



Psalms

Week 2

Steve Watson

Daily Bible Guide – 40 Days of Faith, 2015

Monday, March 2 – Psalm 8

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.

¹ **O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!**

Your glory is higher than the heavens.

² You have taught children and infants
to tell of your strength,
silencing your enemies
and all who oppose you.

³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—

⁴ what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?

⁵ Yet you made them only a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You gave them charge of everything you made,
putting all things under their authority—

⁷ the flocks and the herds
and all the wild animals,

⁸ the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea,
and everything that swims the ocean currents.

⁹ **O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!**

Points of Interest:

Exclamation of the Day—*your majestic name fills the earth*

Here we take a break from our regularly scheduled complaints and problems to praise God for a bit. God's name and majesty filling the earth makes me think of when a movie cleans up at the Oscars and everyone's talking about it, or when most of New England couldn't stop talking about Tom Brady in the wake of another Superbowl win. Here the name of God is the buzz on everyone's lips, filling the earth and even beyond, up to the heavens.

For what it's worth, whenever you see the word LORD in all caps in the Psalms, it's an English translation of the personal name for this God. This name, written in Hebrew as YHWH without any vowels, is – most people think – pronounced Yahweh. Over time, Jews wanted to make sure they didn't disrespect God's name, so they stopped saying or even writing it, and English translations of the Bible have followed suit. Ironically, it's this name of "Yahweh" that the psalmist imagines the whole earth saying over and over again as people talk about how wonderful God is.

Mismatched Battle of the Day – *children and infants tell of your strength*

Even the kids get in on the act. In fact it's the children's celebration of God here that silences God's enemies. At first this seems like an unfair fight. In one corner, the children and infants. In another, the enemies. It makes me think of when children joined in the Civil Rights' Movement marches, against some organizers' wishes at first. Who would dare attack young children? Well, Bull Connor and his Birmingham police force did, but this was one of the events that turned the tide of public opinion toward the Civil Rights protesters, and towards the silence of their oppressors.

Anthropology of the Day – *you made them only a little lower than God*

After looking around at the moon and stars and all the other wonders of nature, the poet notices what is perhaps the most singularly complex and stunning aspect of the earth: humankind. Why is it that humans can function like gods on the earth, with such great authority?

My boys have been into *The Lord of the Rings* tales lately. They ask why it is in that fictional world that the age of elves is fading and that humans are destined to the most prominent place on the earth? From a quick glance at the record of human behavior across any patch of history, it's not always clear that we handle such authority well.

But such authority we have, and it seems like this psalm would nudge us to care for ourselves and each other and the earth in such a way that it helps God's name and goodness fill the earth even more.

Creative Reading of the Day – *putting all things under their authority*

It seems pretty clear that we're talking about the ruling authority all people appear to have on the earth in this psalm. But the early followers of Jesus saw this psalm as applying to Jesus in some fairly unique ways. They saw Jesus arisen from the dead having a kind of preeminent authority over everything on earth, and so many formal churches continue to read this psalm on the Sunday when they remember Jesus leaving the earth, called Ascension Day.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – As you pray this psalm as your own, think of the greatest natural beauty you have ever seen and the most remarkable human achievements you've ever learned of, and consider how all this can show the whole earth how remarkable the creator God is.

For you – Try to praise God for as many things as possible today. See what it feels like for God's name to be filling your mouth and to see God present in filling the earth around you.

Tuesday, March 3 – Psalm 9

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

- ¹ I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.
- ² I will be filled with joy because of you.
I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.
- ³ My enemies retreated;
they staggered and died when you appeared.
- ⁴ For you have judged in my favor;
from your throne you have judged with fairness.
- ⁵ You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked;
you have erased their names forever.
- ⁶ The enemy is finished, in endless ruins;
the cities you uprooted are now forgotten.
- ⁷ But the LORD reigns forever,
executing judgment from his throne.
- ⁸ He will judge the world with justice
and rule the nations with fairness.
- ⁹ **The LORD is a shelter for the oppressed,
a refuge in times of trouble.**
- ¹⁰ Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, O LORD, do not abandon those who search for you.
- ¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD who reigns in Jerusalem.
Tell the world about his unforgettable deeds.
- ¹² For he who avenges murder cares for the helpless.
He does not ignore the cries of those who suffer.
- ¹³ LORD, have mercy on me.
See how my enemies torment me.
Snatch me back from the jaws of death.
- ¹⁴ Save me so I can praise you publicly at Jerusalem’s gates,
so I can rejoice that you have rescued me.

¹⁵ The nations have fallen into the pit they dug for others.
Their own feet have been caught in the trap they set.

¹⁶ The LORD is known for his justice.
The wicked are trapped by their own deeds. *Quiet Interlude*

¹⁷ The wicked will go down to the grave.
This is the fate of all the nations who ignore God.

¹⁸ But the needy will not be ignored forever;
the hopes of the poor will not always be crushed.

¹⁹ Arise, O LORD!
Do not let mere mortals defy you!
Judge the nations!

²⁰ Make them tremble in fear, O LORD.
Let the nations know they are merely human. *Interlude*

Points of Interest:

Musical Note of the Day – *“Death of the Son”*

“Death of the Son”, eh? Sounds like a winning tune....

Trial of the Day – *He will judge the world*

One of the TV shows I liked to watch as a kid was *The People’s Court*. In that televised civil court, viewers saw some ridiculous and petty human disputes, but we also got to cheer as Judge Wapner pronounced justice, requiring absentee landlords and deadbeat dads to pay their fair share.

One of our readers reminded me last week that God’s cosmic court is more like this than we might imagine. God is in charge in this psalm, judging individuals and whole nations. But rather than fearing or resenting God’s judgment, good people are invited to cheer on the marvelous things God is doing: redressing wrongs done and restoring justice. God seems to simply want people to “know they are merely human”, as the end of the psalm states. This would imply knowing our limits and not hunting one another down (15-16), recognizing that others are human as well.

Image of the Day – *a shelter for the oppressed*

In contrast to people and nations that hunt others as prey, God sets up a shelter for the troubled and the oppressed. God’s shelter seems to be really easy to find as well, as he never abandons people who are looking for it, or in fact, for him.

Unforgettable Deeds of the Day – *the cries of those who suffer*

An ancient Near Eastern audience would have expected a god to protect the interests of the powerful. But this god is unforgettable because he looks after the interests of the helpless and the suffering. Apparently, even when such people don’t go searching for God, he sometimes goes looking

for them.

Reversal of Fortunes of the Day – *the fate of all the nations who ignore God*

The psalmist thinks that evil people-hunters who ignore God will face a bad ending. One of the neat features of this Hebrew poetry, though, is that as an idea is repeated, or built upon, it helps develop the original thought. This statement about people who forget God is twinned with a promise that the needy and the poor who are now crushed will not be ignored. In combining these ideas, it seems that a great way to not ignore God is to not ignore those that, relative to you, are poor and needy.

Taking It Home:

Pray this psalm – In praying these longer psalms, you may or may not connect with each line. Give yourself permission to simply linger over the bolded verse, praying it several times. Or pray quickly through the whole psalm, but slow down whenever a particular phrase resonates for you. Let it take your prayers where it takes them.

For your six – Pray that if any of your friends are searching for God, God will hear them and respond.

Wednesday, March 4 – Psalm 10

¹ O LORD, why do you stand so far away?

Why do you hide when I am in trouble?

² The wicked arrogantly hunt down the poor.

Let them be caught in the evil they plan for others.

³ For they brag about their evil desires;

they praise the greedy and curse the LORD.

⁴ The wicked are too proud to seek God.

They seem to think that God is dead.

⁵ Yet they succeed in everything they do.

They do not see your punishment awaiting them.

They sneer at all their enemies.

⁶ They think, “Nothing bad will ever happen to us!

We will be free of trouble forever!”

⁷ Their mouths are full of cursing, lies, and threats.

Trouble and evil are on the tips of their tongues.

⁸ They lurk in ambush in the villages,

waiting to murder innocent people.

They are always searching for helpless victims.

⁹ Like lions crouched in hiding,

they wait to pounce on the helpless.

Like hunters they capture the helpless
and drag them away in nets.

¹⁰ Their helpless victims are crushed;
they fall beneath the strength of the wicked.

¹¹ The wicked think, "God isn't watching us!
He has closed his eyes and won't even see what we do!"

¹² Arise, O LORD!
Punish the wicked, O God!
Do not ignore the helpless!

¹³ Why do the wicked get away with despising God?
They think, "God will never call us to account."

¹⁴ But you see the trouble and grief they cause.
You take note of it and punish them.

The helpless put their trust in you.
You defend the orphans.

¹⁵ Break the arms of these wicked, evil people!
Go after them until the last one is destroyed.

¹⁶ The LORD is king forever and ever!
The godless nations will vanish from the land.

¹⁷ **LORD, you know the hopes of the helpless.
Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.**

¹⁸ **You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed,
so mere people can no longer terrify them.**

Points of Interest:

Enumeration of the Day – *Psalm 10, or 9b?*

Most scholars think that Psalms 9 and 10 were originally one poem. Some traditions still keep them as such, so from here on out, in some Bibles, the numbers of the psalms will be off by one, one way or another. If these were originally one psalm, then yesterday's praise was prelude to today's angst and concern.

Cognitive Dissonance of the Day – *Yet they succeed in everything they do.*

Cognitive dissonance, my counselor wife tells me, is the stress we get when we have two beliefs that don't coexist very well, or when the reality we're facing doesn't seem to synch up with our beliefs and ideas. I think it's fair to say that our psalmist is giving voice to a tremendous cognitive dissonance that many of us have faced in some way as well.

On the one hand, there's a world view in which God is active and present, rewarding the good and

punishing the bad. But then reality isn't like that at all right now. People do horrible things, brag about, maybe claim that God is dead along the way, and in return get ... success, and a smug attitude to boot. What does the psalmist do with that? Well, to start with, an honest prayer giving voice to questions and impatience and anger.

Image of the Day – *Like hunters they capture the helpless*

What exactly are these wicked people doing that have the psalmist so riled up? They're hunting people. Like lions, they look for anyone they can overpower, and they pounce. Human traffickers, ruthless lenders, and bullies of all ages come to mind.

Shift in Tone of the Day – *The LORD is king!*

The psalm begins with questions about where God is in an unjust world. And it moves to frustration and anger. Where Psalm 3 ask God to slap enemies in their mouths, breaking their teeth, here things move down to the arms. The poet wants God to hunt down the hunters and make them pay.

And yet at the end, there's the hope of faith. God is king, so that must mean that God knows and hears and will set things right in due time. *This American Life* recently told the story of a mentally disabled man who was harassed by his city's police, who were trying to meet arrest quotas in a get tough on crime system gone wrong. Eventually, through the efforts of this innocent man's employer/father figure and significant media exposure, things were set right to some degree, and the man could again live in peace, terrified no more. I cried when I heard the story because it evoked in me a desire to live in a world where that's universally the case, where God protects the weak and justice is done. Longing for God to make that so, and hope that God will, turns the tide in this psalm.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – As you pray the psalm, consider the injustices that trouble you most, and pray the final three verses several times, asking God to give you this faith and to make it so.

For your city – Pray that in the community you live in, God would restrain people that prey on the weak and defend people who need it most. Imagine a Greater Boston that is fully safe and just for all people. What gaps most pull at your mind and heart? Ask God if there's anything that God would have you do with that.

Thursday, March 5 – Psalm 11

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

¹ I trust in the LORD for protection.
So why do you say to me,
“Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!
² The wicked are stringing their bows
and fitting their arrows on the bowstrings.
They shoot from the shadows
at those whose hearts are right.

³The foundations of law and order have collapsed.
What can the righteous do?"

⁴**But the LORD is in his holy Temple;
the LORD still rules from heaven.
He watches everyone closely,
examining every person on earth.**

⁵The LORD examines both the righteous and the wicked.
He hates those who love violence.

⁶He will rain down blazing coals and burning sulfur on the wicked,
punishing them with scorching winds.

⁷For the righteous LORD loves justice.
The virtuous will see his face.

Points of Interest

Well-Meaning Advice of the Day – *Fly like a bird!*

The psalmist, perhaps David in one of his many vulnerable moments, gets some well-meaning advice to give up and run away. The assumption behind this advice is that life is dangerous, and there is no one in control. "The foundations of law and order have collapsed." There's a time for flight, of course, but most of us – the psalmist included – don't see this as a great life strategy in most situations.

Binary Grouping of the Day – *the wicked and the righteous*

Like many of the psalms we've seen, this one divides most people into two categories, the wicked and the righteous, and the speaker is happy to be in the latter group. I've trained myself to not see the world in such binary terms. After all, everyone has a story, and it's hard to say that anyone, myself included, is ever wholly good or evil. In fact, part of my parenting strategy with my children has been to help them stop dividing the world into "good guys" and "bad guys" as soon as they are able.

The psalms then challenge me with this other perspective, that we may not know the whole story on anyone – we leave that to God. But we can be honest about the world as we truly see and experience it at the moment. What's happening to me? What do I notice in the people around me, and the people I hear about from far off? How do I feel about the advice I'm getting? Some of our experience, and the people behind it all, seems right, and some feels wrong. Sometimes we experience people (again, ourselves included) as bad or good, wicked or righteous, and we can pray for God to intervene amidst all that.

God-Spotting of the Day – *The LORD is in his holy Temple*

Sometimes the psalmist seems frustrated that God is in the temple, shouting, "Arise!" Get out there and do something, God! Here the same location is comforting. God is somewhere to be found: in charge, in his temple.

The Bible's account of history insists that the whole earth was meant to be a temple for God,

designed for human flourishing. We may have lost that experience of the whole earth as good, with God present and easy to find everywhere, but the foundations have not collapsed after all, we're told. At some most basic level, God is still in charge.

Troubling Image of the Day – *blazing coals and burning sulfur*

What should God do with all these most troublesome people that we'll call "the wicked" for now? How about that time when we hear God just zapped them from the heavens, wiped them out completely? That sounds good!

This is a reference to the ancient story from Genesis of Sodom and Gomorrah. In that story, the people of those communities are so inhospitable, so unjust, so thoroughly mean and hateful that God eventually wipes them out, with blazing coals and burning sulfur firing down on them. It's like a volcano opens right up on these cities. This, of course, is the hope and prayer of the psalmist in this situation, not necessarily God's plans at all. One time Jesus' followers asked him to do the same to a community (Luke 9:51-56), and Jesus more or less told them to shut up. But our desire for God to act this way makes sense sometimes.

Hope of the Day – *The virtuous will see his face.*

The good news, the great hope, at the end of this psalm is that as messed up as the world may be, God is still wonderful. And people that stick with God – that don't give up and run away, and that don't become the people-hunting wicked – will get to see God face to face. Why such good news? Because when we see God, we have the same experience Jesus' followers did. We may be surprised, but we'll find that God is more real and more alive and more wonderful than we could have hoped for, and we'll find that the foundations of everything that matters are still very much in place, and we'll feel seen and protected and hope for our flourishing again.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Has anyone stood against you, undermined your confidence, or encouraged you to give up in some significant way? If so, pray the first half of the psalm as if you're talking to them by name. Then pray the final four verses to God ("You are in your temple... you watch everyone closely") as a reminder that God is real and that God (not this other person) will be the final judge of you and them and all truth.

For you – Where are you most tempted these days to give up, run away, or disengage? To "fly like a bird" as the psalm states? Tell yourself that God is in charge in that area and ask God how that should reframe or redirect your attitudes or actions.

Friday, March 6 – Psalm 12

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by an eight-stringed instrument.

¹ Help, O LORD, for the godly are fast disappearing!

The faithful have vanished from the earth!

² Neighbors lie to each other,

speaking with flattering lips and deceitful hearts.

³ May the LORD cut off their flattering lips
and silence their boastful tongues.

⁴ They say, “We will lie to our hearts’ content.
Our lips are our own—who can stop us?”

⁵ The LORD replies, “I have seen violence done to the helpless,
and I have heard the groans of the poor.

Now I will rise up to rescue them,
as they have longed for me to do.”

⁶ The LORD’s promises are pure,
like silver refined in a furnace,
purified seven times over.

⁷ Therefore, LORD, we know you will protect the oppressed,
preserving them forever from this lying generation,

⁸ even though the wicked strut about,
and evil is praised throughout the land.

Points of Interest:

Holy Moment of the Day – Help!

My friend Charles recently said that people generally pray most when we need something or want to complain. The psalms certainly reflect this tendency but they’re a lot more direct and a lot less nice than most of us. If nothing else, the psalms encourage us to stop prettying up our language and to be absolutely real and blunt in our conversation with God. This is the start of the realest, holiest moments we can have with God.

Butchery of the Day – Cut off lips and silenced tongues

Smashed teeth, broken arms, and now this. If David really had written this one, I like to imagine him saying to the shocked choir director, “Just keeping it real. Just keeping it real....”

False Advertising of the Day – Lying lips and pure promises

At the heart of this psalm is a question of who’s telling the truth. Everyone, even neighbors, seems to be constantly lying. Boy, if we could only drop our writer into the 21st century. I’m reminded of the cliché I heard again yesterday that facebook is the place where we all lie to our friends. And we live in an age where in advertising and politics and online dating and who knows where else, we’ve turned deception into multi-billion dollar industries and whole ways of life!

In the midst of frustration over the psalmist’s version of these observations, there’s a sense that God sees and is most concerned with how all this deception impacts people who are most vulnerable to it. God assures the psalmist that God is watching and will help those folks out. Bank on it.

Image of the Day—*the strutting, but impotent, wicked*

At the end of the psalm, the poet is assured that God will help out the naïve middle schooler getting tricked, the financially inexperienced borrower getting robbed, or the elderly retiree being scammed. Left is the lying bully, strutting about like a proud prison guard, not even noticing that all the inmates unjustly incarcerated have been set free.

Taking it Home:

Pray this psalm – Keep in mind whatever deceit or manipulation that most bothers you or has most impacted you as you pray. See what it feels like to try to trust in God’s promises that he sees and will act.

For your six – Pray that they will discover whatever promises God has for them and be comfortable banking on them. If any of your six seem caught up in the problem of “the lying generation”, either as the manipulators or the manipulated, pray they will be set free by truth.

Saturday, March 7 – Psalm 13

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

¹ O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you look the other way?

² How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
with sorrow in my heart every day?

How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

³ Turn and answer me, O LORD my God!

Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.

⁴ Don’t let my enemies gloat, saying, “We have defeated him!”

Don’t let them rejoice at my downfall.

⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love.

I will rejoice because you have rescued me.

⁶ I will sing to the LORD

because he is good to me.

Points of Interest:**Question of the Day** – *How long?*

This winter in Boston grew old fast. After weeks of shoveling-induced sore shoulders and navigating impossibly slow and harrowing commutes, “How long?” has felt like a great thing to pray. I don’t mean to trivialize this psalm. The original situation that prompted its writing was likely far more serious. There’s anguish in soul, sorrow in heart, and gloating enemies here. But it’s a pretty adaptable prayer. “How long?” gives voice to whatever urgency and impatience we feel in difficulty,

but it also expresses and provokes hope because without the hope of an answer, why bother asking?

It's the same refrain that Martin Luther King, Jr. used in his speech outside the state capitol in Montgomery after the march from Selma. "How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever. How long? Not long, you shall reap what you sow. How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Suffering through too long a winter? Protesting grave injustice? Humiliated by your enemies? Your hopes for happiness dashed again? "How long?" is a pretty great way into prayer in all kinds of trouble.

Image of the Day – *Bringing back the sparkle*

Whereas others think the psalmist's prospects are dim, the psalmist asks specifically for a return to vibrant hope and life. I love the particular phrase here – "Restore the sparkle to my eyes." It's evocative, and it's also kind of childlike, as is the opening prayer, "How long will you forget me? Forever?" The psalms are modeling a safe space to be entirely honest, but also entirely moody and needy before God.

Mood Change of the Day – *But I trust*

As in a number of the complaining psalms, there's a real change of the mood at the end. What happens? Has the psalmist sensed an answer to these prayers? Maybe there's just a history of experiencing an answer to prayer in other circumstances. Or perhaps it's an act of the will. I will *choose* to trust and sing, before I feel the sparkle back at all.

Regardless of the reason, "How long?" becomes "But I trust." And "Turn and answer!" becomes, "I will sing." As much as the psalms model a gritty honesty in our prayers, they also lead us to talk to a vibrant, living God who loves and rescues and is good in all circumstances.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – Color whatever impatience and hardship you may have into these "How long?" prayers. Take your time with the first four verses if you need to, and only pray the final "trust, rejoice, and sing" prayers when you're ready.

For you – If you have time, extend your "how long" prayer. Name a specific area of life where you could really use an experience of God's love, goodness, or rescue. Put up a note, or some other visible reminder of this, and whenever you see it, ask God for help and reason to trust, rejoice, and sing that God is good to you.

Sunday, March 8 – Psalm 14

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

¹ Only fools say in their hearts,
"There is no God."

They are corrupt, and their actions are evil;
not one of them does good!

²The LORD looks down from heaven
on the entire human race;
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,
if anyone seeks God.

³But no, all have turned away;
all have become corrupt.
No one does good,
not a single one!

⁴Will those who do evil never learn?
They eat up my people like bread
and wouldn't think of praying to the LORD.

⁵Terror will grip them,
for God is with those who obey him.

⁶The wicked frustrate the plans of the oppressed,
but the LORD will protect his people.

⁷**Who will come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel?
When the LORD restores his people,
Jacob will shout with joy, and Israel will rejoice.**

Points of Interest:

Pretty Low View of Humanity of the Day – *No one does good, not a single one!*

I heard a *Snap Judgment* podcast the other day on artificial intelligence. They profiled a guy who worked for a while as a censor for a social media company. He said, "When you spend all day looking at people being awful, you realize they're really awful." After seeing a steady stream of bullying, taunting, and creepy sexual predation online all day, he began censoring well beyond his company's policies, as he became convinced certain people were *going* to do harm to others, even if they hadn't yet. The psalmist takes a similarly dim view of humanity here.

Confusing Link of the Day – *atheism = foolishness = corruption?*

The psalmist appears to be equating rejection of God with rejection of basic human wisdom and decency. That's probably jarring to some of us, as there isn't much evidence around us that either belief in God or atheism categorically makes people more or less moral. I think the psalmist lives in a different time, though, where what we think of as atheism – denial of the actual existence of any spiritual being we might call God – wasn't really imagined. Rejection of God, rejection of the good, and rejection of wisdom all amount to the same thing for the psalmist, who links all three to injustice and oppression.

Lesson of the Day – a proverb

So this prayer is technically not really a prayer at all, but more of a wisdom lesson. Another book of the Bible, proverbs, is full of this style of writing.

For just a few verses, though, it's a strangely sprawling proverb. It covers indifference to God ("The fool says there is no God."), social injustice ("they eat up my people like bread"), religious hypocrisy ("wouldn't think of praying to the LORD"), and national calamity ("Who will come to rescue Israel") all at once. I can't even begin to sort out all the connections the psalmist is drawing between these things.

Bat-cave of the Day—Mount Zion

Mount Zion is a nickname for the city of Jerusalem, named after the mountain it sits on. Like the bat cave, someone's hiding out in there, just ready to come and save Israel. Turns out that someone is God himself. The hope that God will restore his people implies that the oppressed envisioned in this psalm aren't just a few victims at the bottom of the social pyramid, but the entire nation of Israel during one of its particularly low points, in need of a national turn around.

I can't help but think into this psalm's future, when Jesus shows up to Jerusalem, and starts to address the same range of problems mentioned above, not just for Israel, but for anyone else who wants in on the party of restoration and joy.

Taking it home:

Pray this psalm – This one's not really a prayer again, but at least verses 4-7 can be turned into another "How long?" prayer, asking God to restore and bring joy to all those who need it.

For your church – This seems like a good invitation to pray for God to work for our church and through our church, for our fortunes to be restored and for us to be known as restorers of fortunes. So for 2015, pray that our church would have all the growth and influence and reach for good that we could have. And pray that we would never have the religious hypocrisy of people who pray to God while taking advantage of others, but that we would be a force of compassion and justice wherever we can.