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Daily Bible Guide – 40 Days of Faith, 2015

Monday, March 23 – Psalm 29

A psalm of David.

- ¹ Honor the LORD, you heavenly beings;
honor the LORD for his glory and strength.
- ² Honor the LORD for the glory of his name.
Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.
- ³ The voice of the LORD echoes above the sea.
The God of glory thunders.
The LORD thunders over the mighty sea.
- ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.
- ⁵ The voice of the LORD splits the mighty cedars;
the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ **He makes Lebanon’s mountains skip like a calf;
he makes Mount Hermon leap like a young wild ox.**
- ⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes
with bolts of lightning.
- ⁸ The voice of the LORD makes the barren wilderness quake;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ⁹ The voice of the LORD twists mighty oaks
and strips the forests bare.
In his Temple everyone shouts, “Glory!”
- ¹⁰ The LORD rules over the floodwaters.
The LORD reigns as king forever.
- ¹¹ The LORD gives his people strength.
The LORD blesses them with peace.

Points of Interest:

Cosmic Arena of the Day – *you heavenly beings*

This psalm begins with an arena or temple or throne room filled with gods or angels who are commanded to give respect to the LORD, the strongest and best and most beautiful god in the house. If this sounds like kind of an odd scene to you, it wouldn’t have been so strange for Hebrew

worshippers 2,500 to 3,000 years ago. Jewish worship of Yahweh (again, the Hebrew name that gets translated as LORD in English Bibles) emerged amidst Canaanite polytheism. At times the Hebrew Scriptures talk about Yahweh as the only true god, while other times He is acknowledged as supreme above all other gods and spiritual beings. In case we're confused about who's in charge, though, the other beings in the heavenly assembly get one collective mention. Yahweh gets eighteen, accompanied by impressive attributes.

Co-opted Pagan Worship of the Day – *the God of glory thunders*

Speaking of that Canaanite worship, scholars are pretty united in thinking that the Psalms ripped off some Canaanite worship here. (Bruegemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*) The only thing they disagree about is just about how much. Some think this was an actual song of praise to the Canaanite fertility god Baal, while others think that Hebrew writers just grabbed features of these Baal-worship tunes and incorporated them into this song. Regardless, all this thunder and lightning and natural destruction certainly evokes Baal-worship.

Rather than just chalking this up to the kind of plagiarism I used to see in my eighth grade English classes, I like to think something else is going on here. The worshippers of the one, true God co-opt some worship tunes from their neighbors to show them who's really in charge. This has actually been happening in the Bible since the very first page. Other folks talk about the gods creating amidst chaos, but the first chapter of the Bible says God brought order to chaos. Other folks talk about the gods of the sea or the sun or the moon, but Yahweh made all that stuff out of nothing in just a couple of days. The writers of the Bible were creative in their dedication to demonstrating that there's a single Master of the Universe, who is earth-shatteringly strong, and yet who is unimaginably loving and reaches out to people personally, calling us his kids and going to great lengths to help us flourish. And all *that* doesn't sound like Baal, or any other god, at all.

Image of the Day – *mountains skipping and leaping*

Just like all the other instances of repetition and parallelism we've seen, the now-skipping mountains of Lebanon and now-leaping Mount Hermon aren't two separate moments in magic geology; they're one and the same. Mount Hermon, now on the border of Lebanon and Syria, is the tallest mountain in the area, over 9,000 feet above sea level. (These are north of Jerusalem; the wilderness of Kadesh is a desert region well south of Jerusalem.) I think the idea in all this is that when God shows up, stuff happens.

Results of the Day – *strength and peace*

Life weights and you get more muscles. Run and you get those endorphins. Binge watch television on Netflix and you get a cool story to talk about behind those glassy eyes. Praise God and strength and peace. Good deal.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – Maybe it's just me, but I feel like this one takes a loud voice. Find somewhere you can really project, and give it your all. Come on, try it, I dare you.

For you – Find some sort of advertisement or other artifact of popular culture that you can

subversively repurpose to praise God. Perhaps it's God that really satisfies you, not that Snickers bar.

Tuesday, March 24 – Psalm 30

A psalm of David. A song for the dedication of the Temple.

¹ I will exalt you, LORD, for you rescued me.

You refused to let my enemies triumph over me.

² O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you restored my health.

³ You brought me up from the grave, O LORD.
You kept me from falling into the pit of death.

⁴ Sing to the LORD, all you godly ones!
Praise his holy name.

⁵ For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime!

**Weeping may last through the night,
but joy comes with the morning.**

⁶ When I was prosperous, I said,
“Nothing can stop me now!”

⁷ Your favor, O LORD, made me as secure as a mountain.
Then you turned away from me, and I was shattered.

⁸ I cried out to you, O LORD.
I begged the Lord for mercy, saying,

⁹ “What will you gain if I die,
if I sink into the grave?

Can my dust praise you?
Can it tell of your faithfulness?

¹⁰ Hear me, LORD, and have mercy on me.
Help me, O LORD.”

¹¹ You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing.

You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy,

¹² that I might sing praises to you and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever!

Points of Interest:

Double Reversal of Fortune of the Day – *riches to rags to health*

Everything was going great for the psalmist, until it wasn't. Prosperity and security were replaced by ill health, a fear of death, and some long, tearful nights. There's no suspense to this psalm's story, though, as it begins and ends by letting us know that one way or another, things worked out again.

Memory of the Day – *"Nothing can stop me now"*

The self-quotation of the psalmist is evocative. I remember a time when I had just heard news of a big promotion and a major raise and biked home down Commonwealth Avenue, occasionally throwing my hands in the air and shouting for joy. It also reminds me of this great, cheesy love song from the 80s by a band named Starship. "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now." What great feelings, when we have them. The psalm reminds us that sadly, they're fleeting. Something usually does, in fact, stop us.

Theology of the Day – *God and our circumstances*

The psalmist has a very particular theology of what our circumstances tell us about God, not one that I necessarily share. When circumstances are going well, it's a sign (as in verse 7) that God's happy with us. And when they're not, it's because God has turned away (v.7) or is angry (v.5). The psalmist takes comfort in believing that God's anger is short and his favor is long, so things are liable to work out well in the end.

This take on God's blessing and cursing showing up in good or bad circumstances is actually a pretty a major theme of parts of the Bible, in addition to this psalm, say in the historical books running from Deuteronomy on. But it's a theme that has some equally major counter-voices in places like Job and the life and teaching of Jesus. It reminds me that the Bible is a pretty fascinating and complicated little library of books that tell an amazing story about God and people, but with some interesting tensions and contradictions within it. I think Jesus shows us that God can be with us and we can receive God's favor, regardless of what our circumstances are telling us, but that's not exactly the direction this psalm goes in.

Image of the Day – *dancing again*

Unless it does. We don't know exactly why the psalmist is dancing again. I've inferred that it's from a return to health we hear about in vs. 2-3, but maybe it's more than that as well.

I love the line, "Weeping may last through the night but joy comes in the morning." My friends who have mourned the loss of spouses and parents and children describe that first day when they wake up and aren't immediately seized by sadness and loss. And then later, sometimes much later, the first time they make it through an entire day with hope and a sense that life is full and good again. In time, it comes. And the psalmist testifies that God's dedicated to bringing that kind of healing and restoration for us.

Historically, we see this psalm associated with the temple dedication. When the Jews rebuilt a temple in the late sixth century B.C., decades after the original model was destroyed, there must have been a feeling of coming back from the brink of national near-death illness. And so for any individual who has experienced illness and loss and mourning, perhaps a temple, or a church, or wherever it is we

find God, is also a great place to learn to dance again.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – The psalmist writes about all the change in the past tense. “You *have* turned my mourning into dancing.” Pray it as written if you want to/can, but feel free to pray in the future tense... “You will turn...” and imagine that it is so.

For your church – Pray that your church will be a place where, in many, many ways, people learn to dance again – celebrating God and celebrating God’s goodness to them in particular.

Wednesday, March 25 – Psalm 31

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

- ¹ O LORD, I have come to you for protection;
don’t let me be disgraced.
Save me, for you do what is right.
- ² Turn your ear to listen to me;
rescue me quickly.
Be my rock of protection,
a fortress where I will be safe.
- ³ You are my rock and my fortress.
For the honor of your name, lead me out of this danger.
- ⁴ Pull me from the trap my enemies set for me,
for I find protection in you alone.
- ⁵ I entrust my spirit into your hand.
Rescue me, LORD, for you are a faithful God.
- ⁶ I hate those who worship worthless idols.
I trust in the LORD.
- ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in your unfailing love,
for you have seen my troubles,
and you care about the anguish of my soul.
- ⁸ You have not handed me over to my enemies
but have set me in a safe place.
- ⁹ Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am in distress.
Tears blur my eyes.
My body and soul are withering away.
- ¹⁰ I am dying from grief;
my years are shortened by sadness.

Sin has drained my strength;

I am wasting away from within.

¹¹ I am scorned by all my enemies
and despised by my neighbors—
even my friends are afraid to come near me.

When they see me on the street,
they run the other way.

¹² I am ignored as if I were dead,
as if I were a broken pot.

¹³ I have heard the many rumors about me,
and I am surrounded by terror.

My enemies conspire against me,
plotting to take my life.

¹⁴ But I am trusting you, O LORD,
saying, “You are my God!”

¹⁵ My future is in your hands.
Rescue me from those who hunt me down relentlessly.

¹⁶ Let your favor shine on your servant.
In your unfailing love, rescue me.

¹⁷ Don’t let me be disgraced, O LORD,
for I call out to you for help.

Let the wicked be disgraced;
let them lie silent in the grave.

¹⁸ Silence their lying lips—
those proud and arrogant lips that accuse the godly.

¹⁹ **How great is the goodness
you have stored up for those who fear you.**

**You lavish it on those who come to you for protection,
blessing them before the watching world.**

²⁰ You hide them in the shelter of your presence,
safe from those who conspire against them.

You shelter them in your presence,
far from accusing tongues.

²¹ Praise the LORD,
for he has shown me the wonders of his unfailing love.

He kept me safe when my city was under attack.

²² In panic I cried out,

“I am cut off from the LORD!”

But you heard my cry for mercy
and answered my call for help.

²³ Love the LORD, all you godly ones!

For the LORD protects those who are loyal to him,
but he harshly punishes the arrogant.

²⁴ So be strong and courageous,
all you who put your hope in the LORD!

Points of Interest:

Trouble of the Day – *In panic I cried out*

We’ve seen a pretty wide range of complaint or lament psalms so far, and they can start to blend together eventually, at least for me. A couple unique features of this one stand out. There’s the blend of deception (“enemies have set a trap”, “rumors”, “accusing tongues”) and aggression that provokes the panic we hear in verse 22. Years ago, I heard Gary Haugen – founder and president of International Justice Mission – explain that injustice and violence are always driven by a combination of abuse of force/power and by lying. What are the various ways that we are entrapped or lied to, or that we are aggressive or deceptive toward others?

Qualification of the Day – *loyalty*

With all of these troubles, the psalmist is counting on God for a lot – to be a fortress and create safety, to be dependable, to care about anguish, to be a place to hide, to change circumstances, to vindicate and to protect and to love. What does the psalmist have as qualification for all these services? Pretty much just one thing, loyalty. It’s explicit in the last stanza and implicit in the contrast with those who “worship worthless idols.”

A writer and pastor named Greg Boyd points out that covenants are kind of like contracts, except that they’re based on an assumption of trust, not distrust. (Boyd, *Benefit of the Doubt*) The covenant between the psalmist and God here that we’re invited to try on for size is pretty one-sided. Trust God, ask God for help, and be loyal to this God – stick around through thick and thin, and God will all kinds of stuff to offer in return.

Parallelism of the Day – *fear you/come to you for protection* (19)

We’ve noticed before that in two part verses, the psalmist is very often repeating a concept in different language, or spinning a variation on a theme. Sometimes these variations provide some interesting texture. In verse 19, the psalmist talks about the great goodness stored up “for those who fear you.” Perhaps illuminating part of what it means to fear God, this is followed by the promise that the goodness is lavished on “those who come to you for protection.” We don’t usually seek the

protection of those we fear, but that's one sign that whatever it precisely means to fear God is really different from what we usually have in mind when we talk about being afraid of somebody.

Contrasting Images of the Day – broken pot/stored up goodness (12/19)

Speaking of stored up goodness, that image contrasts nicely with an earlier one. The suffering, and tears, and body-aching of our psalmist have led to this picture: being so alone, so desolate that it is “as if I were a broken pot.” Ouch. Now, though, the same person waits for all the goodness God has stored up, as it God's been holding onto it all for just this kind of broken pot-feeling rainy day.

Quote of the Day – I entrust my spirit into your hand (5)

Backtracking a bit, if you felt a sense of familiarity as you read this line in verse 5, it may be because it's one of the few things Jesus is quoted to have said while dying on the Roman cross. Just as he quoted the first line of Psalm 22 earlier in the day, Luke tells us Jesus said these words as he was dying.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Use this psalm to give raw voice to any suffering you're experiencing, but also to express to God whatever loyalty you have to God and to express your hopes for God's answers to your prayer.

For your six – Pray for your six, that in any places they feel more like a broken pot, God would extend their way all his stored up goodness for them.

Thursday, March 26 – Psalm 32

A psalm of David.

¹ Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sin is put out of sight!

² **Yes, what joy for those
whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,
whose lives are lived in complete honesty!**

³ When I refused to confess my sin,
my body wasted away,
and I groaned all day long.

⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.
My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. *Interlude*

⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you
and stopped trying to hide my guilt.
I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.”
And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. *Interlude*

⁶ Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time,
that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.

⁷ For you are my hiding place;
you protect me from trouble.
You surround me with songs of victory. *Interlude*

⁸ The LORD says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.
I will advise you and watch over you.

⁹ Do not be like a senseless horse or mule
that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.”

¹⁰ Many sorrows come to the wicked,
but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD.

¹¹ So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him!
Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

Points of Interest

Joy-Producer of the Day – *complete honesty*

If most of us have any association with total exposure, perhaps it would be shame or embarrassment, but joy? Not so likely. Yet that’s exactly the connection the opening of this psalm makes. Disobedience forgiven, sin put out of sight, and being cleared of guilt seem like fairly straight-forward synonyms, so it’s interesting that living in complete honesty completes this picture. When we’re covering up our faults, we’re not being entirely honest with ourselves, and maybe that self-deception is only a stone’s throw away from the aggressive deception we’ve repeatedly seen in the enemies until now. But when we name, rather than hide, our faults, we find the joy of God simply wiping that record aside and accepting us freely, leading to freedom and joy.

New Diagnosis of the Day – *groaning and wasting away?*

Obviously, our bodies can ache from purely physical maladies – torn ligaments, contagious diseases, the flu, and such. In yesterday’s psalm and others, we’ve seen all kinds of body aches that seem to come more from sadness or hardship. Today’s psalm has another potential diagnosis for an aching, lethargic physical state – hidden sin, and God’s resultant discipline.

Barely Averted Bad Outcome of the Day – *drowning in floodwaters*

Without the treatment of confession and forgiveness, things can get worse. It’s one thing to lose energy and groan, another to be swept away in the floodwaters of judgment. Just in time, the psalmist has come clean and has found a very different kind of relationship to God. Instead of wilting under bad consequences, our poet has found God to be like a safe perch to watch the troubles of the world from, all the while listening to a band playing a victory march.

Absolute destruction or total victory seem like high stakes results of hiding or exposing our faults, but

at least for me, it resonates with my experience. And I'm not alone. I look at the famous 12 steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous program, and so many of them boil down to acknowledgement of the truth – admitting powerlessness (step 1), an honest moral inventory (step 4), telling God and self and someone else the nature of our wrongs (step 5), and so on.

Image of the Day – *on not being senseless*

The message of the psalm is brought home with a vivid equine metaphor. We can experience God, and other forces of the universe under God's control, like the bit that's jammed into our mouth to keep us under control. Or we can live free – honest with God and self and others – and joy, and accept God's guidance willingly, no bit required.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – As you read the psalm aloud, pause between verses four and five to name any specific thoughts or actions or inaction you'd like God to know about and clear you of.

For you – In addition to uncovering your faults before God as you pray, identify if there is any area of your life that you haven't been appropriately honest about – to yourself or to someone else who has business knowing. Take a specific step toward honesty and freedom today.

Friday, March 27 – Psalm 33

- ¹ Let the godly sing for joy to the LORD;
it is fitting for the pure to praise him.
- ² Praise the LORD with melodies on the lyre;
make music for him on the ten-stringed harp.
- ³ Sing a new song of praise to him;
play skillfully on the harp, and sing with joy.
- ⁴ For the word of the LORD holds true,
and we can trust everything he does.
- ⁵ **He loves whatever is just and good;
the unfailing love of the LORD fills the earth.**
- ⁶ The LORD merely spoke,
and the heavens were created.
He breathed the word,
and all the stars were born.
- ⁷ He assigned the sea its boundaries
and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs.
- ⁸ Let the whole world fear the LORD,
and let everyone stand in awe of him.

⁹ For when he spoke, the world began!
It appeared at his command.

¹⁰ The LORD frustrates the plans of the nations
and thwarts all their schemes.

¹¹ But the LORD's plans stand firm forever;
his intentions can never be shaken.

¹² What joy for the nation whose God is the LORD,
whose people he has chosen as his inheritance.

¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven
and sees the whole human race.

¹⁴ From his throne he observes
all who live on the earth.

¹⁵ He made their hearts,
so he understands everything they do.

¹⁶ The best-equipped army cannot save a king,
nor is great strength enough to save a warrior.

¹⁷ Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory—
for all its strength, it cannot save you.

¹⁸ But the LORD watches over those who fear him,
those who rely on his unfailing love.

¹⁹ He rescues them from death
and keeps them alive in times of famine.

²⁰ We put our hope in the LORD.
He is our help and our shield.

²¹ In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.

²² Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD,
for our hope is in you alone.

Points of Interest:

Accompaniment of the Day – *the lyre and harp*

In case we've forgotten that these psalms were all set to music and sung, we get a reminder here, with some advice on musical accompaniment for our praises. We don't know a lot about ancient Hebrew instruments and melodies, but you can use your imagination.

Reason for Praise #1 – Word

The psalmist tells us it's fitting to praise God. I think this more or less means it's a good thing to do, which dutiful, New Englander me here's as a supposed-to-do kind of thing. Fair enough. But I like the translator's choice of the word "fitting" because it reminds me of the way it feels good to put on clothes that fit just right. After all, it's in praising God that "our heart rejoices" (21) and it's hard to miss the tone of joy and celebration that is infused throughout this psalm. That's part of what makes praising God fitting as well – how it lifts us out of our problems and worries into a space of wonder and awe and joy.

Anyway, we get a bunch of reasons to praise God, the first being how God speaks. God's words are reliable and they gets stuff done – like giving birth to the universe.

Reason for Praise #2 – World

Second reason here. It's a stunning world we live in, with all of our mighty seas, and all that's just a tiny little dot amidst the also stunning stars.

Reason for Praise #3 – Eyes

God looks at this earth he made a lot, apparently, and when he observes, he spends most of his time looking at people. I might look at Niagra Falls, or giraffes on the savannahs of Tanzania or something, but God likes looking at us. And when he does, he understands what he sees, and he watches over those who are counting on him to do just that.

What to Do When You're Done Praising for the Day – hope, rejoice, trust, be surrounded

Clearly, all of these wonderful attributes of God that can spur us to praise will feel more or less real to us in different times. Sometimes our lives and our worlds feel God-soaked, sometimes God-absent. So in faith, certainty and doubt, enthusiasm and frustration will oscillate, just as they do throughout the psalms. But at the end of the day, we have a couple choices. We can fortify ourselves against vulnerability (16-17), assuming a distant god won't be of much practical help. Or we can hope in God, trust God, invite God to surround us with love, and keep going with a joyful song that celebrates the parts of that we can and can't see.

Taking it Home:

Pray this psalm – This celebratory psalm tends to keep God in the third person. As you pray it, shift things around a bit so you can say it *to* God. Praise you, Lord... Lord, you spoke... etc.

For your church – Pray that your church would love to praise God, and to do so whole-heartedly – together in worship and when people are off on their own and in smaller groups.

Saturday, March 28 – Psalm 34

A psalm of David, regarding the time he pretended to be insane in front of Abimelech, who sent him away.

- ¹ I will praise the LORD at all times.
I will constantly speak his praises.
- ² I will boast only in the LORD;
let all who are helpless take heart.
- ³ Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness;
let us exalt his name together.
- ⁴ I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears.
- ⁵ Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;
no shadow of shame will darken their faces.
- ⁶ In my desperation I prayed, and the LORD listened;
he saved me from all my troubles.
- ⁷ For the angel of the LORD is a guard;
he surrounds and defends all who fear him.
- ⁸ **Taste and see that the LORD is good.**
Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!
- ⁹ Fear the LORD, you his godly people,
for those who fear him will have all they need.
- ¹⁰ Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry,
but those who trust in the LORD will lack no good thing.
- ¹¹ Come, my children, and listen to me,
and I will teach you to fear the LORD.
- ¹² Does anyone want to live a life
that is long and prosperous?
- ¹³ Then keep your tongue from speaking evil
and your lips from telling lies!
- ¹⁴ Turn away from evil and do good.
Search for peace, and work to maintain it.
- ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right;
his ears are open to their cries for help.
- ¹⁶ But the LORD turns his face against those who do evil;
he will erase their memory from the earth.
- ¹⁷ The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help.
He rescues them from all their troubles.

- ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.
- ¹⁹ The righteous person faces many troubles,
but the LORD comes to the rescue each time.
- ²⁰ For the LORD protects the bones of the righteous;
not one of them is broken!
- ²¹ Calamity will surely destroy the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be punished.
- ²² But the LORD will redeem those who serve him.
No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

Points of Interest:

Historical Desperation of the Day – *David pretending to be insane*

The Bible story this psalm has historically been linked to do is every bit as strange and desperate as the subtitle sounds. From I Samuel 21, David has been named future king of Israel, but is on the run from his once-mentor, now-tormentor King Saul, who appears to be truly insane. Meanwhile, David is hiding out amongst his national enemies, the Philistines, until they realize he is this legendary young Hebrew warrior, David himself. To escape imprisonment or even execution, David outdoes himself in his best imitation of mental breakdown, drooling on his beard and peeing on doors like a stray dog. Think your life is tough...?

Poetic Form of the Day – *Acrostic*

If this psalm feels like it wanders a bit, it's because there are a few things lost in translation. In Hebrew, this poetry is pretty tightly organized, utilizing a very specific form of an acrostic. It's a more advanced version of the Mother's Day poems that tell Mom she is Marvelous, Organized, and Musical. It's also written more in the style of wisdom literature – a collection of wise spiritual proverbs – than in the usual direct address to God we see in the psalms.

Images of the Day – *You pick 'em!*

Where do I start? The joyful radiance of people who talk to God, in contrast to living under a cloud of ever-darkening shame? (vs. 5) The picture of an attentive God listening as a brokenhearted child calls out, and God sweeps down in rescue before the spirit is crushed? (vs. 17-18) Probably those are my favorite. This is a beautiful psalm, filled with sweeping poetry about God's tender and strong goodness.

It's important to remember that it's poetry, which means that it's written in hyperbole but at its deepest level is still entirely true. Here's what I mean. Hyperbole, poetic exaggeration, is a common feature of ancient Hebrew speech and literature. You hear it all the time still in the teaching of Jesus, as he salts his speech with extreme-sounding turns of phrase about camels and needles and things that always and never happen. So, yes, there have been people who love God deeply and have had

their bones broken. Perhaps you're one of them. And that could apply anywhere else in this poem, I suppose. So it's not strictly literal perhaps, but that doesn't make it any less *true*.

Discovering All This For Ourselves Tip of the Day – *taste and see*

The invitation isn't to listen to the poetry and wish it were so, or be glad it will be fully so in heaven, or anything like that. It's to take a close look and grab a bite. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Take refuge in God, however you can do that. Try it for yourself. And you'll "lack no good thing." And – this one in the more literal-sounding final two verses – you will never be condemned.

At minimum, this means doing what the psalms have been inviting us to do all along. Take our messy, sometimes jacked-up lives, get up in God's face with them, lay it all out as often as we need to, take delight in the powerful and loving God we meet as we do that, and watch, as the shame on our faces is bit by bit replaced by radiant joy.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Linger over whichever stanza moves you most, provoking the most joy or perhaps the greatest desire to see it be so for you. Meditate over the words, and see what God says to you through them.

For your six – For each of your six, pray one phrase for them that's most relevant as far as you know. If you have no idea, simply pray that God would be close to them, as God is to the brokenhearted.

Sunday, March 29 – Psalm 35

A psalm of David.

- ¹ O LORD, oppose those who oppose me.
Fight those who fight against me.
- ² Put on your armor, and take up your shield.
Prepare for battle, and come to my aid.
- ³ Lift up your spear and javelin
against those who pursue me.
Let me hear you say,
"I will give you victory!"
- ⁴ Bring shame and disgrace on those trying to kill me;
turn them back and humiliate those who want to harm me.
- ⁵ Blow them away like chaff in the wind—
a wind sent by the angel of the LORD.
- ⁶ Make their path dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
- ⁷ I did them no wrong, but they laid a trap for me.
I did them no wrong, but they dug a pit to catch me.
- ⁸ So let sudden ruin come upon them!

Let them be caught in the trap they set for me!
Let them be destroyed in the pit they dug for me.

⁹ Then I will rejoice in the LORD.

I will be glad because he rescues me.

¹⁰ With every bone in my body I will praise him:

“LORD, who can compare with you?

Who else rescues the helpless from the strong?

Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them?”

¹¹ Malicious witnesses testify against me.

They accuse me of crimes I know nothing about.

¹² They repay me evil for good.

I am sick with despair.

¹³ Yet when they were ill, I grieved for them.

I denied myself by fasting for them,
but my prayers returned unanswered.

¹⁴ I was sad, as though they were my friends or family,
as if I were grieving for my own mother.

¹⁵ But they are glad now that I am in trouble;
they gleefully join together against me.

I am attacked by people I don't even know;
they slander me constantly.

¹⁶ They mock me and call me names;
they snarl at me.

¹⁷ How long, O Lord, will you look on and do nothing?

Rescue me from their fierce attacks.

Protect my life from these lions!

¹⁸ Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly.

I will praise you before all the people.

¹⁹ Don't let my treacherous enemies rejoice over my defeat.

Don't let those who hate me without cause gloat over my sorrow.

²⁰ They don't talk of peace;

they plot against innocent people who mind their own business.

²¹ They shout, “Aha! Aha!

With our own eyes we saw him do it!”

- ²² O LORD, you know all about this.
Do not stay silent.
Do not abandon me now, O Lord.
- ²³ Wake up! Rise to my defense!
Take up my case, my God and my Lord.
- ²⁴ Declare me not guilty, O LORD my God, for you give justice.
Don't let my enemies laugh about me in my troubles.
- ²⁵ Don't let them say, "Look, we got what we wanted!
Now we will eat him alive!"
- ²⁶ May those who rejoice at my troubles
be humiliated and disgraced.
May those who triumph over me
be covered with shame and dishonor.
- ²⁷ But give great joy to those who came to my defense.
Let them continually say, "Great is the LORD,
who delights in blessing his servant with peace!"
- ²⁸ Then I will proclaim your justice,
and I will praise you all day long.

Points of Interest:

Image of the Day – *lift up your spear and javelin*

This "enemies psalm" picks up a head of steam pretty quickly. The psalmist calls on God to be equal parts warrior-champion and nighttime hurricane and wipe out the bad guys.

Poetic Justice of the Day – *caught in the trap they set*

Our psalmist may feel violent, but at least it's elegantly so. As the poem wishes enemies would be caught in their own traps and destroyed in their own pits, we start to get a sense of just how violent and brutal these particular enemies are. That continues in the next stanza, where we realize that what's at stake isn't just any old annoyance or peevishness, but grave injustice. The helpless are being exploited by the strong, and the poor robbed by the rich. Our psalmist can rejoice that God cares about such situations and be counted on to side with the victim.

Image of the Day – *paid ill for doing good*

I don't have anything personal that springs to mind yet to relate to this scenario, but I find the third stanza (verses 11-16) especially poignant. Our poet fasts and prays for his friends, grieves at their family funeral, and in return has these friends later cheer his ruin and celebrate his potential downfall.

Plea of the Day – *Wake up! Rise to my defense!*

So in the end, the psalmist's plea – personal as it is – isn't about personal retribution or violence. This isn't a person without quarters wishing harm on the traffic patrol that gave them a \$20 ticket. In these impassioned prayers, we're witnessing someone yearning for God to restore balance and fairness on the earth. The cry is for God to correct grievous injustice, so that our psalmist can announce God's justice and return to unadulterated praise.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Certainly, if you've experienced grievous injustice or personal betrayal, pray this psalm as your own. If not, try praying it on behalf of any victims of injustice that you are aware of – either personally or through broader national or world or civic awareness.

For your city – Pray that God would come to defense to victims of injustice, the God will inspire others to come to their aid as well. Name specific groups, whether it be children who are neglected or abused, or domestic violence victims (both of these common in all communities of every size and social class), or perhaps others. If you discover particular concern or compassion, ask God if there is any way for you to act on it.