



Psalms

Week 3

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Daily Bible Guide – 40 Days of Faith, 2015

Monday, March 9 – Psalm 15

A psalm of David.

¹ **Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD?**

Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?

² **Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right,
speaking the truth from sincere hearts.**

³ Those who refuse to gossip
or harm their neighbors
or speak evil of their friends.

⁴ Those who despise flagrant sinners,
and honor the faithful followers of the LORD,
and keep their promises even when it hurts.

⁵ Those who lend money without charging interest,
and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent.

Such people will stand firm forever.

Points of Interest:

Happy Place of the Day – *The sanctuary and the holy hill*

The first verse is another great example of the poetic repetition we see in every psalm. The sanctuary and the holy hill aren't two different places to be with God. They're both different ways of referring to the ancient Jewish temple, located in Jerusalem, which rests at higher elevations than the surrounding region. Though the Hebrew Bible kind of waffles back and forth on this point, the psalmists were convinced that God made a home in this temple in a unique way, making visiting this temple a much bigger deal than simply going to a church you love or some other special, spiritual place.

Scholars think this first verse was used in worship as a question that would provoke the congregation to say or sing the rest of the psalm as an answer. (Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*)

Ancient Cultural Note of the Day – *Honor/Shame Culture*

As in many ancient cultures, honor and shame played an important role in shaping Hebrew morality and norms. In honor/shame cultures, people aspire to win the respect and value of their friends and neighbors and dread the rejection or disdain of those same people. We may question these cultural



Psalms

Week 3

values, but here, sincere, right-loving people at least appropriately honor and shame. Rather than honoring wealth or status or accomplishment, integrity is honored, and obvious bad behavior (such as gossip and financial abuse) is shamed.

Moral Aspirations of the Day – *Those who lead blameless lives*

This is an interesting answer to the priest's opening question. It sounds like only good people are allowed to hang out with God. Is someone checking for gossipers or bankers at the door? That would be a weird job to have.

Now, granted, this sounds like a pretty good way to live overall. Absolute honesty, giving honor where honor is due, financial generosity and integrity – those are all virtues I'd be glad to have in me and my friends. (Although, truthfully, the importance of "despising flagrant sinners" escapes me at the moment.) But why should any of this be a prerequisite for being with God?

Well, I'm pretty sure that historically, it wasn't. There may have been other problems with inclusion in ancient Jewish worship, but the temple didn't keep moral bouncers at the door. Which makes me wonder, as I've mentioned rabbis guiding me to before, if this is as aspirational as anything else. Worshippers remind themselves that they want to be the kind of people God made us to be. And perhaps there's something about the act of worship and being in God's presence that invites us to live as these people – to be a little more sincere, generous, and loving.

Promise of the Day – *Such people will stand firm forever*

In training educators, preachers and other public speakers, I've often said that it's important for speakers to promise as much as we ask, to offer to give as much or more than we're asking from our hearers. So as much as this psalm implies that being with God compels us toward good living, it also promises big at the end. People who are have integrity in response to God will experience inner protection, vibrancy, and security for a long, long time.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – Imagine yourself praying this psalm in the ancient temple, hearing the opening question, and then joining a big crowd in making this response. What does this provoke in you?

For you – If you're up for it, give God permission to shape your whole life as you make these prayers. Ask God if there's anything in your speech or your relationships or your finances that God would like to address in order to deepen your worship and give you greater strength.



Psalms

Week 3

Tuesday, March 10 – Psalm 16

A psalm of David.

- ¹ Keep me safe, O God,
for I have come to you for refuge.
- ² I said to the LORD, “You are my Master!
Every good thing I have comes from you.”
- ³ The godly people in the land
are my true heroes!
I take pleasure in them!
- ⁴ Troubles multiply for those who chase after other gods.
I will not take part in their sacrifices of blood
or even speak the names of their gods.
- ⁵ LORD, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing.
You guard all that is mine.
- ⁶ The land you have given me is a pleasant land.
What a wonderful inheritance!
- ⁷ I will bless the LORD who guides me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
- ⁸ I know the LORD is always with me.
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.
- ⁹ No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice.
My body rests in safety.
- ¹⁰ For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.
- ¹¹ **You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.**



Psalms

Week 3

Points of Interest:

Need of the Day – *Safety*

Relative to so many people, my life in the developed West has been a safe one. But this past week, amidst the opening of the trial of one of the alleged Boston marathon bombers, I've found myself somewhat re-traumatized as I've recalled the chaos of that day, the deaths and injuries of many Bostonians, and the potential harm I could have experienced myself. And in that space of deeper awareness of vulnerability, this prayer for safety and refuge makes a lot of sense to me.

What does it mean to pray for refuge and safety in a world with no guarantees of that? In part, we get a clue later in the psalm, in verses 8 and 9, with the assurance that "I will not be shaken" and, "My body rests in safety." Why? Because God is with me. God may answer my prayers for physical safety by intervening with protection in times of danger, but even if I experience harm (as the psalmist clearly does sometimes), I won't be fundamentally shaken, because God will be with me still.

Contrast of the Day – *the godly, and those who chase after other gods*

We've been wrestling as we've regularly seen the psalmist draw a contrast between the faithful and the enemies, or the righteous and the wicked. Here there's a similar contrast that goes in a slightly different direction. On one side of the ledger are people who pray and make animal (or even human) sacrifices to the many gods in the ancient Near East available for that kind of thing. Those folks have their troubles multiply – don't we all sometimes! On the other hand, there are the psalmist's heroes – all the people who love the LORD – Yahweh, this one true God. They get blessing, protection, instruction, and the presence of God with them. The psalmist seems comfortable talking about all this benefit as an inheritance, which is usually experienced in part in the present and more fully in the future. The benefits of being in relationship to this God are good now, and they get better and better in the future. Blessings, and troubles, are bound to multiply.

Hope of the Day – *pleasure forever*

We've seen that the long-term future is kind of shaky for the psalmists, but without knowing how this could exactly play out, the writer here is sure that this inheritance God has for people just gets better and better. Regardless of how the prayers for safety work out, guidance toward greater and greater life, and ever-increasing joy, and satisfaction that grows even through and past death is a sure gift from God.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – Ask God to guide you to the promise, image, or hope in this psalm that you most need to hear. Pray over that particular verse or image for a few moments.

For your six – Pray that your friends will experience more and more of the particular inheritance God has set aside for them as they engage more with God.



Psalms

Week 3

Wednesday, March 11 – Psalm 17

A prayer of David.

¹ **O LORD, hear my plea for justice.**

Listen to my cry for help.

Pay attention to my prayer,

for it comes from honest lips.

² Declare me innocent,

for you see those who do right.

³ You have tested my thoughts and examined my heart in the night.

You have scrutinized me and found nothing wrong.

I am determined not to sin in what I say.

⁴ I have followed your commands,

which keep me from following cruel and evil people.

⁵ My steps have stayed on your path;

I have not wavered from following you.

⁶ I am praying to you because I know you will answer, O God.

Bend down and listen as I pray.

⁷ Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways.

By your mighty power you rescue

those who seek refuge from their enemies.

⁸ Guard me as you would guard your own eyes.

Hide me in the shadow of your wings.

⁹ Protect me from wicked people who attack me,

from murderous enemies who surround me.

¹⁰ They are without pity.

Listen to their boasting!

¹¹ They track me down and surround me,

watching for the chance to throw me to the ground.

¹² They are like hungry lions, eager to tear me apart—

like young lions hiding in ambush.



Psalms

Week 3

¹³ Arise, O LORD!

Stand against them, and bring them to their knees!

Rescue me from the wicked with your sword!

¹⁴ By the power of your hand, O LORD,

destroy those who look to this world for their reward.

But satisfy the hunger of your treasured ones.

May their children have plenty,

leaving an inheritance for their descendants.

¹⁵ Because I am righteous, I will see you.

When I awake, I will see you face to face and be satisfied.

Points of Interest:

Self-Confident Attitude of the Day – *You have scrutinized me and found nothing wrong*

Not for the first time, we have a writer of tremendous moral self-confidence. “Unlike those other wicked people, my life has earned me some help from you, God!” You and I are not the first people to read these psalms and feel a little uncomfortable making these words our own. What does it mean to be so confident God will answer me “because I am righteous?”

Well, here’s what I do with that. I’m pretty sure that Jesus could say these things without batting an eye, and I’m pretty sure that in following Jesus, I get the benefit of being connected with Jesus. So I can say to God, “I know you’re really fond of Jesus. I’m Steve, one of Jesus’ little brothers. I’m sure you remember me and are excited to hear my prayers and help me out.” Maybe it sounds silly, but that prayer never feels cocky or misguided to me.

In fact, it gets me to the ancient idea of a relationship of covenant that this psalm is based on. A covenant is a binding deal between two parties that sets out terms of loyalty and promise and reward in the relationship. Being in a binding relationship with God, the psalmists were more than comfortable expressing their own loyalty and connection to God and expecting that God would recognize that and get moving on their behalf.

Images of the Day – *guard your own eyes, hide me in the shadow of your wings*

What would God’s benefits look like in this relationship? What if God were to look after us like he would his own eyes? In Hebrew, the phrase about the eyes here is one of the earliest instances of the phrase “the apple of your eye,” referring literally to the tiny reflection of yourself you can see in the pupil of someone’s eye. It’s an intimate image. Take care of me, like I was right in your face, God – reflected right there in your eye.

And moving from humans to birds for a moment, how about another personified image? What if God has these huge wings we can hide out under anytime things get thorny? I think of the giant eagles in



Psalms

Week 3

The Lord of the Rings that swoop down and scoop up the hobbits and good wizard we love whenever they need help.

Help of the Day – *praying with a warlord*

Recently, on *This American Life*, I heard the short story, “Julie and the Warlord” by BJ Novak, which imagines the awkwardness a woman experiences when she realizes that the handsome man she met online is, in fact, a real life warlord. Here, in this psalm, we discover we’re praying with a warlord, or to a warlord. David, or whoever this is speaking, has murderous, attacking enemies hunting him like lions and needs God to show up with his enormous sword and whack them down to their knees. And then if God could him and his friends and their kids some plunder – food and inheritance and all that – that would be great too, Amen!

A friend of mine last week told me that these enemy psalms were working wonders for him, since he’s recognized that his biggest enemy is his alcoholism. That’s the force that wants to tear him apart. Taking on a warlike antagonism toward this, and asking God to do the same, is helping him out. When I’ve engaged these psalms around anxiety in the same way, that’s been working for me too. It might take some reimagining or some contextualizing to make them work for our circumstances, but maybe praying with a warlord is kind of neat after all.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Try my whole covenant approach as you pray today. If you feel you can say this, tell God, “I’m so and so, Jesus’ little brother or sister.” (Well, don’t literally say that; personalize it to you... you get the idea.) And then invite God to listen to your concerns, to get up, and to help you out.

For you – Consider that you and Jesus and God can be so tight that you can be like the apple of God’s eye. What comes to mind in considering that you might be just that valuable to God?

Thursday, March 12 – Psalm 18

For the choir director: A psalm of David, the servant of the LORD. He sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. He sang:

¹ I love you, LORD;

you are my strength.

² The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;

my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.

He is my shield, the power that saves me,

and my place of safety.

³ I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise,

and he saved me from my enemies.



Psalms

Week 3

- ⁴ The ropes of death entangled me;
floods of destruction swept over me.
- ⁵ The grave wrapped its ropes around me;
death laid a trap in my path.
- ⁶ But in my distress I cried out to the LORD;
yes, I prayed to my God for help.
He heard me from his sanctuary;
my cry to him reached his ears.
- ⁷ Then the earth quaked and trembled.
The foundations of the mountains shook;
they quaked because of his anger.
- ⁸ Smoke poured from his nostrils;
fierce flames leaped from his mouth.
Glowing coals blazed forth from him.
- ⁹ He opened the heavens and came down;
dark storm clouds were beneath his feet.
- ¹⁰ Mounted on a mighty angelic being, he flew,
soaring on the wings of the wind.
- ¹¹ He shrouded himself in darkness,
veiling his approach with dark rain clouds.
- ¹² Thick clouds shielded the brightness around him
and rained down hail and burning coals.
- ¹³ The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded
amid the hail and burning coals.
- ¹⁴ He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies;
great bolts of lightning flashed, and they were confused.
- ¹⁵ Then at your command, O LORD,
at the blast of your breath,
the bottom of the sea could be seen,
and the foundations of the earth were laid bare.
- ¹⁶ He reached down from heaven and rescued me;
he drew me out of deep waters.



Psalms

Week 3

- ¹⁷ He rescued me from my powerful enemies,
from those who hated me and were too strong for me.
- ¹⁸ They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress,
but the LORD supported me.
- ¹⁹ He led me to a place of safety;
he rescued me because he delights in me.
- ²⁰ The LORD rewarded me for doing right;
he restored me because of my innocence.
- ²¹ For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
I have not turned from my God to follow evil.
- ²² I have followed all his regulations;
I have never abandoned his decrees.
- ²³ I am blameless before God;
I have kept myself from sin.
- ²⁴ The LORD rewarded me for doing right.
He has seen my innocence.
- ²⁵ To the faithful you show yourself faithful;
to those with integrity you show integrity.
- ²⁶ To the pure you show yourself pure,
but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd.
- ²⁷ You rescue the humble,
but you humiliate the proud.
- ²⁸ You light a lamp for me.
The LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.
- ²⁹ In your strength I can crush an army;
with my God I can scale any wall.
- ³⁰ **God's way is perfect.**
All the LORD's promises prove true.
He is a shield for all who look to him for protection.
- ³¹ For who is God except the LORD?
Who but our God is a solid rock?
- ³² God arms me with strength,
and he makes my way perfect.



Psalms

Week 3

- ³³ He makes me as surefooted as a deer,
enabling me to stand on mountain heights.
- ³⁴ He trains my hands for battle;
he strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow.
- ³⁵ You have given me your shield of victory.
Your right hand supports me;
your help has made me great.
- ³⁶ You have made a wide path for my feet
to keep them from slipping.
- ³⁷ I chased my enemies and caught them;
I did not stop until they were conquered.
- ³⁸ I struck them down so they could not get up;
they fell beneath my feet.
- ³⁹ You have armed me with strength for the battle;
you have subdued my enemies under my feet.
- ⁴⁰ You placed my foot on their necks.
I have destroyed all who hated me.
- ⁴¹ They called for help, but no one came to their rescue.
They even cried to the LORD, but he refused to answer.
- ⁴² I ground them as fine as dust in the wind.
I swept them into the gutter like dirt.
- ⁴³ You gave me victory over my accusers.
You appointed me ruler over nations;
people I don't even know now serve me.
- ⁴⁴ As soon as they hear of me, they submit;
foreign nations cringe before me.
- ⁴⁵ They all lose their courage
and come trembling from their strongholds.
- ⁴⁶ The LORD lives! Praise to my Rock!
May the God of my salvation be exalted!
- ⁴⁷ He is the God who pays back those who harm me;
he subdues the nations under me
- ⁴⁸ and rescues me from my enemies.



Psalms

Week 3

You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies;
you save me from violent opponents.

⁴⁹ For this, O LORD, I will praise you among the nations;
I will sing praises to your name.

⁵⁰ You give great victories to your king;
you show unfailing love to your anointed,
to David and all his descendants forever.

Points of Interest

Summary of the Day – *God, Enemies, and Us*

You may have noticed that this psalm is longer than any we've seen so far – a lot longer. So rather than commenting on all its salient features, I'll try do a bit of summary on what this psalm highlights that's been consistent with much of the other 17 we've seen so far.

The LORD: Strong, powerful, a shield, seems far away at first – up in heaven or hanging out in a temple, but gets a kick out of getting up and getting dirty, acting on behalf of people that connect with him. Shows up, helps, and even talks to us and teaches us too, consistently leaving us invigorated, strong, and safe.

Enemies: They're everywhere, these meanies out to do people harm. The psalms sometimes remember David's enemies – other countries out to harm the young nation of Israel or David's enemies amongst his people, like the vicious king Saul who, in his own paranoia and insecurity, turned on David, going from mentor and father figure to attacker. We can identify human enemies, as these psalms so often do: people that exploit, harm, hunt, and take advantage of their fellow humans. But many folks have found it helpful to consider our unseen enemies – spiritual forces behind evil and exploitation and harm, as well as the enemies within – the parts of us that do ourselves and others harm.

Us: Needy, vulnerable, sometimes afraid, unembarrassingly in want of protection and help and kindness. Free to speak our minds and give vent to our full range of emotions to God, and to expect God to listen and respond. Sometimes this help comes through the good reign of a king – David and his successors in the psalms, reinterpreted as Jesus by his followers.

Angry Dragon-God of the Day – *Smoke poured from his nostrils*

Here God is depicted as so angry and ticked off at the injustice going on, that smoke pours out of his nose and flames from his mouth as he flies down from heavens to earth and takes care of a vulnerable person in need of help.

I first remember encountering this psalm when I was about twenty years old, reading a guidebook on the Bible, and spiritual help for personal healing. When I had been younger, I was an early mark of a



Psalms

Week 3

sexual predator in my community. My own mistreatment was far less than what happened to others later, but it felt messy and sad to confront and work through. Seeing God, particularly in verses 7-19, as impassioned and angry on behalf of the vulnerable, ready to lift them out of distress, was then and continues to be deeply encouraging to me.

Favorite Verse of the Day – *With my God I can scale a wall*

I love that with God around, the psalmist fast moves from overpowered victim to superhero, able to crush an army and scale any wall. (Verse 29) From there on, there's nothing the psalmist can't do. The vigor and strength of God seems to be transferable. What starts out as a shield becomes courage and power within.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – This is a long one, so read along and anytime a verse catches your attention more, pray it slowly a few times, making it yours.

For your city – Draw God's attention to the greatest injustices and problems that you are aware of in our region. Ask God to show up and fight for the vulnerable and turn their weakness to strength.

Friday, March 13 – Psalm 19

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

¹ **The heavens proclaim the glory of God.**

The skies display his craftsmanship.

² Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.

³ They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.

⁴ Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

⁵ It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.
It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.

⁶ The sun rises at one end of the heavens
and follows its course to the other end.
Nothing can hide from its heat.



Week 3

Psalms

⁷ The instructions of the LORD are perfect,
reviving the soul.

The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The commandments of the LORD are right,
bringing joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are clear,
giving insight for living.

⁹ Reverence for the LORD is pure,
lasting forever.

The laws of the LORD are true;
each one is fair.

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold,
even the finest gold.

They are sweeter than honey,
even honey dripping from the comb.

¹¹ They are a warning to your servant,
a great reward for those who obey them.

¹² How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me.

Then I will be free of guilt
and innocent of great sin.

¹⁴ May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Points of Interest:

Glorious Poetry of the Day – *The heavens proclaim the glory of God*

One of the most widely read Christian authors of the twentieth century was by a day a literary scholar at Oxford and then Cambridge. In his book on the Psalms, Lewis isn't shy about asking questions of,



Psalms

Week 3

and even insulting, the psalms. But he calls this one of the greatest poems not just in the Psalms, but in all poetry ever.

Like Lewis, I like this psalm's opening praise of the natural world as so glorious and radiant that without a single word, nature can itself speak volumes about the beauty and power of God. The nifty personification of the sun is kind of a bonus flourish here.

Surprising Connection of the Day – *The perfect instructions of God*

All of this talk of the wordless communication of nature is just prelude, though, to the remarkable words God speaks. In an attempt to describe the perfection of God's words, the poet keeps stumbling over his. There's an abundance of repetition here, with lots of ways of expressing three things: God's words (instructions, decrees, commandments, laws), their attributes (perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, pure, true, etc.), and their effect (reviving, making wise, bringing joy, giving insight, etc.). Apparently, it's one thing to consider God while gazing in wonder at the natural world. Hearing God speak to you directly is another level of experience entirely!

Impressive Review of the Day – *more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey*

As part of tenure review and student course selection process, college professors have their courses reviewed. As a middle and high school teacher, I had my students review my instruction by choice. I got some pretty encouraging and positive feedback sometimes, but never anything quite like this. When God talks, it's better than gold and tastier than the sweetest available treat.

Living Out the Final Stanza of the Day – *our own words and heart*

In the final section of the psalm, the poet turns inward, to our own hearts and thoughts and words, praying that God will make these beautiful as well. I like to see the end of this psalm as an incomplete third section. Nature shines with the beauty and power of God, and when God talks to us – through the Bible, in prayer, and by any other means – it's even more wonderful and helpful. What if you could make my own heart and thoughts and words just like that, God? That would be cool.

Taking it Home:

Pray this psalm – As you pray these words as your own, and tell God how cool are God's creation and words, invite God to make you reflect these, to find the spots in you that aren't so sweet and do what God wants to do with those – not to criticize but to transform.

For our church – What could occur in our church that would make people say, "Wow, that church really shows me the glory of God! I see people in that church, and think that whatever is happening there is powerful and sweet?" Pray that God would work in our church to give people that experience of seeing God alive and beautiful and good here.



Psalms

Week 3

Saturday, March 14 – Psalm 20

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

- ¹ In times of trouble, may the LORD answer your cry.
May the name of the God of Jacob keep you safe from all harm.
- ² May he send you help from his sanctuary
and strengthen you from Jerusalem.
- ³ May he remember all your gifts
and look favorably on your burnt offerings. *Interlude*
- ⁴ **May he grant your heart's desires
and make all your plans succeed.**
- ⁵ May we shout for joy when we hear of your victory
and raise a victory banner in the name of our God.
May the LORD answer all your prayers.
- ⁶ Now I know that the LORD rescues his anointed king.
He will answer him from his holy heaven
and rescue him by his great power.
- ⁷ Some nations boast of their chariots and horses,
but we boast in the name of the LORD our God.
- ⁸ Those nations will fall down and collapse,
but we will rise up and stand firm.
- ⁹ Give victory to our king, O LORD!
Answer our cry for help.

Points of Interest:

Blessing of the Day – May he...

This psalm takes the form of a Jewish blessing – words said by one person to in another wishing God's goodness to them in a way that might just make it so. Here the blessing is said for a king, perhaps just before an important battle, or on the occasion of the king's succession. (Where we think of royalty being crowned, the most important symbolic action for ancient Hebrew kings was to anoint them, meaning pour oil over their heads, representing God's presence and favor.)

This blessing has all of the expected cultural context of ancestors (God of Jacob), national geography



Psalms

Week 3

(the temple in the capital of Jerusalem), and religion (the king's gifts and offerings in consideration.) None of this particularly moves me, but I can appreciate the local flourishes to this blessing and pray for others – or appreciate being prayed for – with this kind of specificity of circumstance.

Great Prayers of the Day – *personal fulfillment, victory parades, and answered prayers*

I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm not sure exactly what to pray for others. There are some great ideas here that we'll have the chance to try out in a minute. What a wonderful thing to have one's desires fulfilled and plans come to pass at such a level that people hold a victory parade in your honor. That's some answered prayer!

A Different Kind of Royal Power of the Day – *boasting in the name of the Lord our God*

I've got to think this new king, or this king on the eve of battle, would have appreciated prayers – or even funding – for a larger standing army. But the person praying here says, "Oh, come on, lots of chariots and horses are for other kings. What you want is God on your side. *That* will lead to success." No wonder the psalm ends with another prayer for victory and help!

Seriously, one of my favorite ever documentaries is called *Strong in the Broken Places*. It highlights four Americans who have known profound trauma and equally profound healing in those places of weakness, such that they have been able to effect enormous positive change in others' lives, right out of their own experience of strength in weakness. The psalmist prays as if that's God's characteristic success strategy – not to give us tools to avoid or remove our weakness but to be a powerful force for us despite or even in the midst of our weakness.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Pray this prayer on behalf of any national leaders and other people that come to mind. If you have time, even pray this for the pastors of your church. Getting selfish for a minute here, I'd love to have hundreds of people praying this blessing for me today.

For your six – Pray this blessing for each of your six, or at least for one or two of them. Insert their name(s) everytime you see "you" or "the king." If some really specific hope or blessing comes to mind for one of them, consider telling them that today.

Sunday, March 15 – Psalm 21

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

¹ How the king rejoices in your strength, O LORD!
He shouts with joy because you give him victory.

² For you have given him his heart's desire;
you have withheld nothing he requested. *Interlude*



Psalms

Week 3

- ³ You welcomed him back with success and prosperity.
You placed a crown of finest gold on his head.
- ⁴ He asked you to preserve his life,
and you granted his request.
The days of his life stretch on forever.
- ⁵ Your victory brings him great honor,
and you have clothed him with splendor and majesty.
- ⁶ You have endowed him with eternal blessings
and given him the joy of your presence.
- ⁷ For the king trusts in the LORD.
The unfailing love of the Most High will keep him from stumbling.
- ⁸ You will capture all your enemies.
Your strong right hand will seize all who hate you.
- ⁹ You will throw them in a flaming furnace
when you appear.
The LORD will consume them in his anger;
fire will devour them.
- ¹⁰ You will wipe their children from the face of the earth;
they will never have descendants.
- ¹¹ Although they plot against you,
their evil schemes will never succeed.
- ¹² For they will turn and run
when they see your arrows aimed at them.
- ¹³ **Rise up, O LORD, in all your power.
With music and singing we celebrate your mighty acts.**

Points of Interest:

Homerism of the Day – *God's King*

True confession, this is my least favorite psalm so far. On the surface, it's a nationalistic celebration of one of Israel's kings, with unabashed home team favoritism. God is on this king's side, ready to give him long life and help him beat up on all his enemies. That's a little hard for me to celebrate, but there is a subversive angle here as well. Strong as the king is, even he isn't ultimately in authority. Even the most powerful human would benefit from trusting God (vs. 7), and experiencing God's love and protection.



Psalms

Week 3

Shift of Address of the Day – *Moving from Prayer to Cheerleading*

Midway through the psalm, the poet slips out of prayer and right into cheerleading for the king. You go, king. Wipe them out, clean ‘em up. Smash ‘em, bash ‘em, goooooo King!

Image of the Day – *take your pick*

This might be a hard psalm to get behind, but the language gets pretty fun sometimes. In the move from prayer to cheerleading, things get a little saltier. This kind gets to seize people in hand, throw them in a flaming furnace of devouring flame, wipe children from the earth, and point arrows in enemies’ faces. Wowser!

A Whole Different Angle on this Psalm of the Day – *rewriting history: a new king with a different enemy*

There’s a Christian tradition of reading Jesus into the royal psalms and identifying death, and all of its various tentacles, as the enemy’s Jesus is up against. On these terms, in dying and then rising again, Jesus is the Victor over death and will in time smash death in all its forms – actual death, and things like despair and sickness and oppression and more – into oblivion. This is a battle I can get behind.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Try praying this psalm, substituting Jesus for the king in it. It’s going to break down for you sometimes, particularly in the second half, so feel free to pray creatively when you get there.

For Jesus – So this is a little weird, but it’s what came to mind. This is kind of “for you”, but with a twist. Pray that Jesus would experience this kind of honor and reign on earth, that we would visibly see Jesus in absolute control and that Jesus would smash out death in the way this psalm describes.