



Psalms

Week 4

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Daily Bible Guide – 40 Days of Faith, 2015

Monday, March 16 – Psalm 22

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune “Doe of the Dawn.”

¹ **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**

Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

² Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.

Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

³ Yet you are holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ Our ancestors trusted in you,

and you rescued them.

⁵ They cried out to you and were saved.

They trusted in you and were never disgraced.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man.

I am scorned and despised by all!

⁷ Everyone who sees me mocks me.

They sneer and shake their heads, saying,

⁸ “Is this the one who relies on the LORD?

Then let the LORD save him!

If the LORD loves him so much,

let the LORD rescue him!”

⁹ Yet you brought me safely from my mother’s womb

and led me to trust you at my mother’s breast.

¹⁰ I was thrust into your arms at my birth.

You have been my God from the moment I was born.

¹¹ Do not stay so far from me,

for trouble is near,

and no one else can help me.

¹² My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;



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- fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!
- ¹³ Like lions they open their jaws against me,
roaring and tearing into their prey.
- ¹⁴ My life is poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart is like wax,
melting within me.
- ¹⁵ My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.
You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.
- ¹⁶ My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands and feet.
- ¹⁷ I can count all my bones.
My enemies stare at me and gloat.
- ¹⁸ They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing.
- ¹⁹ O LORD, do not stay far away!
You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!
- ²⁰ Save me from the sword;
spare my precious life from these dogs.
- ²¹ Snatch me from the lion's jaws
and from the horns of these wild oxen.
- ²² I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.
I will praise you among your assembled people.
- ²³ Praise the LORD, all you who fear him!
Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!
Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!
- ²⁴ For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.
He has not turned his back on them,
but has listened to their cries for help.
- ²⁵ I will praise you in the great assembly.
I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.



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- ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied.
All who seek the LORD will praise him.
Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.
- ²⁷ The whole earth will acknowledge the LORD and return to him.
All the families of the nations will bow down before him.
- ²⁸ For royal power belongs to the LORD.
He rules all the nations.
- ²⁹ Let the rich of the earth feast and worship.
Bow before him, all who are mortal,
all whose lives will end as dust.
- ³⁰ Our children will also serve him.
Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.
- ³¹ His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born.
They will hear about everything he has done.

Points of Interest:

Paradox of the Day – *abandoned by my God?*

The first verse gives voice to a paradox that runs through the entire poem and really, through the whole book of psalms. The poet can ask why God has disappeared in the midst of a very personal address. Abandonment and intimacy meet and mingle in this prayer. How can it be? This speaks to the complexity of our experience of God, which at its best is for now a simultaneous mix of confidence and doubt, nearness and farness, appreciation and yearning.

Conjunctions of the Day – *“Yet” and “For”*

This psalm divides into two sections – the first two thirds (1-21) that ask for help amidst suffering, and the last third (22-31) that expresses confidence in what God is about to do. The prayer in both sections can be captured by a single conjunction that works like a hinge, holding two thoughts and feelings together.

In the lament, the psalmist is struggling with two seemingly contradictory experiences. There’s the present low – a melting heart, public ridicule, increasing danger, near-starvation. YET at the same time there’s the thought (3-5) about what the psalmist believes about God’s perfection that others have experienced in the past and a memory (9-10) of how God has been good over the years. Out of this tension eventually flows an unlikely confidence in a better future. This is anchored in God’s compassion and availability (24), and in God’s ultimate power. (28)

Familiar Situation of the Day – *They have pierced my hands and feet*



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If this sounds a little like Jesus at the crucifixion to you, you're not alone. For centuries, followers of Jesus have read this psalm as presciently giving texture to Jesus' experience of death (1-21) and resurrection (22-31). In fact, Jesus himself thought this psalm reminded him of Jesus, which is why he's reported to have said the psalm's opening line out loud while dying. As a first century Jew, Jesus would likely have memorized large sections of the Hebrew scriptures, including most of the psalms, which – at that time – were known more by their first lines than by their numbers.

So in asking God why God has abandoned him, Jesus is asking that particular question but likely connecting with all that this psalm would have spoken to him in that moment – his suffering and shame as well as his dependency on his Father's goodness and power to come through for him even in that space. From a theological perspective, this moment has provoked thousands of pages of scholarship and rich reflection on what Christians call the Trinitarian nature of God. This is fancy language for God's nature as one being in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who is emotionally fractured and suffers deeply as Jesus dies, giving you and me comfort that God suffers with our human pain still.

For what it's worth, the single line that most uncannily sounds like Jesus – hands and feet being pierced, has a history of mild controversy. No one has the original manuscripts of the psalms, and some early texts have this line, while others have a line about being pierced by a lion. Either way, the universal pain and the resonance of the experience of Jesus in particular stand. And all that's tied up with God's capacity to be present with us and give us hope, even at the very moment we wonder if we've been abandoned.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – Make this psalm yours – with you as the first person in the psalm. Or if life is great for you right now, but you're aware of someone else or some group of people who are suffering, pray the psalm on their behalf. “My God, why have you abandoned *so-and-so*?”

For you – What “righteous acts” or reversals of fortunes are you aware of God doing – in the life of Jesus, in others' lives, or in your own life? How does remembering these help you “eat and be satisfied” and “rejoice” in your current circumstances today?

Tuesday, March 17 – Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

¹ **The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.**

² He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.



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³ He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.

⁴ Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.

⁶ Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the LORD
forever.

Points of Interest:

Metaphor of the Day – *the Lord as shepherd*

For the first third of this most famous psalm, the poet works one of the Bible's more common and enduring metaphors for God. Sheep were a central part of this region's economy and so shepherding was a common but also low status profession in ancient Near Eastern life. Sheep weren't fenced in back then and didn't live on fixed pastures, so a shepherd's job was to lead the sheep around to good pastures and to keep them safe, well-fed, and healthy for their owners. This is a cozy, pastoral metaphor for God and us, but a humbling one as well, as part of why shepherds were so important is that sheep are particularly dimwitted and helpless without good leadership.

Image of the Day – *green meadows and peaceful streams*

Healthy sheep – like healthy people – need plenty of food and water, and a good balance of exercise and rest. Giving us all these good things we need is important to a shepherd God.

Beneficiary of the Day – *bringing honor to his name.*

While it's certainly good for the sheep to be on the right paths and be well cared for, we also read that the shepherd does it because it gives him a good reputation. So if God takes good care of us, it is for our sake or for God's? Maybe this is more of a win-win than an either-or. God wants us to thrive, the psalmist feels, but God kind of enjoys looking good for making sure that happens. It actually



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comforts me to think that it's in God's own best interests to take good care of me.

Chase of the Day – *goodness and unfailing love will pursue me*

The last two verses largely move the metaphor from God as shepherd to God as home-owner and great host. (Shepherds don't feed their sheep while wolves wait outside. They beat the wolves off or help the flock run away. But this host closes the gates and throws a bit meal for his guest.)

Anyway, I like keeping the sheep and shepherd at least partly in mind here, because it helps me see the full range of tactics God will use to take care of us. Offering rest and food here, a moment of celebration amidst trouble there, giving me a bonk on the head to help me find the right path, and then chasing after me when I miss it anyway. It reminds me of a story Jesus tells of another good shepherd, who leaves 99 sheep to chase after one who gets away. Risking 99% security to protect against a 1% loss is actually a pretty imprudent tactic for a shepherd – that'd get you fired. But in God's case, it appears that love and passion overrule logic. Perhaps in his determination to see you and me thrive, God can't help himself in doing whatever it takes on his end to make this happen.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – It's short, and it's famous, so resist just glossing over this, and go slow. Linger over any image or phrase that delights you or taps into any yearning or longing you have.

For your church – Pray that our church will be an incredibly effective setting for all types of people to encounter and get to know a God who gives them guidance and rest and help and joy. Pray that all of the members and leaders of our church continue to experience God's chase of them and help for them.

Wednesday, March 18 – Psalm 24

A psalm of David.

¹ **The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it.**

The world and all its people belong to him.

² For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas
and built it on the ocean depths.

³ Who may climb the mountain of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴ Only those whose hands and hearts are pure,
who do not worship idols
and never tell lies.



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- ⁵ They will receive the LORD's blessing
and have a right relationship with God their savior.
- ⁶ Such people may seek you
and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob. *Interlude*
- ⁷ Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.
- ⁸ Who is the King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty;
the LORD, invincible in battle.
- ⁹ Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.
- ¹⁰ Who is the King of glory?
The LORD of Heaven's Armies—
he is the King of glory. *Interlude*

Points of Interest:

Names for God of the Day – *King, Lord, God, and so on.*

In a really short poem, there are an awful lot of names for God. Lord – the personal Hebrew name, “Yahweh.” God – a more generic name for a supernatural power. God of Jacob – the same God tied to the experience of the psalmist's Hebrew ancestors. King of Glory – powerful ruler with an amazing reputation. Lord of Heaven's armies – Warrior God with an army full of angels at his disposal. Like a mosaic, the many individual pieces (here names) are meant to fill out one rich picture.

Image of the Day – *a mighty big masonry project*

Let's see... how large is this god? How much does he own the earth? It's like he stood in the ocean depths pouring concrete foundations for the earth, or piling up the brick foundations for everything we stand upon. We have a more accurate sense of geology than the psalmist did. We know the outer crust of the earth isn't floating on bottomless seas. But I think the image is a pretty cool one and still holds water, or earth, or both....

Superpowers of the Day – *laying earth's foundations, charging through gates in victory*

The psalm begins and ends with a superpower God on earth. First, there's God creating everything and thus rightfully owning it. And then there's God charging on the scene like a conquering king. But this king isn't borne on a throne behind his troops. He's out front, an invincible warrior leading his



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troops. The only word for this mix of impressive power and beauty and reputation? The same one we've heard John Legend singing: "Glory!"

Liturgical Reenactment of the Day – *a religious procession?*

One way to make sense of all this imagery in its original context is as a psalm written for temple worship. (Breueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*) Picture yourself in a crowded temple in ancient Jerusalem (the mountain, hill, holy place, etc. referred to in the psalms). Priests wait outside, reenacting the first time that the ark of the covenant was carried into the temple; the ark contained the tablets of the ten commandments and represented the presence of a living God. As they march through the door, you all sing this song, inviting an unseen but very powerful God to be present. I can imagine a spine-tingling experience.

Jesus' followers have always taught that God is no longer confined to any particular place on earth, if he ever was, and that we can experience the powerful presence of God anywhere. This psalm gives us poetry to invite a powerful God to be present anytime, anywhere.

Confession of the Day – *Who may stand in his holy place?*

As we saw in Psalm 15 last week, in the center of this song, there's a question of what needs to happen in us to be able to stand up and talk to God when he comes rushing through the gates. I find it helpful to not try to convince myself I'm one of these pure-handed, pure-hearted people and not to disqualify myself for not being good enough either. Part of what it means for me to be a follower of Jesus praying these psalms is the freedom to be authentically who I am at the moment and know I'm fully accepted by God.

So these moments give me the opportunity to freely acknowledge where my hands or heart are dirty, so speak, with my lies and self-deception and whatever silly or unproductive ways I've tried to be happy that aren't so great. And there's something about that honesty and confession that helps clear things up so I can seek and find and connect with God.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Use the flow of this psalm to name God as super-powerful, to confess your shortcomings, and then to invite God to show up in power and give you the opportunity to converse, to receive, and to be left in awe and wonder.

For your six – If any of your friends seem to be needing, waiting, or wanting to see God, or if perhaps you want that for them, ask that they would have a "God coming through the gates" kind of experience.

Thursday, March 19 – Psalm 25



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A psalm of David.

¹ O LORD, I give my life to you.

² I trust in you, my God!

Do not let me be disgraced,
or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat.

³ No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced,
but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others.

⁴ Show me the right path, O LORD;
point out the road for me to follow.

⁵ Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.

⁶ Remember, O LORD, your compassion and unfailing love,
which you have shown from long ages past.

⁷ **Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth.
Remember me in the light of your unfailing love,
for you are merciful, O LORD.**

⁸ The LORD is good and does what is right;
he shows the proper path to those who go astray.

⁹ He leads the humble in doing right,
teaching them his way.

¹⁰ The LORD leads with unfailing love and faithfulness
all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.

¹¹ For the honor of your name, O LORD,
forgive my many, many sins.

¹² Who are those who fear the LORD?
He will show them the path they should choose.

¹³ They will live in prosperity,
and their children will inherit the land.

¹⁴ The LORD is a friend to those who fear him.
He teaches them his covenant.



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- ¹⁵ My eyes are always on the LORD,
for he rescues me from the traps of my enemies.
- ¹⁶ Turn to me and have mercy,
for I am alone and in deep distress.
- ¹⁷ My problems go from bad to worse.
Oh, save me from them all!
- ¹⁸ Feel my pain and see my trouble.
Forgive all my sins.
- ¹⁹ See how many enemies I have
and how viciously they hate me!
- ²⁰ Protect me! Rescue my life from them!
Do not let me be disgraced, for in you I take refuge.
- ²¹ May integrity and honesty protect me,
for I put my hope in you.
- ²² O God, ransom Israel
from all its troubles.

Points of Interest

Doublespeak of the Day – *Disgraced or not?*

Often these psalms let us say and pray two seemingly opposite things at once. “Do not let me be disgraced.” (Hint, hint – it’s starting to look like I’m disgraced!) And then immediately afterwards, “No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced.” Read one way, this could sound like doublespeak – are you disgraced or not? Just admit it. But prayed ourselves, it makes sense to me. Our circumstances drive us somewhere we’d rather not go, or that puts us in tension with what we hope to experience from God in this world. The psalms invite us to tell the absolute truth to ourselves, and to say it out loud to God, while at the same time saying what we think we know about God but can’t yet see playing out. And then we trust God to work on this dissonance, to bring our theory and our reality closer together, and to meanwhile be present in the gap.

Navigation of the Day – *the right path*

The contrast between the “rebellious sins of my youth” and the proper, or right, or true path isn’t theoretical to this psalmist. One way has been decisively bad, creating all kinds of problems. The other way is suitable – it’s “the road for me to follow.” That way feels like compassion and love. There’s an admission here that we don’t always choose best for ourselves and a request for God to help nudge us in the right direction.



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Image of the Day – the light of your unfailing love

Amidst considering personal screw-ups, I like this request that God “remember me in the light of your unfailing love.” Maybe it’s just an idiom, but I picture God pulling out a pair of rose-colored glasses or some other filter that sees only the best in us. I don’t think God is so naïve, but this does feel like the sort of kindness God’s capable of.

Enemies of the Day – my problems go from bad to worse

We’ve had a break from the enemies, but they’re back. Perhaps there are other people rooting for the psalmist’s failure. I’ve had that happen before, and it’s a lousy feeling. But it’s clear that the biggest troubles the psalmist needs help with are of his own creation. The old cartoonist of the strip *Pogo* put it this way: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Even the traps we set for ourselves, though, don’t seem to be too big of an obstacle for God.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – If you have particular mistakes in your present or past that still bother you, name them specifically each time the psalm talks about sins or disgrace.

For you – Spend a bit of time telling God about your own internal enemies, problems, and disgraces. God already knows, but it does us and our prayers good to say these things anyway. Close your time, remembering that God wants to be a friend to you and to teach you to trust him. (14)

Friday, March 20 – Psalm 26

A psalm of David.

- ¹ Declare me innocent, O LORD,
for I have acted with integrity;
I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.
- ² Put me on trial, LORD, and cross-examine me.
Test my motives and my heart.
- ³ For I am always aware of your unfailing love,
and I have lived according to your truth.
- ⁴ I do not spend time with liars
or go along with hypocrites.
- ⁵ I hate the gatherings of those who do evil,
and I refuse to join in with the wicked.
- ⁶ I wash my hands to declare my innocence.
I come to your altar, O LORD,
- ⁷ **singing a song of thanksgiving**



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and telling of all your wonders.

⁸ I love your sanctuary, LORD,
the place where your glorious presence dwells.

⁹ Don't let me suffer the fate of sinners.
Don't condemn me along with murderers.

¹⁰ Their hands are dirty with evil schemes,
and they constantly take bribes.

¹¹ But I am not like that; I live with integrity.
So redeem me and show me mercy.

¹² Now I stand on solid ground,
and I will publicly praise the LORD.

Points of Interest:

Trial of the Day – *Declare me innocent*

To tell the truth, I don't much like this one. To me, the writer comes off as defensive and self-righteous. It reminds me of a man who Jesus says would pray in public, thanking God he was not like other sinners. One thing that helps me to get something out of this psalm, though, is to take the writer's trial metaphor seriously. Here we have the unusual – unprecedented? – situation of someone showing up to court and asking to be put on trial. And the judge in court that day is God himself.

I'm not sure what situation could have provoked this psalm, but I remember a time when I was hired for a job and found out that there had been an outcry amongst some of my future employees against my hire before they had even met me. The details are a long story, but it was one time when despite my integrity and good motives, I was questioned, criticized, and slandered. This psalm might have been helpful to me in that situation.

Literary Analysis of the Day – *The heart of the psalm*

Like many old Hebrew poems, this one has something called a chiasmic structure. In labeling the poem, we would use letters – A, B, C, B¹, A¹. The beginning and the ending are related, as are the second and second to last sections, and so forth. Chiasmic structure is often used to highlight the importance of the middle section, which has no parallel in the poem. It's like there's a road headed to a destination, and a somewhat similar road leading away from it. The differences between the roads are interesting to notice, but the real centerpiece is the place that they connect.

Here the heart of the psalm is verses six to eight. A back door behind the judge in the court has magically led to the temple sanctuary, where the poet gets to spend a quiet moment alone there with God. Following a ritual hand washing, the poet sings thanks, stops in wonder, and savors the peace of being alone with God. It reminds me of the moment in Psalm 23 when the man on the run enjoys a



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feast in God's house, even while his enemies wait outside.

Confidence Booster of the Day – *now I stand on solid ground*

The psalmist finds security and confidence before God by being different than the dirty-handed bribing murderers about town. And that's fine, I guess. But it doesn't work well for me; I'm not so confident about my own moral integrity or so convinced that this is what matters most to God. I prefer to speak with God and walk away feeling secure by knowing that God loves to show me mercy, that this is the God whose "goodness and unfailing love will follow me all the days of my life." (Psalm 23)

Taking it Home:

Pray this psalm – Try a somewhat subversive praying of this psalm, if you're comfortable with that. Pray the words, but changing them as necessary. "Declare me innocent, O Lord, *even though* I have *not* acted with integrity, *even though* I have *not* trusted in you, Lord, without wavering." And so on.

For your six – Pray that your friends would find moments of gratitude, peace, and wonder in the middle of their stresses and difficulties this week.

Saturday, March 21 – Psalm 27

A psalm of David.

¹ **The LORD is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?**

**The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger,
so why should I tremble?**

² When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.

³ Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.

Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.

⁴ The one thing I ask of the LORD—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
delighting in the LORD's perfections
and meditating in his Temple.



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- ⁵ For he will conceal me there when troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a high rock.
- ⁶ Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,
singing and praising the LORD with music.
- ⁷ Hear me as I pray, O LORD.
Be merciful and answer me!
- ⁸ My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.”
And my heart responds, “LORD, I am coming.”
- ⁹ Do not turn your back on me.
Do not reject your servant in anger.
You have always been my helper.
Don’t leave me now; don’t abandon me,
O God of my salvation!
- ¹⁰ Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the LORD will hold me close.
- ¹¹ Teach me how to live, O LORD.
Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me.
- ¹² Do not let me fall into their hands.
For they accuse me of things I’ve never done;
with every breath they threaten me with violence.
- ¹³ Yet I am confident I will see the LORD’s goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.
- ¹⁴ Wait patiently for the LORD.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.

Points of Interest:

Stress of the Day – *why should I be afraid?*



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Well, there seem to be a lot of reasons. The original context of the psalm seems decidedly military. Foes attack, a mighty army surrounds, and enemies lie in wait. Fear and trembling indeed. Maybe in comparison, there's something "first-world-problemish" about this, but I find that for me and my friends, stress is one of the most consistent sources of this kind of fear and anxiety.

Regardless of the source of the fear, though, the psalmist experiences God as a steady fortress, offering both light and salvation. God helps to see clearly and access help in times of trouble.

One Wish of the Day – *to live in God's house*

At the top of the psalmist's wish list is to hang out in the temple and enjoy everything God is and does there. The sanctuary the psalmist finds is both literal and metaphorical – a hiding place from the troubles of war and a spiritually refreshing hideaway as well.

Prayer of the Day – *talking with my heart*

This psalm has a great picture of what so many people mean when they say God has spoken to them. The psalmist has this inner sense that God is saying, "Come on, let's talk." And the heart says back, "Here I come."

Image of the Day – *never abandoned*

At the start of the week, we saw an extraordinary circumstance in which the psalmist is convinced of being abandoned by God. Here the reverse is assured. Mom and Dad may turn their backs on me, and will likely die before I do. But God will still be there as a parent for us, no matter how old we are.

Benediction of the Day – *be brave and courageous*

Our psalmist breaks out of prayer at the end and offers us all a good word. Wait patiently, be brave and courageous, wait patiently. Brave courage and patient waiting are an interesting complement.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Now and then there's a psalm with so many gems in it, we could maybe just pray a single verse for days and not exhaust its power. Either pray a single verse that way, or pray the whole thing slowly, and notice what it does for your stress and your faith.

For you – Throughout the day, if you notice yourself ever becoming stressed or discouraged or defensive, take a moment o sanctuary to ask God to help you see more clearly, to be your help, and to give you patience and courage.

Sunday, March 22 – Psalm 28

[A psalm of David.](#)

¹ I pray to you, O LORD, my rock.
Do not turn a deaf ear to me.



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For if you are silent,

I might as well give up and die.

² Listen to my prayer for mercy
as I cry out to you for help,
as I lift my hands toward your holy sanctuary.

³ Do not drag me away with the wicked—
with those who do evil—
those who speak friendly words to their neighbors
while planning evil in their hearts.

⁴ Give them the punishment they so richly deserve!
Measure it out in proportion to their wickedness.
Pay them back for all their evil deeds!
Give them a taste of what they have done to others.

⁵ They care nothing for what the LORD has done
or for what his hands have made.
So he will tear them down,
and they will never be rebuilt!

⁶ Praise the LORD!
For he has heard my cry for mercy.

⁷ **The LORD is my strength and shield.
I trust him with all my heart.
He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy.
I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.**

⁸ The LORD gives his people strength.
He is a safe fortress for his anointed king.

⁹ Save your people!
Bless Israel, your special possession.
Lead them like a shepherd,
and carry them in your arms forever.

Points of Interest:

Emotional Drama of the Day – I might as well give up and die



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Week 4

Consistently keeping it real, here's another psalm that gives us freedom to speak our minds without censor when we talk to God. Again, these psalms are a model for process and psychologically and spiritually helpful prayer, rather than a model for perfect theology or human perfection.

Irony of the Day – *he will tear them down*

The psalmist imagines that God has a good sense of poetic justice. If people tear up what God has made, then perhaps in time they will be torn up themselves. Given that the scriptures insist the people are the most valuable thing God has made, then depending on which side of the equation you sit on at the moment, this is both stern warning not to harm people or comfort that God will deal with those who harm others. It's probably not too much of a stretch to apply this beyond people as well, though. Not caring for what God's hands have made – meaning the entirety of the earth and all that is in it – is a sign of a significant problem, worthy of outcry and God's justice.

Now-Familiar Images of the Day – *shield, fortress, shepherd*

The last two stanzas of the poem consolidate images which are now familiar from the psalms. God is a trustworthy shield – a source of security, protection, and inner strength. God is a fortress – a place to hide out, to be safe, and to regroup. God is a shepherd – a source of comfort, care, and leadership.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – In the first half of the psalm, pray keeping in mind whoever it is (a person? a company? some other group of people?) whose bad deeds and harm for what God has made most troubles you. In the second half, ask God to illuminate one of the images – shield, fortress, shepherd – that you most need to hear and meditate on.

For your city – Pray that God will protect all those in your community who seem most vulnerable, and pray that those creating or exploiting their vulnerability would see the light and change their ways.