

Introduction: As we begin a series of three prayer-focused Thursdays in the month of September, we face many unknowns for the rest of the year: internationally and pandemically as well as spiritually. Our nation desperately needs to be given the grace of repentance, so that we would seek forgiveness for the many moral failings of our government and society. Our missionaries are greatly burdened and exhausted with many of their missions opportunities limited by disease and unrest in the nations where they serve.

So, we again turn to the confidence-building book of Psalms! May this week's notes on selected Psalms bring our heart and our faith much strength and confidence in God's persevering work of Creation, Providence and Redemption. Though many do not see His glory in our day, nor know our Savior, yet God's story in the Psalms is still our story – and we are being carried forward with the church of old into each unfolding part of God's plan for His Church!

Monday: read Psalm 104:1-28 and Isaiah 40:27-29. How firmly do the Psalms bring us back to the first principle of our faith, namely, our faith in God as our Creator. This is what the Psalmist celebrates in the first half of Psalm 104. Another passage that firmly brings to display the practical comfort of God as our Creator is Psalm 40, where Isaiah seeks to comfort Judah as they face exile to the Babylonians. Isaiah knows that this exile will prove so difficult as to prompt the despairing declaration: "Our way is hidden from the Lord." (Isaiah 40:27). But God corrects such despair by reminding Israel and us that He is the Creator who never grows tired of providing for His own people (Isaiah 40:28-29).

The lesson of creation is clearly identified by Dr. Sinclair Ferguson in his book, *'A Heart for God'*: "*The knowledge of God the Creator is the answer to our doubts and complaints... He has made everything, sustains everything, watches over everything. He does not diminish in energy as we do. He is the Creator! He will give us strength and power.*"

Tuesday: read Ephesians 4:30 & Psalm 104:29-30. We do not ask God to sporadically check on us. We ask instead that He constantly show His lovingkindness by visiting us every moment and throughout all our trials! Nor is this a selfish prayer, beyond what we should boldly expect to be answered. Jesus Himself prayed with thankfulness that "His Father was always with Him." Let us never be ashamed of constantly beating out a path to His throne as we cry out to Him morning and night for His help and for His presence. Most of all, let us give thanks that the *reason* our Savior Jesus ascended to God's right hand is so that He could pour out His Holy Spirit upon every believer so that *each of us would have the constant comfort and companionship of the Holy Spirit*. Think of it! The very same Holy Spirit by which the face of the earth is renewed in Psalm 104:30 lives in the bosom of every one of God's children!

Meditate and Pray: But you may object. *How can the Holy Spirit of the Holy God dwell in my sinful breast?* I grieve God so much on a daily basis! Well, Paul sternly commands us not to grieve the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 4:30. But take heart. The Spirit is only grieved because He loves us so much. We can only grieve those who love us. But the Spirit is committed to the long haul. He has sealed us "until the day of redemption", as a second look at Ephesians 4:30 shows. What a promise is contained in those words: "Sealed until the Great Day!" So we have daily access to God through this same Holy Spirit, and can be sure of finding help in our time of need. As the old Gospel hymn puts it, (# 631 in our hymn books):

*From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, a sure retreat;
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.*

*There is a place where Jesus sheds
The oil of gladness on our heads;
A place than all besides more sweet;
It is the blood bought mercy seat.*

*There is a scene where spirits blend,
Where friend holds fellowship with friend;
Though sundered far, by faith they meet
Around one common mercy seat.*

*Ah, whither could we flee for aid,
When tempted, desolate, dismayed,
Or how the hosts of hell defeat,
Had suffering saints no mercy-seat?*

Weds/Thurs: read Psalm 105:1-9; 105:42-45 & Psalm 106:1-5. What do you do when you are discouraged and overwhelmed by present circumstances? The Bible's answer, perhaps surprisingly, is not merely to give vent to your feelings of loneliness and perplexity at the events of your life. To be sure, there is a place for such emotional laments in the Psalms. But don't miss the *history* that also finds its place in this book. For example, Psalm 104 deals with the history of *creation*, proving that God cares for every part of His world – even the birds, the storks, the wild-goats and the rock-badgers in Psalm 104:17-18! Thus He cares for you, as worth “more than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31).

Psalm 105 goes on to record the history of God's *preparing a people for Himself* – calling Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be the ancestors of Israel, in covenant with Him as their God in Psalm 105:8-9 & 105:42-45. God's covenant, by the way, means His blood-sealed promise to be our God *even at the cost of blood sacrifice*. No covenant without blood-shedding. In this way, God was pointing forward to when His Son would pay that blood-price – by shedding His blood as “the blood of the covenant” (Matthew 26:28)!

In Psalm 106, we have the history of Israel *failing utterly to live up to God's holy calling*. Verses 6-46 are an unrelenting account of how God's people rebelled from the very start under Moses, and continued to sin all the way into the Promised Land, where their evil behavior earned them exile in enemy lands. They lost the Promised Land and were shipped off to Assyria and then Babylon – Psalm 106:41-43. We are not surprised to find the author of Psalm 106 so full of grief at this turn of events that he begs God to mercifully gather His people back from exile. “Save us, O Lord God, and gather us from the nations” is his cry in Psalm 106:47! In faith that God would hear this prayer, the Psalm ends with words of praise that *anticipate* when all of God's scattered people will be able to praise God together once again: “Let all the people say, Amen.”

Friday: read Psalm 106:1-6. What do you do when faced with the depravity of your own heart and the sinfulness of your deeds? This is a question for mature believers as well as new converts, since one of the marks of godliness is a growing sense of our sinfulness and of the completely demerited blessings of grace that we enjoy. Because of such a mature humility, the Psalmist includes himself in the corporate sin of verse 6. Yet even with his crushing sense of guilt, he also finds hope in asking the LORD to “remember him and help him” in the trials brought on him by his sin (Ps 106:4-5). In this way the Psalmist shows us what the godly say when they are *driven* to cry out to God to remember them and send His reviving Spirit to give the breath of life they need (Psalm 104:30). As God's sinful people, we simply have no one else to turn to for daily spiritual help! As Peter confessed to our Lord, when many false disciples abandoned Christ, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Meditate and Pray: “*Thank you, Lord Jesus, for sending your Holy Spirit to live in us and thereby imparting to us your very life beating in our breasts! Thank you that it is the Holy Spirit we worship as the “Lord and Giver of Life.” Thank you most of all that this Spirit at work in our lives, giving us light and life, is committed to staying within us! He will never leave, though many times we grieve Him by our sins and weaknesses (Eph 4:30). Through that same Holy Spirit, we beg you, Lord Jesus, be present every day in 2021. By your Holy Spirit, mold our lives into what you would have them to be! Through Christ we pray, Amen.*”

Sat/Sun: read Psalm 106:1-6 & Genesis 50:24. There is a second all-important prayer request which the Psalmist utters to God at the beginning of Psalm 106. Besides asking the LORD to “remember him” in the trials

brought on him by sin, (Ps 106:4), he pleads in that same verse for God to “help” (or a better translation would be to “visit” him with salvation).

What a great theology there is behind this biblical word “to visit”. Though it can be a terrible word, when describing God’s Divine “visitation” on a sinful land, people or even an unfaithful church, (see Exodus 20:5 – “*visiting*” the iniquity of the fathers upon the children), it is here used as a plea for God to draw near in order to help and to care for His sheep. It is also a word for God inquiring about what needs to be done in His people’s lives to restore them to His ways. Just as David the shepherd was sent by his father to “visit” or “inquire about” his brother’s welfare out in the wilderness, (1 Samuel 17:18), so God is a God who sends the needed shepherding care *by coming Himself to His hurting people!*

Most of all, then, the word “visit” means for God to “come to the aid” of His people, with such “visits” of God providing perpetual care for His own. Perhaps the most famous Old Testament promise that God will “visit” His people at their most needy time is Joseph’s promise in Genesis 50:24 that, after years of slavery in Egypt, God would come and take them back to the land of Canaan, taking care *even to carry Joseph’s bones back to the Land of Promise!*

The lesson? Just as God took care of even the smallest bone in Joseph’s body through the process of mummification, so He cared about each day in the life of even the lowliest Hebrew slave among His people! Or to put it in terms of Psalm 104:27ff: If even the lowliest part of creation looks to the Lord for its daily food... how much more we His people, created in His image! If He were to hide His face or remove His Spirit of loving care from us for even one day (Psalm 104:29-30), we would simply perish! But the reason we can praise Him “as long as we live” – even if we be strangers in a strange land like Egypt – is because His care for us is perpetual. “Morning by morning new mercies we see.”

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks that Christ Jesus’ whole earthly ministry, coupled with His resurrection and ascension to God’s right hand, is so that He can daily send the Holy Spirit to help us in our earthly pilgrimage! As the Puritan John Owen put it:

“Christ lives forever to send the Holy Spirit unto his disciples. Without this constant effect of the present mediatory life of Christ the being of the church would fail, it could not subsist one moment.” (Owen, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. V, p. 536).