently? Should we live our lives differently?

The fact that God knows all and is everywhere should be the basis of hope, not just for today, but for the future as well. Wherever we go, whomever we meet, God is already there waiting for us. He not only comes to us in times of need or crises, He also goes before us to prepare the way.

Should that knowledge change how we live our daily lives?
Jesus says this:

“... you cannot serve both God and worldly riches. Don’t worry about ‘stuff’. The thing you [should] want most is God’s kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you. Don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will bring its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:24b, 33-34 NCV)

Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to move forward under the watchful eye of our Saviour, expectantly anticipating what He has drafted in His building plan for our lives. In order to do that, however, we must, as did the Psalmist, experience progressive steps towards arriving at an unlimited, unwavering trust in the God of [both the present] and the future. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 199)

1. I Know You

“O Lord, you have examined me and know all about me. You know when I sit down and when I get up. You know my thoughts before I think them. You know where I go and where I lie down. You know, thoroughly everything I do. Even before I say a word, You already know it. Your knowledge is amazing to me; it is more than I can understand.” (vv. 1-6)

Imagine what it would be like for somebody to know everything about you. Have you ever said this: "Nobody really knows me . . . nobody understands me . . . nobody listens to me."

When someone asks how we're doing, we say, "fine."

Inside we may be thinking, "The kids are driving me crazy; my boss is bugging me; my husband doesn't understand me; I can't take any more", . . . but we say, "I'm doing fine."

And we smile and continue on.

We may secretly think that it would be great to have someone to truly understand us. Have you ever considered the implications of that?

Such a person would have access to every thought, every action, and every mistake in your life. There would be no secrets!

Your life would really be an open book!

“O Lord, you have examined me and You know all about me” . . . all the secrets, all the motives of my actions, all the unclean thoughts of my mind, all the blasphemous words of my mouth.

You know the ingratitude of my heart!

Sometimes we have this idea that we have to pray and pray and pray some more to get God’s attention, and then we have to present our case in such a way that He will help us and give us what we want.

Our strenuous religion becomes one of trying to involve God in our needs and opportunities. We may think of God as removed,
aloof, not particularly interested in the ordinary details of our life.

We tend to treat God as a consultant, someone we call in to help us when we have exhausted all of our own resources.

We forget that God is in charge of our lives; that we are employed by Him rather than He by us! We cannot call God into any area; he is already there! (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 200)

He already knows what we are thinking.

He already knows what we need!

God knows no one thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything, he is never surprised, he is never amazed.

He never wonders about anything, nor does he seek information or ask questions (except when drawing people out for their own good).

God can make the best decisions because he has all the facts. God knows all the possible outcomes, and all the possible effects. God knows how everything fits together. God perfectly and eternally knows all things which can be known – past, present, and future.

God required no forums, committees, consultants, engineers or rocket scientists when he made the heavens and the earth.

There were no psychologists, counsellors or guru’s to show him the path of understanding.

With God, there is no computer required to keep track of the names and numbers of stars, no calculators for the quantum physics equations – God didn’t require any of these – he KNEW ALL THINGS!

In God, knowledge finds its completeness. (Uren, 2000)

2. I See You

“Where can I go to get away from Your Spirit? Where can I run from You? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; If I lie down in the grave, You are there. If I rise with the sun in the east and settle in the west, You are there. If I say that darkness will hide me . . . darkness and light are the same to You.” (vv. 7-12)

Maybe having someone know all about us would not be ideal. Maybe we would begin to feel smothered. Maybe we would want to run away and hide from them. “I need some space.” “I need to clear my head,
find myself,
figure it out.”
Whatever our reason, sometimes we feel like running away and hiding from all of the
challenges and responsibilities of life.
Sometimes we try to get away from God and shield ourselves for awhile.
Where can we go to get away from the all-seeing eye of God?

We purchased a GPS – a Tom-Tom – a Global Positioning System so that, when we are
travelling we would know where we are going.
Remember when you used a map!
Or a TripTik!
All new vehicles now come equipped with such a ‘luxury.’
You can type in any location in the world, and the technology of this little computer will plan
the most direct route to your destination.
If you miss a turn, or defy the directions, you will be instructed to ‘turn around’ or it will
‘recalibrate’ to accommodate your decision.
Every road and street and body of water is recorded on this thing, so that the driver is always
aware of his surroundings.
As long as the thing is turned on, and the route is planned, you cannot get away from the
input of the voice.

Where can we go to get away from God?
North?
South?
East?
West?
God has it covered.

Whether we are flying high in the sky,
scuba diving deep in the ocean,
biking on a trail,
hiking through a bush,
skiing down a mountain – whether it is night or day,
whether we are asleep or awake,
whether we are working or playing,
regardless of the continent in which we live, God is there!
“Divine presence means God’s personal control. God monitors not only the
psalmist but the whole world, so that nowhere in God’s world could anyone go

God sees you – He sees you as much as if there were nobody else in the world for Him to
look at, but you.
This very moment, God sees you!
God sees you entirely.
He is not put off by your appearance, He looks within.
God sees you constantly.
God sees you where ever you are – in public or private,
and at all times.
God sees you supremely.

God sees you: and if He can see you, surely He can hear you. Perhaps you cannot say a word when you pray. God understands. He knows the desire, when words stagger under the weight of it; He knows the wish when language fails to express it.

When you have doubts, anxieties, and fears, you are not alone in the world; there is at least one eye regarding you; there is one hand that is ready to assist you.

God can see your cares, your troubles, and your anxieties and He wants to comfort you.

When you sin, when you disobey the spiritual laws of God, wherever you are, whatever you do, God’s eyes are watching you. He is an eye witness to the choices you make, the places you go, the things you do. (Uren, 2000)

Are you trying to run and hide from God? Do you think that you have messed up your life so badly that He could never ever forgive you? Do you think that you are so insignificant that God does not know where you are? Or particularly care? Then listen to this:

3. I Made You

“You made my whole being; you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. You saw me before I was formed. You planned out my days before I was even born! If I could count the number of times You think about me, they would be more than all the grains of sand, they are so many!” (vv. 13-18)

Many years ago, when Stephanie and Ryan were very young, and money was very scarce, I decided that I would make Christmas presents for the kids. It would save money and it would be ‘made with love.’ So I checked out many craft magazines, and finally found a pattern for an adorable little elf-type of doll. “I can make that!”

So, after the kids were in bed, I would pull out the old Singer sewing machine and begin my project. I was able to sew the body together. Two arms, two hands, two legs,
two feet,
one body,
one head.
I made cute little vests and shorts for this “gift of love”.

But something went horribly wrong when I began to create the face – it was not ‘amazing and wonderful’.
It was frightening and foreboding.
The kids were terrified of this thing . . . this gift, sitting under the Christmas tree, staring at them with blank eyes and a disfigured face.

“I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (139:14)

There is no more wonderful work of God in the whole universe than a human being. Each human body has trillions of cells falling into some five classifications. Recent research into the mysteries of the DNA – the effective element in conception – has added almost incredible dimensions to the wonder which men already had identified, but which is a million times more wonderful than anyone ever dreamed it was until recent discoveries by such noted medical doctors as Dr. Elton Stubblefield, a director of such research at the M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston.

He recently declared in a public address that each cell (and, remember there are trillions of them) at the moment of conception is supplied with a library of one quarter of a million words commanding that cell exactly how many times to multiply, and when to die. That is the reason one’s nose is not as long as that of an elephant or one’s neck is not as long as that of a giraffe! In view of this knowledge – and it is only beginning to be unravelled and deciphered – one must admit that the words that stand at the head of these two paragraphs in Psalm 139:14 are the greatest understatement on earth. (Coffman, 1983-1999)

God has made us . . . in His image . . . to love, serve and glorify Him.
So,
“I will praise you because You made me in an amazing and wonderful way . . . You think about me all the time . . . Even when I wake up in the morning I am still with You!” (vv.14, 17, 18b)

God comprehends our thoughts; He observes our actions; He understands the unique design of each of us. As the psalmist comprehends this awareness of the unfathomable character of God, the awesomeness of God, His all-knowing, all-seeing, all-present power, his thoughts turn to those who ‘hate God.’ Those who “say evil things about God, . . . who use His name thoughtlessly.” (vv.19-22)

He rages against their indifference,
their arrogant attitudes,
and their deceit.
His anger burns against those who are God’s enemies.

On one hand, the Psalmist cannot tolerate those who defy the divine attributes of God.
On the other hand, he cries out:
   “Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . Test me . . . Know my nervous
   thoughts . . . See if there is anything bad in me.” (v. 23)

David's plea is that God may deliver him from the danger of committing sins which are
unknown to him,
sinful deeds which to the psalmist might not appear as sins,
sin of which he himself is unaware.
The truth must be that all people are guilty of this type of sin. (Coffman, 1983-1999)

And lead me in the way everlasting, the way of God, the way of the righteous, which stands
forever and shall not perish. (v. 24)

Are you hiding behind destructive habits?
Are you running away from God?
Do you feel unworthy of God’s grace and forgiving love?

I invite you to allow God to “search your heart” and see if there is anything there that is a
stumbling block, a hindrance to an intimate relationship with Him.
Let Him take charge of your life.
Let Him lead you.
Live with anticipation and delight, expecting God to be there, both in good and bad situations,
watching you,
   waiting for you,
   wanting to bless you.

I know you.
I see you.
I made you.
I love you.
I forgive you.
   “Lord, lead me on the road to everlasting life.” (v. 24)

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“Falling Into Greatness”

Scripture Reading¹¹: Psalm 145:1-21 NIV  A psalm of praise. Of David

1 I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.
2 Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.
3 Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. ⁴ One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. ⁵ They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. ⁶ They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. ⁷ They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. ⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. ⁹ The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. ¹⁰ All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. ¹¹ They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, ¹² so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. ¹⁴ The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. ¹⁶ You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. ¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. ¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. ¹⁹ He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. ²⁰ The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. ²¹ My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

Introduction

[ interview with Mr. Len Smith who served as a paratrooper with the Canadian Army. ]

1. Len, I understand that you were trained as a paratrooper while you were a member of the military, is that right?
2. How many jumps did you make as a paratrooper?
3. How high were you when you made those jumps?
4. Did you immediately go up in a plane and jump out – or was there a process involved before you made any of those jumps?
5. What did that process entail?
6. Wasn’t it risky?
7. Thanks, Len, for telling us your story!

One of the things that Len learned in ‘jump school’ was that the result of falling and being caught by the parachute, allowing him to drift to earth, increased his confidence and daring. Each jump made him able to be more at ease with the mission,

¹¹ All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
the team work,
the final goal.

The same can be said of life.
I know from my own experience because I have fallen often.
I think we all have.
Now, I’m not talking about losing our balance or tripping and ending up flat on our backs in a physical sense.
I’m talking about falling – or maybe it would be better understood as ‘failing’ in the spiritual sense,
in the maturing sense – the ‘growing up’ part of life.
But who hasn’t fallen at some time or another?

But the one thing I have learned in my own Christian walk is this: just like the parachute, the Lord catches me when I fall.
I am caught up in His everlasting arms and gently lowered back onto my feet.
And it is in these times that I have made the wonderful discovery that God is truly great; that He is the forgiving Lord whose love
and grace
and mercy never fail.
And I realize that, if I had never fallen flat on my face, I would never know the absolute reliability of His grace.
God is always there when I fall.

And the amazing truth that comes out of that is this: the more confident I am that God is always with me
and supporting me
and loving me
and caring for me, the less I am afraid of failure.
And the less I am afraid of failure, the less I actually fail!
I am learning how to fall into greatness. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 207)

The phrase ‘falling into greatness’ seems rather contradictory, doesn’t it?
As Lloyd Ogilvie states:
“*What I’ve learned about falling successfully is that in times of inadequacy, I experience how great the Lord is. In times of ease or triumph I can readily acknowledge His glory with gratitude, but when life goes bump, I realize the greatness of His gracious heart.*” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 208)

The apostle Paul knew what falling into greatness was all about.
When things were not going well for Paul,
when he seemed to be at the end of his rope,
when all he wanted to do was say, “stop the world – I want to get off” – God said to him:
“... *My favor and loving-kindness and mercy is sufficient against any danger and enables you to bear the trouble manfully; for My strength and power are made perfect and show themselves most effective in your weakness. Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ may rest upon me! So for the sake of Christ, I am well pleased and*
take pleasure in infirmities, insults, hardships, persecutions, perplexities and
distresses; for when I am weak in human strength, then am I truly strong in divine
strength.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 The Amplified Bible)

And again, toward the end of his life, Paul stated:

“Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily
whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with
everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is
with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. *For I can do everything with
the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.*” (Philippians 4:11-13 NLT)

“There are aspects of the Lord’s nature we never experience until we are forced to
face our inadequacy, insufficiency, and inability. We trip and fall in our mistakes,
poor decisions, or when we experience a breakdown in communication with people
we love. Sometimes we stumble in our careers or in accomplishing our goals.”
(Ogilvie 1984, p. 208)

But in all probability, the most painful falls have to do with our relationship with God.
We tell Him that we love Him, *YET* we do not allow Him to have total access to our minds and
hearts.
We fall out of that deep relationship with Him that we had experienced when we first became
Christians.
Praying becomes a duty.
Service becomes a drudge.
Closeness now becomes distant.

We begin to feel lost and abandoned.
When life feels like it is coming apart at the seams, we cry out for help – but that cry sticks like
a dry bone in our throats.
We wonder what right we even have or how God would even want to help us when we have
turned our backs on Him so often.
Can His love reach out to people like us?

It is at this point that we fall into greatness.
God’s greatness!
And . . . the possibility of our own greatness through Him.
We are blown away by the astounding love – the depth,
the height,
the breadth,
the width – the limitless dimensions of the love of God.
Our falls – our failures – do not, . . . no . . . cannot change His faithfulness.
His love is ‘fail-safe.’

And the assurance that He will always be there – no matter the risks,
no matter the difficulties,
no matter the outcome – creates within us a new freedom for what is before us.
“We become people who can risk doing His will!”
We become people who know that – when we fall – He will catch us and put us back on our
feet again, and give us a new beginning. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 209)
That greatness in what we can do “with the help of Christ who gives [us] the strength [we] need” (Philippians 4:13 NLT) is demonstrated in compassionate, accepting love for others who, themselves, fall.

“We become partners with the Lord in catching people who fall in their mistakes, failures, and sins.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 209)

Well, that is exactly what David is expressing here in Psalm 145.

“Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.”

(vs 3-7)

This is David’s song of praise for the greatness and the goodness and the grandeur of God.

David looks around him and is in awe of all the things God has done. He recognizes the wonder of God’s creation. He recalls the mighty acts of God’s greatness. He realizes the grandeur of God’s glory. And he rests in the goodness of God’s glory.

And, in an instant, David’s mind shifts from what God has done to who God is. He shares from his own experience.

We read it in verses 8-9.

“8The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.
9The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”

It is truly wonderful what the Lord has done.
It is truly wonderful; it is truly wonderful.
It is truly wonderful what the Lord has done,
Glory to His name!

Doesn’t that make you feel like – like, . . . doing whatever it is you feel like doing right now? How do we know how to feel like this? How did David know the reality of God’s love?

From experience!

Just like Len who learned that the parachute holds up all those who fall out of airplanes, David learned that:

“The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.”

(vs 14)

A little word study here.
In Hebrew, upholds is a predicate – that is a word or phrase that states or asserts the quality of something or someone.
It explains the nature or characteristic of God. That is who God is – that is His name: “The Lord upholds.”

God – by His very nature – supports those who fall in their walk of life. He holds them up – He “upholds all those who fall.” You will notice that this metaphor also suggests that God also “lifts up all who are bowed down.”

We fall because of what we do with life. We are bowed down because of what life does to us. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 210) We either fall down or are pushed down – either way, the Lord is there to help us with a kind of love we never, ever thought possible.

I believe that the profound part of this psalm is the message that the One who is praised as King of all creation,

who is adored in His majesty, grandeur and goodness,

who is acknowledged for His providential care and intervening acts of power – is known and loved personally as He “upholds those who fall.”

Only someone who has gone through the bruises and bumps of falls would know that. In our deepest pain, we discover that God is gracious and kind. In our lowest point, we discover that God has a special quality of love. We are able to experience Him – to the fullest – when we have lost hope or support is nowhere else to be found.

We all totter and sway in our relationship with God. We all tumble and stumble in our relationship with others. We all trip and slip in our relationship with ourselves. We also fail in our mission to live out our faith in front of our family members, our friends, our community, our church. All too often we make a grab for the steering wheel and take over control of our own lives and refuse to continue seeking and doing God’s will. We get into this pattern of “doing it my way” and miss out on the power that God has in store for us.

And the cycle begins: First, we make a mess of things. Then, once we are in the middle of this huge mess, we get down on ourselves. We begin to think negative thoughts, and we cancel out the very special and unique creation that is our own selves – the special and unique creation that God meant us to be. “We forget that we are the loved and forgiven sons and daughters of a compassionate Father.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 211)

There is a spill-over effect that happens. Once, we become down on ourselves – and it sticks – then we begin to get down on others – negative and critical about other people.
And now, more than ever, is the time when we need to fall into the greatness of God. Fear of failure opens us up to actual failure. We need to stop the cycle. We need to get back on track. Confession of our failures – our falls – opens us up to receive from the great heart of God, His compassion, mercy and goodness. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 211)

These aspects of the character heart of God are seen in our Lord, Jesus Christ. They are offered to us through the cross. Calvary becomes a fortress, a place of safety and security. When we fall, Calvary our source of hope in the very middle of our fears, our remorse, our shame.

“The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to raise us out of the graves of our failures. The risen, reigning Christ, God with us, stoops to us when we are beaten and depressed and says, “You are forgiven. Let me help you back to your feet. Put your hand in Mine. Let Me help you walk and run again.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 211)

When we are weighed down by the stresses and the struggles that life brings us, we are blessed with the opportunity of experiencing God’s love mercy and goodness yet again, and getting our standing back as one who is chosen, called and cherished. We belong to the Lord!

“Now to Him Who is able to keep you without stumbling or slipping or falling, and to present you blameless and faultless before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy and with unspeakable, ecstatic delight -- To the one only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be splendor, majesty, might and dominion, and power and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25 The Amplified Bible)

Bibliography
Welcome

Call to Worship Psalm 150:1-2 GOD’S WORD
1 Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy place. Praise him in his mighty heavens.
2 Praise him for his mighty acts. Praise him for his immense greatness.

Invocation

Choruses Let There Be Praise Words and music by Dick Tunney / Melodie Tunney

Let there be praise, let there be joy in our hearts
Sing to the Lord, give Him the glory
Let there be praise, let there be joy in our hearts
Forevermore let His love fill the air and let there be praise

He inhabits the praise of His people and dwells deep within
The peace that He gives none can equal, His love it knows no end
So lift your voices with gladness sing, proclaim through all the earth
That Jesus Christ is King

When the Spirit of God is within us, we will overcome
In our weakness His strength will defend us when His praise is on our tongue
So lift your voices with gladness sing, proclaim through all the earth
That Jesus Christ is King

We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise Words and music by Kirk Dearman

We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord
We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord
And we offer up to You, the sacrifices of thanksgiving
And we offer up to You, the sacrifices of joy (repeat x 2)

Announcements

Our Worship in Giving of God’s Tithes and Our Offerings

Introduction to the Pilgrimage of Praise
Throughout these summer months, we have been on a spiritual pilgrimage with the Psalmist as he made his way to the Temple, to the house of God.
Every fibre of his being cried out for the presence of God.

12 All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.
13 Scriptures in responsive readings may be compiled from:
   - GOD’S WORD
   - New Century Version (NCV)
   - New International Version (NIV)
   - New Living Translation (NLT)
   - The Amplified Bible
   - The MESSAGE
“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:2)

Along the way, life happened.

“Why are you so downcast, my soul? Why so disturbed within me?” (Psalm 42:5)

Discouragement, challenges, health issues, spiritual warfare, financial crises, or emotional turmoil . . . the list goes on.

On our spiritual pilgrimage, life can wear us down, darken our hearts, create and cast doubts, bring suffering.

Just as the psalmist cried out to God in his pain: “. . . why have you forgotten me?” (Psalm 42:9), so we, also, have experienced times in our lives when we have felt alone, uncared for, anxious, and fearful of the ‘tomorrows’ of our lives.

**Responsive Reading**

*Psalm 42 (taken from the Scottish Psalter)*

As the hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for You, O God

*My soul does thirst for the living God*

*When shall I come to see Your face?*

*My tears have fed me day and night while men have said, "Where is your God?"

But I recall as my soul pours dry the days of praise within Your house

*Why do I mourn and toil within when it is mine to hope in God?*

*I shall again sing praise to Him*

*He is my help, He is my God*

*My Jesus died to give me life*

*His body broke to make me whole*

*Now darkness holds no fear for me*

*I have His love to light my soul*

**Special Music**

*Praise the Lord*

**The Pilgrimage of Praise** (continues)

But even in the dark night of the soul, the pilgrim cries out:

“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in times of trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way, or the mountains fall into the sea, or the waters roar and foam.” (Psalm 46:1-3)
A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing
Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe
His craft and pow'r are great and armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing
Dost ask who that may be; Christ Jesus it is He
Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same
And He must win the battle

No strength of ours can match his might, we would be lost rejected
But now a champion comes to fight whom God Himself elected
You ask who this may be; the Lord of hosts is He
Christ Jesus mighty Lord, God's only Son adored
He holds the field victorious

A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon
He helps us free from ev'ry need that hath us now o'ertaken
The old evil foe now means deadly woe
Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight
On earth is not his equal

The LORD Almighty is With Us Psalm 46:7-8; 10-11

The LORD Almighty is here among us;
The God of Israel is our defender, our stronghold.

Come, see the glorious things that our God does.
Let go of your concerns! Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be supreme and exalted over all the nations.
I will be honored throughout the world.

The LORD Almighty is here among us;
The God of Israel is our defender, our stronghold.

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)
And so our spiritual pilgrimage continues.

Psalm 1 begins with a warning to the pilgrim – a warning not to become complacent. We began our series by understanding the downward spiral if we neglect our spiritual well-being.

“Blessed is the man, woman, boy or girl who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.” (Psalm 1:1)

Walking with the ungodly influences our attitudes, but standing with sinners affects our behaviour.
We become like the people with whom we associate.
Cynicism starts with our thoughts, is expressed by our attitudes, and becomes a part of our being. The downward spiral continues.

We have begun to “walk with the ungodly” and their thoughts and attitudes have infected ours; we then “stand with sinners” who have no interest in God, but we finally “sit with the scornful” – scoffers, those who mock God. This is subtle.

At the heart of scorn is pride. Pride which elevates itself above God, questions His ways, challenges our faith and erodes our relationship with God.

A spiritual battle rages: the ways of the wicked vs. the ways of the righteous. The “wicked are like chaff, blown away in the wind” (Psalm 1:4); the righteous, on the other hand, is “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season.” (Psalm 1:3)

The pilgrim is promised that “the Lord watches over the righteous but the wicked shall perish.” (Psalm 1:6)

The age old battle of ‘good’ versus ‘evil.’ ‘Right’ versus ‘wrong’. ‘Righteous’ versus ‘wicked’.

The power of God versus the influence of Satan in a world that struggles with the consequences of sin because of our disobedience to God.

**Responsive Reading**

**Whom Have I In Heaven, But You?** Mk 6:31; Ps 46:1; 73:23-26, 28a

Jesus said, "Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest."

*Let go of your concerns and be still, and recognize and understand that I am God.*

Yet I am always with You. You hold me by my right hand.

*You will lead me by telling me what I should do. And after this, You will bring me into shining greatness.*

Whom have I in heaven but You?

*I want nothing more on earth, but You.*

My body and my heart may grow weak, but God is the strength of my heart and all I need forever.

*It is good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my safe place.*

**Chorus**

**Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus**

Words and music by Helen H. Lemmel

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus*  
*Look full in His wonderful face*
And the things of earth
Will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

Pastoral Prayer

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)
Even when, intellectually, we know that God watches over us, our emotions sometimes control our actions.

“My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught. My heart is in anguish within me; fear and trembling have beset me” O, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest!” (Psalm 55:2, 4-6)

Stop the world, I want to get off!
Have you ever felt this way before?
We have all felt that way at one time or another.
Maybe you feel that way right now – that overwhelming desire just to escape – to get out from under that difficult, painful, upsetting, disappointing, frustrating circumstance or relationship.
Maybe you believe that life for you has no meaning, makes no sense, provides no sense of worth.
Maybe you feel that you are drowning in hopelessness.
Maybe you feel that, well . . . what is the use of going on?
Why is this happening?
Why?

What do you do when you feel there is no escape?
What do you do when life flashes you a “No Exit” sign?
What do you do when you just want to get away from it all – yet God seems to call you back to the fray?
What do you do?

Responsive Reading Lord, Get Me Out of This Psalm 55:6; Jonah 4:8; Job 3:2, 20-21; Psalm 34:19; John 12:27; Hebrews 2:17-18

"Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.
And as the sun grew hot, God sent a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. "Death is certainly better than this!" he exclaimed.

"Why give light to one in misery and life to those who find it so bitter, to those who long for death but it never comes- though they dig for it more than for buried treasure?
The righteous face many troubles, but the LORD rescues them from each and every one.
Now my soul is troubled and distressed, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour of trial and agony? But it was for this very purpose that I have come to this hour that I might undergo it.

Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to be in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God.

He then could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.

Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted.

Hymn

Jesus Will Walk With Me

Words and music by Haldor Lillenas

Jesus will walk with me down thro’ the valley;
Jesus will walk with me over the plain.
When in the shadow or when in the sunshine,
If He goes with me I shall not complain.

Jesus will walk with me.
He will talk with me; He will walk with me.
In joy or in sorrow, today and tomorrow,
I know He will walk with me.

Jesus will walk with me when I am tempted,
Giving me strength as my need may demand.
When in affliction His presence is near me;
I am upheld by His Almighty hand.

Jesus will walk with me, guarding me ever,
Giving me vict'ry thro' storm and thro' strife.
He is my Comforter, Counselor, Leader,
Over the uneven journey of life.

Jesus will walk with me in life's fair morning,
And when the shadows of evening must come.
Living or dying, He will not forsake me.
Jesus will walk with me all the way home.

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)

In the dark night of the heart, when the enemy seems to be lurking in the shadows,
threatening to deceive us,
threatening to destroy us,
challenging the very fibre of our being, the pilgrim calls to his Lord, “Hear, O Lord, my righteous plea; listen to my cry.” (Psalm 17:1)

David desired to be a man of integrity before God.
So he takes his case to the Heavenly Supreme Court: “O Lord, hear my righteous plea.” (Psalm 17:1a)

His motives are pure; his prayer “does not rise from deceitful lips.” (Psalm 17:1b)
He invites God to “probe his heart and examine him” because David is confident that God “will find nothing” in his words or in his deeds that is sinful.
“I have resolved with my mouth not to sin.” (Psalm 17:3b)
“My feet have not slipped.” (Psalm 17:5)
On your spiritual pilgrimage, are there times when you feel misrepresented . . . misunderstood . . . when you feel attacked, but you know in your heart that you are innocent?
The pilgrim calls upon the Lord again to protect him from the arrows of false accusations and hurt and revenge: “Show the wonder of your great love; keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadows of Your wings.” (Psalm 17:7-9)

Think about how that applies to us when the hurts and accusations of life threaten to destroy us.
We are the apple of God’s eye.
He is looking at us;
   He is caring for us;
   He will not forsake us.
His unqualified love heals our hurts.
His unlimited grace pours over our wounded spirits.
We are reflected in God’s eye, not as the person we’ve been, but as the miracle we can become. (Ogilvie, 1984, p. 45)

Responsive Reading Assurance Heb 10:22a; 2 Tim 2:1b, 1:12b; Heb 4:16; 1 Jn 5:14-15, 4:16; Ps 91:1-4a; 84:1
Let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him.
Be strong in the grace we have in Christ Jesus.
I know the one in whom I trust, and I am convinced that he is able to protect what he had entrusted to me until that day.
So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.
We are confident that God listens to us if we ask for anything in line with his will.
We know that he listens to our requests. So we know that we already have what we ask him for.
And so we know the love that God has for us, and we trust that love.
Whoever lives under the shelter of the Most High will remain in the shadow of the Almighty.
This I declare of the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I am trusting him.
He will rescue you from every trap and protect you from the fatal plague.
He will shield you with his wings and shelter you with his feathers.
The LORD God is like a sun and shield; He gives us grace and glory. No good thing will the LORD withhold from those who do what is right.

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)
What is the purpose of your pilgrimage?
Maybe your purpose in life is survival, just making it through today because tomorrow is going to throw another monkey-wrench at you.
Or maybe it is security.
Or freedom from worry.
Or maybe your purpose is happiness, whatever that may mean to you. 
Or excellent health.
Maybe your purpose in life is a successful career or lots of money, 
or a big house, 
or a great vacation to some exotic spot.

The purpose of this pilgrimage was a spiritual journey into the very presence of God. 
On our journey, we may travel through the desert of spiritual dryness; 
we may flounder in the valleys of despair or sorrow or regret; but always, the pilgrim continues. 
He does not look backward. 
He encourages those around him to come with him, to 
“come before the Lord with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song” because “he is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.” (Psalm 95:2, 6-7)

Knowing that He, Himself has had desert moments and valley moments, 
and false accusation moments 
and moments when it seemed as if the stuff of life would swallow him, yet, He challenges others not to “harden their hearts if you hear the voice of God calling to you.” (Psalm 95:8)

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you; who have set their hearts upon pilgrimage.” (Psalm 84:5) 
Blessed is the person who is so focused on God – that even in the dry, 
thirsty, 
barren times of their lives – they can see springs in the desert. 
They can see parched valleys turned into oases and barren slopes clothed with flowers, whether it rains or not. 
Why? 
Because their strength comes from God. 
Blessings are poured down wherever the pilgrim goes, because they are looking to God whose presence is in Zion. (see Psalm 84:6-7)

This pilgrimage has taken us out of the hot, 
dry, 
tiresome, 
heart-wrenching valleys of pain, 
disappointment, 
strife, 
loneliness, 
and sickness into the grand and glorious presence of Yahweh – Almighty God. 
And today is the day. 
This is the day of celebration. 
This is the day of worship. 
This is the day of thanksgiving. 
This is a great day!

**Chorus**

This Is the Day
This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord hath made
That the Lord hath made
We will rejoice, we will rejoice
And be glad in it
And be glad in it
This is the day that the Lord hath made
We will rejoice and be glad in it
This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord hath made

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)
Feel the relief of the pilgrim as he reflects on God’s grace and mercy.

“Lord, you have searched me; you know my heart; you know my thoughts;
you know where I am at any time of the day or night. Your right hand holds
me fast.” (Psalm 139:1-4)

If I were to count the number of times each day that God thinks about ME – they would
outnumber the grains of sand. (see Psalm 139:18)

God has made us – in His image – to love,
to serve
and to glorify Him.
So,

“I will praise you because You made me in an amazing and wonderful
way.” (Psalm 139:14)
“You think about me all the time.” (Psalm 139:17)
“Even when I wake up in the morning I am still with You!” (Psalm 139:18b)

On one hand, the Psalmist cannot tolerate those who defy the divine attributes of God.
On the other hand, he cries out:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious
thoughts.” (Psalm 139:23)

Are you hiding behind destructive habits?
Are you running away from God?
Do you feel unworthy of God’s grace and forgiving love?
I invite you to allow God to “search your heart, see if there is anything there that is a
stumbling block, a hindrance to an intimate relationship with Him.
Let Him take charge of your life.
Let Him lead you.

Live with anticipation and delight, expecting God to be there, both in good and bad situations,
watching you,
waiting for you,
wanting to bless you.
I know you.
I see you.
I made you.
I love you.
I forgive you.

“Lord . . . lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:24)

Responsive Reading God Is Always There Ps 139:12; Job 34:21-22; Jer 23:24; Ps 91:5-6. 9-10;
121:3, 5-7; 23:4

Even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you.

"For God carefully watches the way people live; he sees everything they do.
No darkness is thick enough to hide the wicked from his eyes.

Can anyone hide from me? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?"
asks the LORD.

Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor fear the dangers of the day, nor dread the plague that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your dwelling.

He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep.

The LORD himself watches over you! The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.

The sun will not hurt you by day, nor the moon at night.

The LORD keeps you from all evil and preserves your life.

Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)

As the pilgrim contemplates the wonder and majesty of God’s infinite love, he is overwhelmed by the fact that humanity is God’s crowning creation – that we are made in the image of God, and crowned with glory and honour. (see Psalm 8:5)

Our pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of service and stewardship – to God, to each other,

to this earth upon which we have been ‘planted’

“O Lord, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:9)

Chorus How Majestic Is Your Name

Words and music by Les Garrett

Oh Lord our Lord how majestic is
Your name in all the earth
Oh Lord our Lord how majestic is
Your name in all the earth

87
Oh Lord we praise Your name
Oh Lord we magnify Your name
Prince of Peace Mighty God
Oh Lord God Almighty

Great is the Lord
Words and music by Deborah D. Smith; Michael W. Smith

Great is the Lord, He is holy and just
By His power we trust in His love
Great is the Lord, He is faithful and true
By His mercy He proves He is love

Great is the Lord and worthy of glory
Great is the Lord and worthy of praise
Great is the Lord! Now lift up your voice
Now lift up your voice
Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!

Great is the Lord, He is holy and just
By His power we trust in His love
Great is the Lord, He is faithful and true
By His mercy He proves He is love

Great are You Lord and worthy of glory
Great are You Lord and worthy of praise
Great are You Lord; I lift up my voice
I lift up my voice
Great are You Lord! Great are You Lord!

The Pilgrimage of Praise (continues)

“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendour of Your majesty, and I will meditate on you wonderful works.” (Psalm 145:1, 3-5)

The pilgrim realizes that, in the driest, hardest, most dismal times of his journey, God . . .
- “is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger” (Psalm 145:9)
- “is rich in love” (Psalm 145:9)
- “is good and compassionate to all He has made” (Psalm 145:9)
- “is faithful to all His promises” (Psalm 145:13)
- “upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down” (Psalm 145:14)
- “is righteous in all his ways” (Psalm 145:17)
- “is near to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18)
- “watches over all who love Him” (Psalm 145:20)
- and “hears the cry of those who fear Him” (Psalm 145:19)

The Lord catches me when I fall.
I am caught up in His everlasting arms and gently lowered back onto my feet.
And it is in these times that I have made the wonderful discovery that God is truly great; that He is the forgiving Lord whose love and grace and mercy never fail. And I realize that, if I had never fallen flat on my face, I would never know the absolute reliability of His grace. God is always there when I fall.

And the amazing truth that comes out of that is this: the more confident I am that God is always with me and supporting me and loving and caring for me, the less I am afraid of failure. And the less I am afraid of failure, the less I actually fail! I am learning how to fall into greatness. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 207)

Regardless of where you are on your spiritual journey today, maybe you are not quite there yet, not quite ready to hand the reins of control over to God, who is waiting for you to come to Him, or come back to Him; maybe you are just beginning your personal walk with Christ, or maybe you have had an intimate relationship with Christ for a lifetime—wherever you are, like the pilgrim whose journey we have followed over the summer, I can say this:

“\textit{What I’ve learned about falling successfully is that in times of inadequacy, I experience how great the Lord is. In times of ease or triumph I can readily acknowledge His glory with gratitude, but when life goes bump, I realize the greatness of His gracious heart.”} (Ogilvie 1984, p. 208)

And now, more than ever, is the time when we need to fall into the greatness of God. Fear of failure opens us up to actual failure. We need to stop the cycle. We need to get back on track. Confession of our failures – our falls – opens us up to receive from the great heart of God, His compassion, mercy and goodness. (Ogilvie 1984, p. 211)

These aspects of the character heart of God are seen in our Lord, Jesus Christ. They are offered to us through the cross. Calvary becomes a fortress, a place of safety and security. When we fall, Calvary our source of hope in the very middle of our fears, our remorse, our shame.

“The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to raise us out of the graves of our failures. The risen, reigning Christ, God with us, stoops to us when we are beaten and depressed and says, “You are forgiven. Let me help you back to your feet. Put your hand in Mine. Let Me help you walk and run again.” (Ogilvie 1984, p. 211)

Because of life experiences, the pilgrim knows that God is reliable, faithful, compassionate
and worthy of all the praise we can give Him.

His presence surrounds us;
His grace and mercy uphold us;
His Spirit directs us.

Praise the Lord!

**Unison Reading**

Psalm 150:1-6 NIV

1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.
2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.
3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.
4 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

**Closing Song**

Lord of All

Words and music by Phill McHugh

Lord of all of the heights where faith can lift the trusting heart
Lord of all of the depths where fear would tear such faith apart
Lord of all of the nations, quick to anger, bearing arms
Lord of all of each child held by its mother safe from harm

Lord of all - of all seen and unseen things.
Of the universe that sings and calls You Lord of all
Lord of all of the power not to sin
You have always been and always will be Lord of all

Lord of all of the peace that we can draw with every breath
Lord of all of provision, for each need in life and death
Lord of all of the turning of the seasons and the earth
Lord of all of the love that purchased man a second birth

**Closing Prayer**

**Benediction**

"His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:3, 8 NRSV)

**Bibliography**


Lemmel, Helen H. *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*. Public Domain. C.C.L.I. Song # 15960.


