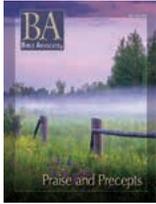




May - June 2024

A scenic photograph of a misty field at dawn or dusk. The foreground is filled with tall green grass and numerous small yellow and purple wildflowers. A rustic wooden fence made of weathered posts and a horizontal log runs across the middle ground. In the background, a dense line of trees is partially obscured by a thick layer of white mist. The sky is a soft mix of purple, pink, and blue.

Praise and Precepts



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2024: Meeting God in Scripture



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In His House

Welcome back, readers! I hope you are enjoying our journey through the Bible. In this issue, we are exploring the books of poetry. Of these J. I. Packer is credited in claiming, “Psalms teach us how to worship; Proverbs, how to behave; Job, how to suffer; Song of Solomon, how to love; and Ecclesiastes, how to live.”

That’s a good summary. Of these five books, Psalms has captured my attention most. As my favorite book, I read it most every day. I find it leads me into worship every time. My favorite verse in Psalms sums up this worship and the whole book:

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple (27:4, KJV throughout).

What is worship but the expressed desire to be near God? This psalm conveys that singular aspiration: to see, and to be with, Him. The most beloved, Psalm 23, ends on this very keynote: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Passion for His presence is the heartbeat of worship. Psalms exclaims this longing often: “LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house” (26:8; see also 36:8; 42:4; 52:8; 55:14; 65:4; 66:13; 84:4, 10; 92:13; 116:19; 118:26; 122:1, 9; 134:1; 135:2). Psalms presents us with a question: Where do you want to be? It gives the answer too: I want to be where You are!

Dwelling with the Almighty is intensely intimate. Only those of faith would dare to desire it. That’s why trust is the central theme of Psalms — and the basis of worship. May we all say, “I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: . . . let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice” (5:7, 11; cf. 2:12; 4:5; 5:11; 7:1; 9:10; 11:1, et al.). Read and enjoy!

— Jason Overman





Living a Truly Successful Life

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The benefits of following the right path in life.

by **Bob Hostetler**

Matthew Emmons aimed his rifle at the target one last time. He was one shot away from his second Olympic gold medal in Athens. He squeezed the trigger. It was a perfect shot. Unfortunately, he had aimed at the wrong target, an embarrassing and disqualifying mistake that dropped him from first to eighth place in the fifty-meter rifle, three-position target event.

Many people do something similar when they shoot for success. They work hard and

achieve much, only to discover that they were aiming at the wrong target. They *pursue* success without pausing to *define* success, without making sure they're aiming at true success.

In that respect, they're like the ancient sage whose writings are preserved in the book of Ecclesiastes. Writing from the pinnacle of achievement — a king on a throne, the world's wisest and richest man — he describes how he tried losing himself in work, hoarding money and possessions, and pursuing every worldly pleasure, as if success in those areas would satisfy his cravings. Eventually, however, he learned what true success in life looks like — the target the wise should aim for.

Live responsibly

Some readers and commentators consider Ecclesiastes to be a cynical book. That may be true, but its more prominent characteristic is irony. It's a book that warns against the writing of books. Its wisdom consists of showing the pursuit of wisdom to be meaningless. And it's the record of a man who learned the meaning of true success only by firsthand experience, which he hoped to pass on via second-hand instruction.

Nine and a half chapters into the memoir of his pursuit of fulfillment in life, the sage finally starts to impart a few secrets of true success. He writes:

Woe to the land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning.

Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time — for strength and not for drunkenness (10:16, 17).

In the culture of that day, rulers and judges held court in the morning. Late afternoon and evening were times for feasting. When the so-called responsible people reverse the proper order of things, when government officials are irresponsible, self-indulgent, and self-serving, everyone loses. But everybody wins, the sage says, when kings and presidents, owners and employers, leaders and managers, are responsible.

He goes on to say:

Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks (v. 18).

In other words, what is the measure of success? Take care of business. Pay your rent on time. Maintain your property. Pick up after yourself. Live responsibly.

But living responsibly is not just a matter of mowing the lawn and paying the bills. A few verses later, the sage says:

Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say (v. 20).

This is an admonition to be responsible in what we say, and it's a key to success: *Don't say things you'll be sorry for later* — even if no one's listening, even in your thoughts, even in your own bedroom.

So many relationships are ruined by careless words: things said in anger, offhand comments, whispered words “in

confidence.” People have lost jobs over such things. Families have been fractured. Churches have split. All because of someone who couldn't keep their mouth shut.

Live responsibly, the sage says. In your civic life, in your home life, in leisure, and in language.

Live generously

The next target to aim for is living generously:

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth (11:1, 2, NKJV).

In other words, practice open-handed generosity. Give freely to the needs of others.

spending like drunken sailors but says to be generous — maybe even uncomfortably so — when you see a need. In the wisdom and purpose of God, it may return to you someday, somehow, when you are in need.

The sage goes on to suggest four reasons to live generously:

Because generosity is the natural outflow of a full life, like clouds that fill up and empty themselves, again and again, over and over (v. 3). God fills up the clouds, not so they can get bigger and bigger but so they can empty themselves over and over. If God has blessed you, He did it so you can empty yourself, like the clouds of heaven.

Because by being generous, you will more likely fulfill God's reasons for putting you where

“Live responsibly, the sage says.
In your civic life, in your home life,
in leisure, and in language.”

The phrase “Cast your bread upon the waters” was probably an Arabic proverb for what looked like wasteful expenditure. No one would take good bread and throw it in the river or onto the ocean waves. That would be like “throwing your money down a rat hole” or “throwing good money after bad.”

But the sage enjoins that very thing. He doesn't suggest

you are. The sage's mention of the tree falling to the south or north (v. 3) may be his way of saying, “Wherever God has put you, meet needs around you. Be alert to the reasons God may have for placing you where you are.”

Because every stage of life is ideally suited for being generous. The sage writes, “Whoever watches the wind will not plant;

whoever looks at the clouds will not reap" (v. 4). That is, don't wait for the perfect time to give. Don't think you have to have so much in the bank before you start giving. Don't wait for the kids to grow up. Don't wait for the next raise. Because *now* is always the time to be generous.

Because you don't know all that God will do through your generosity. The sage says you don't know where the wind comes from or how a baby's body forms in a mother's womb. Neither do you know what God will do with your generosity or

“Success consists of making your choices and living your life in the awareness that *this* life is not all there is.”

what He will do *for you* someday as a result of it (vv. 5, 6). You don't know whether the tithe you scrape together in a time of need may come back to you at the most opportune time. You don't know whether your kindness to a friend may make possible an even larger kindness. You don't know the power of God or the timing of God. He changes and blesses lives; He changes the *history of the world* by the phenomenon of godly generosity.

Live thoughtfully

The sage mentions one more target to aim for if you're shooting for success:

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless (vv. 7, 8).

Light and sun are symbols of life lived in the love of God. Just as we love to step outside when

we see the sun break through on a cloudy, gloomy day, so we can enjoy the love of God, the sense of His acceptance, the joy of His presence, the knowledge that we're approved and accepted by Him, the gift of righteousness by faith. That is success.

But those lines also contain a warning. The sage is not being maudlin or pessimistic when he says to enjoy the years you've been given, but remember the dark days. He's saying, "Make the most of good days, because everybody has bad days."

That's common sense. The

idea is not to let yesterday's rain or tomorrow's forecast ruin today's parade.

But the sage isn't saying only, "Make the most of good days, because everybody has bad days." He's also talking about preparing for the end of our earthly lives. In verses 9, 10 he says when young, use your limitless energy, enjoy your good looks, follow your dreams, seize opportunities, and take advantage of being young. But remember that though there are great, open doors of opportunity set before you (which you won't have later in life), approach them thoughtfully, considering that many people spend a lifetime recovering from bad choices. Some even spend an eternity suffering for them.

Success consists of making your choices and living your life in the awareness that *this* life is not all there is. True success takes thought not only for this life but also for the life to come.

No matter what your past has been or what your future might be, you can live successfully if you aim well at the right target. True success is living in the awareness that all that is done "under the sun" is not all that is done. Success is living responsibly, generously, and thoughtfully in this life, all while aiming for and anticipating the next. **BA**

Bob Hostetler writes from Las Vegas, NV. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



Spotlight on Psalms

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Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1).

The most read and best-loved portion of Hebrew Scriptures, Psalms has served as a book of poetry and prayer for lovers of God for 3,000 years. It provides comfort and counsel to the many Christians who regularly take in its words. About half these songs and poems were written by David. Other authors are Asaph, the sons of Korah, Moses, and Solomon.

The psalmists were men of like passions as we. They wrote, sang, and prayed over a wide range of human emotion and experience: anger, depression, guilt, fear, revenge, gratitude, praise/worship, melancholy, sickness, loneliness, etc. With life-like realism, the psalms are saturated in robust faith where God is the answer — immediately or eventually — to all life's problems, the source of all its blessings.

- One-third as long as the entire New Testament, Psalms takes up more pages than any other book.
- Psalms has 150 “chapters” — more than twice as many as Isaiah, with 66.

- At the Bible's center, Psalms has its middle chapter (117), middle verse (118:8), and middle page.
- It contains the Bible's shortest (117) and longest (119) chapters.

Ten most-loved psalms

- 1 - “Blessed is the man”
- 19 - “The heavens declare”
- 23 - “The Lord is my shepherd”
- 27 - “The Lord is my light”
- 46 - “God is our refuge and strength”
- 51 - “Have mercy upon me, O God”
- 91 - “He who dwells in the secret place”
- 100 - “Make a joyful noise” (KJV)
- 103 - “Bless the Lord, O my soul”
- 121 - “I will lift up my eyes”

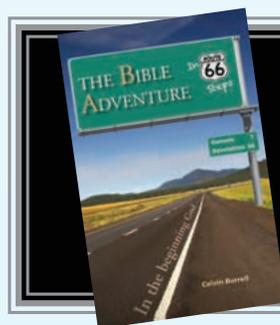
Psalm categories (examples)

- Life wisdom (1, 15, 101)
- Against enemies (52, 58, 59, 109, 140)

- Royal, to the king (18, 72, 89)
- Nature (8, 19, 104, 148)
- Messianic (2, 22, 72, 110)
- Penitential (34, 51)
- Ascent to the temple (120-134)
- Historical (78, 105, 106, 136)
- Hallelujah, or “Praise Jehovah” (111-117, 146-150)

Amazing 119: This marathon psalm sings the praises of God's law. Divided into 22 stanzas (for Hebrew alphabet letters) of eight verses each, nearly all its 176 verses mention *law* or a synonym: *word, statutes, judgments, commandments, testimonies*, etc. The Bible's longest chapter, conceived and penned from a heart after God, is wholly positive about what's now rejected by many Christians.

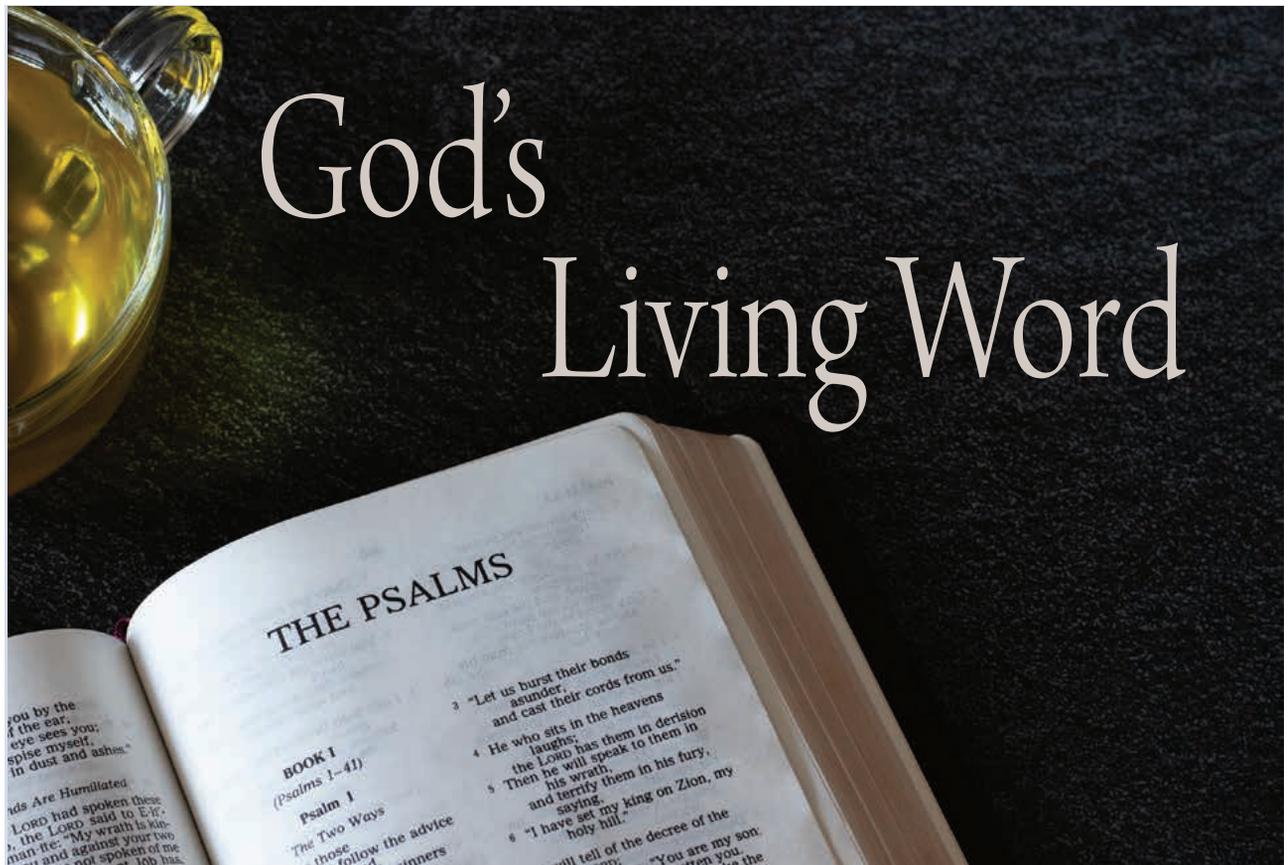
Psalms in a sentence: In all times, places, and circumstances, the person with a trusting heart can bring it all to God and be blest. Praise the Lord!



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Digging deeper into Psalm 19.

by Dr. David R. Downey

The nineteenth psalm, written by King David, starts with such statements as “The heavens are telling,” “their expanse is declaring,” and “Day to day pours forth speech.” It closes with an appeal for the acceptability of “the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart.”

We could write *the Word* over this entire psalm as a theme, as it is referring to the words, commands, and precepts of God and our response to them. The

speech of God is life, no matter if spoken or silent, and His commands give us life and direction.

King David desired to follow God with all his heart. He failed spectacularly on several occasions, but then he found his way back again. He consistently tried to focus on God’s line of thought, as he does in this psalm.

The heavens tell

In verses 1-6, David focuses on the heavens. Not surprisingly, these verses are used often in our discussion with those naturalists who do not believe in the act of creation. We point to the beauty and design of nature to emphasize God as the author, contrary to their declaration that this is simply a significant work in nature, an unexplained ordering

of the details. David says the details are explained in God: “The heavens are telling the glory of God.”

This declaration of God’s glory is continuous — “day to day” and “night to night.” God’s evidence in the created world testifies to His glory, His greatness, and His concern for His creation.

Such testimony never stops if we are wise enough to see it. Many times on my hikes through the woods and fields, I thank God that I have eyes to see creation as God’s handiwork. It is liberating to sense His closeness in the things He has made. I feel sad for those who only see it mechanically.

David spends the large part of three verses in this psalm’s opening to refer to the sun. He

says the heavens are a tent, or tabernacle, from which the sun begins its march each day and concludes at night. This is not intended to be a scientific study of the sun's movements, any more than saying the sun is a literal bridegroom. The "circuit" of the sun's movements is from the perspective of the psalmist; it comes up, crosses the heavens, and goes down. David is simply extolling the power he sees.

This poetic language shows just one example of the display of God's power. The mighty sun, which no one can stop, marches at the commands of its Sovereign from morning to night.

I live in Texas. The last few summers have been a clear witness to the fact that we cannot hide from the sun's heat. Just so, the evidence that God continues to speak to us through His creation tells us of His majesty. These wonderful displays of His power and His sovereign care give us hope for order in a world that is too often awry.

The law tells

The latter part of Psalm 19 can be broken into two parts. The first is verses 7-10, where the psalmist speaks of the effectiveness of God's law. The second is in verses 11 through the end of the psalm, where David appeals to God for the law to have an impact on him, personally.

First, David extols the excellence of God's law. I am reminded of Psalm 119, where each verse has something to say about the wonder of God's law and its impact on the faithful follower. (Curiously, the numbers of these psalms are close where the

theme is so similar.) In the same manner, we are told here in Psalm 19 that the law is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true.

If this were a modern writer, we might wonder if he had spent too much time with his thesaurus! But more than simply employing repetition of the same idea or a nuanced interpretation of the same word, David carefully chooses each word to reveal his love for the law. A quick consultation of the Hebrew words he uses shows us the law is *perfect*, or complete; it is *sure*, or reliable; it is *right*, or straight; it is *pure*, or free of blemishes; it is *clean*, or ethically spotless; and it is *true*, or trustworthy.

These qualities cause changes in the one who believes. David

might have reached low ebb? His words are life. They lead to the best riches we can find on this earth, but we sometimes consider them dry. Dryness would contrast with David's description in verse 10. He says that God's words, extensions of His presence, are finer than the purest gold and sweeter than the best confection on earth. We simply cannot find anything more valuable or helpful than what God has told us in His revelation.

The Word moves

Second, having extolled the law itself, David expresses his desire to be moved by its power. He writes that the law equally protects us from mistakes and re-

“We simply cannot find anything more valuable or helpful than what God has told us in His revelation.”

follows each word he mentions with benefits of the law, like restoration, wisdom, joy, enlightenment (vv. 7, 8), or superlative characteristics, like endurance and righteousness (v. 9). The law is to be trusted, and it leads to a deepening relationship with God.

Are we alert when we read such psalms and observe how our love for God's commands

wards us when we follow (v. 11). This would make the law a living thing, representative of God's character. How else would it warn and give life? During our private Bible study, worship, or church instruction, we participate in the regenerative power of God's Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, we cannot know

Your Gifts and Giving

As I write on this beautiful spring afternoon, blooms and blossoms of every color are popping up everywhere. I love this time of year. It always reminds me of God’s faithfulness.

We see God’s faithfulness at the Bible Advocate Press. As our 2023 fiscal year ends and the next begins, we are thankful for God’s enduring care. For over 160 years now, He’s blessed us in so many ways, but especially through the readers who believe in what we are doing.

As you probably know, for over 50 of those years, the BA has been sent free of charge because we are supported by the gifts of readers like you. As stewards of this ministry, we make it our goal to be accountable and transparent in all our financial dealings. In that spirit, you will find below our budget for 2024 and our 2023 expenses. We hope this gives you an idea of how your regular giving helps keep the BA going.

Like so many others, we continue to feel the effects of inflation. The expenses associated with printing and delivering the BA continue to climb. Thanks to our regular givers and even the surprising generosity of strangers, we made it through another year. Praise the Lord!

If you can help a little or a lot with a monthly or annual gift, with a onetime gift or endowment, it will help greatly. While the BA is free in both physical and digital form, it’s not free to create, print, and mail. That’s why we come back each year and ask for your support even as we thank you for all you have already done.

On this beautiful spring day, I thank the Lord, and I thank you for your faithful generosity. We cannot deliver the BA without you!

Blessings in Christ,
Jason Overman
Editor

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2023 Total \$107,000 for BA Production			
	\$42,000 Labor	\$44,000 Printing	\$21,000 Postage
January-December 2024			
\$118,100 Projected			

ourselves without the searchlight of the Word of God. David says, “Who can discern his errors?” (v. 12). Left to ourselves, we tend to either exaggerate our wickedness or accentuate our righteousness. The Word of God alone can accurately shine light on our condition. It can remedy our tendency to sin presumptuously, but it can also atone for the many sins we have not yet acknowledged weighing us down (vv. 12, 13).

We could say, “I want to get washed!” Our attention to God’s testimonies can free us. His words offer hope because they offer *Him*. When we allow His instruction to penetrate our souls, to transform us, we become righteous in His light.

David concludes this psalm with the well-known words “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer” (v. 14). His entire life is intricately woven into God’s will. We cannot escape the fact that life is found in God: He has revealed Himself as all-powerful. He has shown Himself to be gracious toward us, and He has made it clear that our abundance is found when we embrace His words. **BA**

Dr. David Downey writes from Burleson, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



Questions & Answers



What are the imprecatory psalms? How are they applicable to Christians today?

The imprecatory psalms are those that *imprecate*. They invoke judgment, calamity, or curses upon those perceived as the enemies of God and His people. The major imprecatory psalms are 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, and 140.

Understanding how they apply to Christians today, with New Testament ethics about loving one's enemy, requires spiritual maturity. Most important is that Christians never curse their enemies. They call for the curse upon God's enemies. Christians today do this sometimes when they pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" In doing so, we are calling for an end to the unrighteousness of this world, even at the expense of cursing all those who are unrighteous.

Obviously, this prayer is biblical. It calls for Christ's return and deliverance of God's people from all enemies' wickedness and for God's judgment to be invoked upon the wicked.

In a Ligonier Ministries podcast, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey commented:

The imprecations of the Psalter are directed against the enemies of God and His purposes, and of His people. Still, that doesn't entirely remove the problem. Should we be cursing enemies? And I think part of the answer is, well, not all the time. Not a lot of the time. We need to kind of follow the balance of the Psalter. The Psalter doesn't curse enemies all the time either. Nonetheless, I think we mustn't sentimentalize Christian ethics. Paul says in Romans,

after all, that we love our enemies so that in the final judgment, more coals will be heaped on their heads. So, the loving of the enemy is not the elimination of judgment to come.

Jesus bore God's vengeance for the sins of the whole world from start to finish, for those who accept His judgment in place of their own. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "The imprecatory psalm leads to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God which forgives enemies. . . . In this way the crucified Jesus teaches us to pray the imprecatory psalms correctly."

Paul used imprecation: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22). "If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). We are not taking matters into our own hands but rather expressing trust in "The Lord [who] executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed" (Psalm 103:6).

So, yes, believers may pray for severe temporal judgments upon the enemies of God. But they must leave it to God for the outworking of such petitions. Finally, the Christian can use the imprecatory psalms to pray against those things that hinder the advancement of God's kingdom in this world.

— Elder Chip Hinds

Editor's note: For more insight on this topic, see "22 Reasons to Pray the Cursing (Imprecatory) Psalms" at <https://praypsalms.org/22-reasons-to-pray-the-cursing-psalms-b4a85ae40aa9>.



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The reason for repetition
in Psalm 136.
by R. Herbert

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever (Psalm 136:1).

In the iconic Verizon cellular phone commercial that aired in the US a number of years ago, the actor playing the Verizon service technician repeatedly asks, “Can you hear me now?” It was an effective message that made its point through the continued repetition of its tagline.

The repetition of “Can you hear me now?” in this commercial always reminded me of Psalm 136, a unique psalm of

twenty-six verses, each of which ends with the same statement: “His love endures forever.” That’s a lot of repetition. The only other psalm that comes close to it is Psalm 118, which repeats the same expression four times. But with twenty-six repetitions, Psalm 136 is truly the “Can you hear God now?” psalm.

More than repetition

But Psalm 136 is more than just the simple repetition of a phrase. Its repeated “tagline” ties into an important lesson. The psalm carefully catalogs the many different areas where God’s love may be seen — some of which we may not often think about.

The composition begins with a statement about God’s goodness (v. 1) and continues through its

first section with expressions of God’s powerful nature and creative deeds (vv. 2-9). These are things we may usually think of as being reasons for praise, but not aspects of God’s love. The psalmist clearly saw the connections, however, and we can, too, if we think about them.

For example, can we see that God’s refusal to misuse His great power is based entirely on His love? That is only a single instance of how God’s love continually determines every other aspect of His nature.

Even more obviously connected with God’s love, the psalm’s second section catalogs many of His saving actions in rescuing and helping His people, guiding them and giving them freedom and a land of their own (vv. 10-24). The psalm ends with the statement that God gives food to

every creature (v. 25), reminding us that God’s love is shown not only to His people but to all of His creation.

Examples of love

Each of the themes covered in Psalm 136 is broken down into specific areas – specific examples of things God has done that show His love. Many of them are taken from the early history of Israel. The psalm actually quotes Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy a number of times.

For instance, in verse 15 the psalmist uses an unusual expression. He says that God “swept,” or literally “shook off,” the Egyptians in the middle of the sea – the exact Hebrew expression used in Exodus 14:27 to describe the drowning of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. But if many of the examples in the psalm are firmly rooted in the history of ancient Israel, they could just as easily represent ways we today have been given freedom and every blessing, both nationally and individually.

Why does Psalm 136 repeatedly connect the things it catalogs with the love of God? The answer is that it is all too easy to see God’s love in His obvious and tangible gifts. Without a broader awareness and understanding, we may not see God’s love – or we may even question it – in situations where God allows us to experience bad things rather than good.

That is why we are told, “Give thanks” for such things four times in the psalm (vv. 1-3, 26) and implicitly throughout it. The psalm reminds us that every one of the Old Testament stories it alludes to, or quotes, involved fears,

frustrations, and failures for the Israelites before the final positive outcome. In seeing God’s love in results, we must also come to see His love in the steps along the way to those outcomes.

Recognizing His love

Only when we look more deeply at life and the Word of God do we see that the love of God is actually at work in a myriad of aspects of creation and events of history – and in every aspect of our lives.

If we think about the ongoing

repetition of “His love endures forever” at each point throughout the “Can you hear God now?” psalm, we, too, can hear God – everywhere.

Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever (v. 26). **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds an earned doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Question: What is read widely but never appears in print?

Answer: The BA’s Online Extras!

Take an even deeper dive into the Bible’s wisdom and poetry with three additional online articles for this issue:

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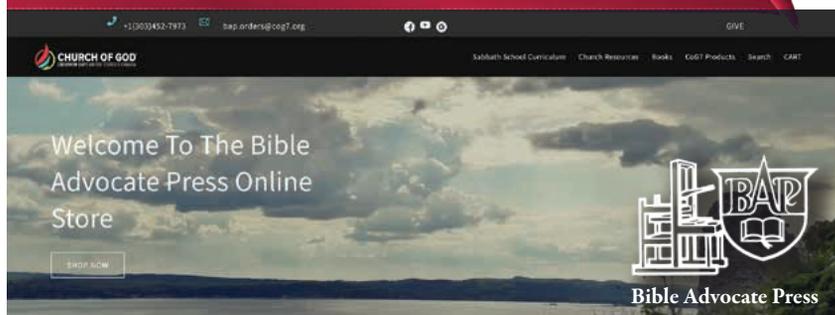
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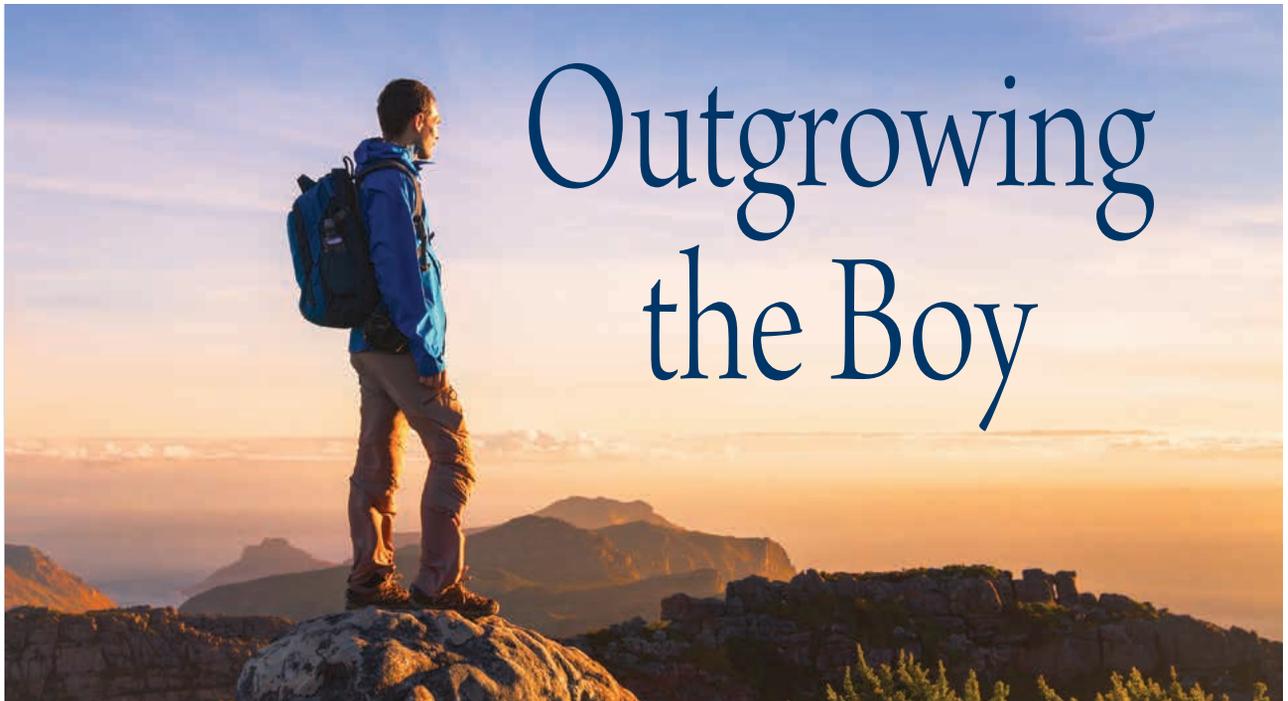
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Outgrowing the Boy

A mother's godly wisdom and warnings.
by Esther Zeiset

Little boys, according to the nursery rhyme, are made of snips and snails and puppy dog tails. Compared to little girls, who are made of sugar and spice and everything nice, boys are infinitely inferior. They are just, well . . . boys.

Public opinion treats males no better in adulthood. Popular entertainment portrays men as incompetent, irresponsible, beer-drinking oafs who hog the TV remote and growl at their kids.

The church does well to push back against such male-bashing and to challenge men to become the leaders God intended them to be.

It is a daunting task to raise godly kids of either gender in a godless society, and even more

difficult to guide our sons in becoming God-fearing men who will lead courageously.

Centuries ago, King Lemuel's mother grappled for words to shape and guide her boy-king. Not once, but three times in Proverbs 31:2, she demanded the listening ear of the son destined for the throne. She ached for him to develop strength of character and adopt principles that would enable him to rule with a firm hand, yet to be compassionate. To possess a quick mind, yet to be circumspect.

The mother of Proverbs 31 lives in the heart of every Christian parent whose deepest desire is for their son to grow into godliness. Achieving that goal requires intentionality. Our natural tendency is to minimize our child's character flaws and excuse with a sigh, "Boys will be boys." It takes courage to confront areas in their lives that need correction.

While few of our sons will

reach the pinnacle of national leadership roles that King Lemuel did, they will function in varied areas of influence — from the playground to parenthood and beyond. How can we shape our sons to operate within the sphere of leadership God will call them to?

We can start by heeding the warnings laid out by King Lemuel's mother. She identified three potential inhibitors to her son's ability to lead in a God-honoring way.

Women

This mother zeroed in on sexual integrity. "Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings," she cautioned in verse 3. Today's sex-saturated culture bombards our sons incessantly with ungodly messages regarding morality. It asserts there is no right or wrong and that we each have freedom to live according

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David Discovers

God's Presence



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by **Marcia Sanders**

David trudged down the long driveway, dragging his feet in the dirt. Skippy looked at him, as if to ask what was wrong. When David reached the house, he went straight to the kitchen island, plopped a package on the table, and sat staring at it.

"So, who's the box for?" Mom asked.

"Me. It's my birthday present from Papa and Nana," David answered. "Why would they send a package? My birthday is Sunday, and they always bring my presents with them when they come."

"I don't know. Why don't you open the card that's attached to the package?"

David opened the envelope and withdrew a colorful birthday card with notes from both Nana and Papa inside. "Papa's been sick and doesn't feel like traveling right now," David reported with sadness. "Man! I was so looking forward to making cookies with Nana and hunting with Papa. It stinks that they won't be here!"

"But they sent a present," Mom pointed out.

"Do you want to open it?" Dad asked.

"Maybe later. Right now I'm just so disappointed that they won't be here. I appreciate the gift, but I really wanted time with them."

"You know what this makes me think of, David?" Dad asked.

David grinned. "No, but I bet it's about God."

"Yep! You know me well." Dad smiled. "It reminds me of the David in the Bible who was said to be 'a man after God's own heart.' He had a close relationship with God, even though he still messed up at times. Still, he wrote many psalms that talked

about his love for God and God's presence — like Psalm 16:11: 'In Your presence is fullness of joy'" (NASB).

Mom agreed. "That David understood the need to have God always with him, just as you feel the need to have Papa and Nana physically here with you."

"Wow," David said. "That makes me think about how sad God must be when I only pray and ask Him for things. I don't spend enough time just enjoying His presence, reading His Word, sharing my thoughts with Him, and listening for Him to answer. I want His presents more than His presence when I do that."

Dad smiled. "That's a powerful insight, David."

"Yes," agreed Mom. "You hit on a really important idea that too many people overlook. God isn't some genie in a bottle to grant wishes. He's a loving Father who wants what is best for His people, and that includes a close and loving relationship with Him."

David looked thoughtful. "I'm going to wait to open my present until my birthday. Then I can Face-Time Papa and Nana and enjoy spending time with them that way. Right now, I'm going to go upstairs and spend time with my heavenly Father by reading my Bible, asking God to help me really understand what it says, and sharing my thoughts with Him. I'm going to concentrate on being *in* His presence." **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



The God Who Would Be Known

Pairs of Praise and Power

Psalms shows us not only *how* to worship but *who* we worship. In thanksgiving the psalmists celebrate the nature of God enthusiastically, and in lament they appeal to His divine nature earnestly. Often cited in pairs, the poetry of Psalms reveals God as He truly is. These are just a few divine attributes that His people declare repeatedly.

Thy mercy (Hebrew: *hesed*). Usually translated as “mercy” or “lovingkindness” in the KJV/NKJV, or “steadfast love” or “unfailing love” (ESV, NIV), *hesed* is the most praised and called on of all God’s attributes. Appearing over 125 times in Psalms alone — and most famously in Psalm 136 — *hesed* reveals a loving God we can trust to forgive and to save. *Hesed* is God’s character in a word.

In Psalms, *mercy* is often paired with *truth*: “All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth . . . For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds” (25:10; 57:10; cf. 61:7; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14; 100:5; 108:4; 115:1).

Thy truth (Hebrew: *emet*). Usually translated as “truth” in the KJV/NKJV, *emet* is translated “faithfulness” in the ESV and NIV. When Psalms pairs and repeatedly calls upon God’s mercy and truth, it echoes God’s self-revelation to Moses at Mount Sinai, declaring He abounds in *hesed* and *emet* (Exodus 34:6). By the word *emet*, God’s people know that their covenant God is faithful and true. When paired with *hesed*, especially, Israel praises God’s steadfast and reliable love.*

Because God is faithful, it follows that His people can count on all His words being the truth (*emet*): “The entirety of Your word is truth” (Psalm 119:160).

But Psalms has another word for *faithfulness*.

Thy faithfulness (Hebrew: *emunah*). The sister words *emunah* and *emet* appear approximately 60 times in Psalms. Like *emet*, *emunah* reveals God’s sure and caring hand in all His deeds, as in Psalm 89. Here the psalmist praises God’s *emunah* seven times and pairs it with *hesed* in five cases: “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations” (v. 1; cf. vv. 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, 49).

Psalms praises God’s faithfulness and cries for it in penitential prayer, and here, pairs it with God’s righteousness: “Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness” (143:1).

Thy righteousness (Hebrew: *sedeq*). Psalms repeatedly confesses and appeals to God’s *righteousness*. By *sedeq* God is revealed as just, not only in punishing wrongdoing but also in promising to set things right. For this reason, God’s righteousness is often paired with His salvation (24:5; 51:14; 65:5; 98:2) and alongside *hesed*, *emet*, and *emunah*. In Psalm 40 we find all five wonderful words in a single verse:

I have not hidden Your *righteousness* [*sedeq*] within my heart; I have declared Your *faithfulness* [*emunah*] and Your *salvation*; I have not concealed Your *lovingkindness* [*hesed*] and Your *truth* [*emet*] from the great assembly (v. 10, emphasis mine).

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”**

* See *compassion* (*raham*) and *gracious* (*hanun*) paired in 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8.

***Mercy* and *goodness* (*tov*) are paired in 23:6; 25:7; 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 136:1.

The Scarlet Thread of the Messiah

Anticipating Jesus in the Psalms

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As Israel's songbook, Psalms shapes our worship and, in the process, forms our expectations. It holds forth God's blessing, mercy, and righteousness. It calls us to trust Him as our shelter and salvation. These are merely features of Psalms' central message: "the LORD reigns" (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1); "He is a great King over all the earth" (47:2; cf. 5:2; 10:16; 24:7-10; 29:10; 68:24; 74:12; 95:3; 98:6; 149:2).

With its focus on God's rule, it is not surprising that Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament, where the gospel of the kingdom and God's reign are fully revealed in Jesus the Messiah. Time and again, Psalms points to Jesus in prophecy and prefiguration.

Identity of Jesus

As Messiah: "Why do the nations rage . . . against the LORD and against His Anointed?" (Psalm 2:1, 2; Mark 1:1; Acts 4:25).

As King: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6; Mark 15:32; John 18:37).

As Son: "The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'" (Psalm 2:7, 12; Mark 1:1; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; cf. Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

As Lord: "The Lord said to my Lord . . ." (Psalm 110:1; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34).

Life of Jesus

His birth: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body" (Psalm 132:11; Luke 1:32; cf. Psalms 33:10; 34:2, 3, 10; 71:19; 80:17; 98:1, 3; 103:17; 111:9; 126:2, 3; 138:6 in Luke 2:45-56).

His baptism and transfiguration: "The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'" (Psalm 2:7; Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

His teaching: "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Psalm 37:11, 22; Matthew 5:5). Jesus' Sermon on the Mount draws widely from Psalm 37 (cf. 6:8; 7:1; 18:25; 24:4; 34:14-19; 35:11-14; 39:5; 40:10, 17; 48:2; 55:22; 68:3; 81:10; 103:20, 21; 107:9; 119:115; 145:13).

His triumphant entry and rejection: "The stone which the builders rejected . . ." and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Psalm 118:22, 26; Matthew 21:9, 42).

Passion of Jesus

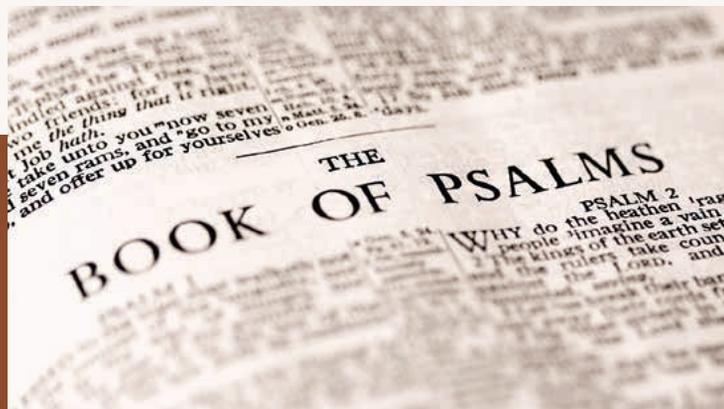
His crucifixion: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1; Mark 15:34); "Into Your hand I commit my spirit" (Psalm 31:5; Luke 23:46). See further: Psalm 69:4 in John 15:25; Psalm 69:21 in Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36; John 19:28, 29; and Psalm 88:8 in Luke 23:49.

His resurrection: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27; 13:35).

His ascension: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1; 10:12, 13; 12:2).

It is fitting to end with Psalm 110:1, the most quoted Old Testament verse from the most quoted Old Testament book in the New. When the apostles wrote the Gospels of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, Psalms confirmed their message. **BA**

— Jason Overman



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Interpreting

by Brian Franks

Modern readers face some challenges interpreting the Psalms, especially those living in Western countries. This is due to differences in cultures and time.

The differences between ancient Israelite and modern Western cultures are greater than one might expect. What readers may not know at first observation is that the Psalms were not originally written in English, Spanish, or Kiswahili, but in Hebrew. Once we grasp the implications of this simple fact, we are on our way toward much better reading and interpretation of the Psalms.

Language

One thing that changes for the reader is that these holy words were not written according to the rhythm and rhyme of English poetry, or in the forms of Spanish poetry. Rather, they follow Hebrew poetic norms, which are less concerned with rhyming and strict structures than they are with telling a story, with emotional reporting, and with expression.

A great way to see this

dynamic in action is to read the story of the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 13-14), a Western mind-friendly narrative, alongside the song of Moses and Miriam (chapter 15). You will catch the stylistic difference between the two forms and how certain details are presented about the same event.

Another instance of this is the story of Deborah in Judges, followed by the song of Deborah right after (chapters 4-5). We can compare the story with the song or compare the story with Psalm 78, the report of God's works and Israel's struggles through the Exodus. What should stand out is the factual reporting of the narrative versus the emotional expressions (joy, sorrow, wrath, hate, despair) of the poetry. The narratives tell what happened, while the poetry tells how the people, the narrator, and/or God felt.

Song

The second thing to recognize about the Psalms is that, in most cases, they were not meant to be read in a book. They were made to be sung! Many, but not all, of the psalms are noted with superscriptions of the tune they

go with (e.g., "the tune of lilies," "the tune of Do Not Destroy," "a maskil," etc.), or are noted to be for the choirmaster, or both.

This presents an extra challenge for the modern reader, who does not know these tunes and often interacts with them by reading the Psalms devotionally. It is not that they can't simply be read, but something is missing in the original intent when we don't sing them. Thankfully, many modern Christian musicians have used lines and whole psalms in their music to give us at least some idea what singing psalms can be like, even if we don't know the original tunes or sing them in the original language.

One advantage for this scenario is that the original Hebrew of the Psalms didn't tend to utilize rhymes or cadence (rhythm and meter) that is more common in our modern and even medieval Western poetry. Instead, the Hebrew poetic style leaned toward various formations of couplets. The purest form of couplets can be found in most of Proverbs, in which two lines interact to convey or develop an idea. They may contain simile, metaphor, or repetition. The couplets may state an opposite or compare

the Psalms

and contrast themes. In this sense, the main mechanism employed to convey meaning is still intact in Hebrew poetry no matter what language it is translated into or what tune is given. What a stroke of God's wisdom!

Revelation

Finally, the Psalms proclaim truth and wisdom about God. They are quoted often by Jesus in His incarnation to make a theological point or note a prophecy about His ministry.

Some psalms are so heavy in prophecy, it's hard to see them any other way, such as the description in Psalm 2 of the coming king of God's kingdom and Psalm 22's connection to Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and death. Hebrews makes heavy use of the Psalms in some of its main arguments about Melchizedek and Psalm 95's report of Israel's grumbling in the desert exodus.

Interaction

Given this elementary review of interpreting the Psalms, what can the modern reader do to better interact with them?

We can begin by better setting expectations. We can

understand that the Psalms were written in a different language and don't follow some of the defining features of Western poetry — though using some of the same techniques (simile, metaphor, hyperbole) — and that they were often written to be sung.

For those musically inclined, try singing the Psalms to a simple tune. For more analytical minds, recognize the Psalms' focus on emotional expression and the value this has in our walk with God. Sometimes the Western mind can be so focused on cold, hard logic that the evocative nature of the Psalms is like being stuck in a mire (simile intended!). On that occasion, you can much better understand the trials and challenges of the psalmist in Psalm 40 and God's deliverance.

Psalms covers a wide array of emotions that are harder to include in logically constructed narratives. They run the gambit of not just praise and joy but also frustration, anger, bitterness, despair, depression, confusion, and grief. These emotions are part of the experience of this life. God walks with us through them all. That is astounding!

Finally, seeing the many connections to Jesus' ministry,

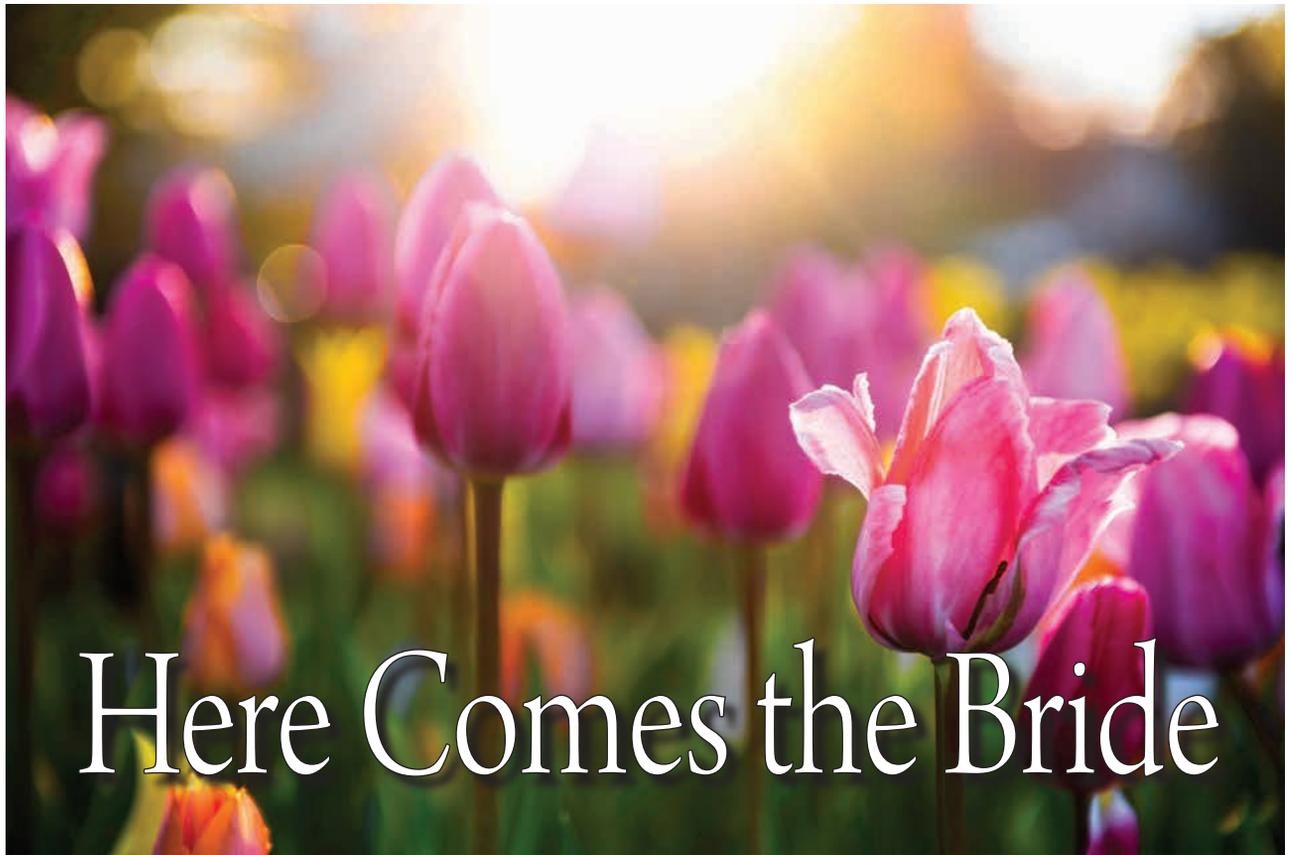
reading the Psalms can bring revelation of the work of the Messiah and build faith in God's plan described beforehand. As Jesus told us, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44, KJV). **BA**

Brian Franks lives in Colorado Springs, CO, with his wife and four children. He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College.



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Here Comes the Bride

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Everyday events in light of
the kingdom.

by **Caroline S. Cooper**

The Beloved (the Groom):

Like a lily among thorns, so is
my love among the daughters.

**The Shulamite (the
Bride):** Like an apple tree
among the trees of the woods,
so is my beloved among the
sons. I sat down in his shade
with great delight, and his
fruit was sweet to my taste
(Song of Solomon 2:2, 3).

Solomon's beautiful love
song is unique in Scripture
because, rather than directly
providing historical, theological,
or spiritual insights for our walk
with the Lord, it reveals intimate
details of the relationship be-
tween Solomon and his bride.

However, there is an abun-
dance of principles and applica-
tions in Solomon's words. For
example, we can learn God's in-
tention for marriage as the bride
and groom express their love for
each other in preparation for and
during their union. I can't help
but think about my most impor-
tant human relationship as I read
their story.

"Ready?" Dad asked with a
smile.

I looked at him and knew

we were sharing a life-changing
moment. I trembled slightly, nod-
ded, and let him guide me into
position. When the organ pipes
opened and the wedding march
began, Dad walked me down the
aisle to my waiting fiancé.

My future husband smiled
broadly, and love radiated from
his eyes. He made me feel beau-
tiful, created for this moment.
I returned the loving look and
could not take my eyes off him. I
could not imagine a better match
for me. This man had changed
my life and brought me delight
in many ways. I knew God had
brought us together and that we
would be sweethearts forever.

Fast-forward almost forty-one
years, and my husband and I are
more in love than ever. But it has
not been an easy road. During
our most challenging season,

I turned away from his love. I suffered the consequences of untreated post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mental illness, resulting in an outpatient treatment program at a psychiatric hospital.

But even as I healed and God restored my life, I wondered, *Have I lost him?*



The Shulamite (the

Bride): By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. "I will rise now," I said, "and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love." I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me; I said, "Have you seen the one I love?" Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me (3:1-4).

When our faithful God brings two people together, He intends them to make every effort to stay together. It took my husband and me years to repair the damage to our marriage, but through this experience, our devotion to each other grew stronger. And, while our four children experienced pain and heartache during those challenging years, I'm thankful they also witnessed God's redeeming and restoring work. They watched as their mom and dad forgave each other, learned new ways to communicate, and began to love as Christ

commanded. As an added blessing, our great and merciful God brought us into a deeper relationship with Him as He worked a miracle of healing in our marriage and family.

As life continued, we were thrilled when our two daughters became brides. Their weddings fit their distinct personalities and reminded us how God created everyone to be unique. Solomon echoed this truth about his bride. I could easily apply many of his words to my precious daughters on their wedding days.



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The Beloved (the Groom):

But my dove, my perfect one, is unique: she is her mother's only daughter; she is the pure child of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines also, and they praised her, saying, "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?" (6:9, 10, NASB).

In 2013, I looked my younger daughter in the eyes and said, "Are you ready?"

She laughed and nodded

with eyes sparkling. Only eight months before, she had met the young man who was now waiting by the preacher. But she had no doubt that God had brought them together.

We finished her hair and adjusted the veil before she floated down the aisle to the music her husband wrote for the occasion. Today they have two beautiful children, a daughter and a son, being raised in a Christian home by parents who are dedicated to teaching them God's Word.

The following year, my other

daughter got married. Unlike her less patient sister, she spent an entire year planning the special day. She carefully considered every detail from the rehearsal dinner to the reception. As Dad and daughter processed solemnly to the front of the cathedral, tears came to my eyes as she said, "I do" to her soul mate.

Today, she and her husband have two beautiful daughters. A vibrant prayer life is one of their strengths as a couple, and we are blessed to see their Christian marriage thrive.

It is amazing how God uses everyday events to reveal truths

continued on page 25



Mr. and Mrs. Job

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Reacting versus responding to life's trials.

by Kathleen Barrett

Have you ever pondered Job's wife, or even been annoyed at her mocking him when he was at his lowest? Here's what Mrs. Job said: "Are you still trying to be godly when God has done all this to you? Curse him and die" (Job 2:9).

Job had just lost all his earthly possessions, including his beloved children and servants. He now lost his dignity through his wife's thoughtless words. We are told in Job 1 that he was a righteous, blameless, God-fearing man. But how would he react to the heart-wrenching devastation of his shattered world? In Job's hour of despair, while he scraped

his boils with shards of pottery, his wife's angry words crushed him. What would he say?

Before answering that question, let's consider Job's wife, the mother of his children — also broken and grieving. Many of us can relate to hearing unkind words that spew from the mouths of others in times of trauma. We, too, can speak stinging words we regret aiming at others.

Of course, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to proclaim God as protector or as good and merciful where a devoted father and mother are robbed of their family. The afflicted, understandably, are void of comprehending God's goodness in their present stress.

However, let's take a lesson from Job: He did not *react* to his wife's accusation; he *responded*! "You talk like some heathen woman. What? Shall we receive only pleasant things from the

hand of God and never anything unpleasant?" (v. 10).

To Father God's ears, Job's words must have been precisely what He expected from His faithful servant. His wife's harsh words were also expected, but God understood the depths of her pain — and forgave her. We say ugly things in the heat of the moment, but God sees and hears the words written on our hearts.

Both this father and mother were deeply grieved at losing everything. One reacted, the other responded. Yet the love and mercy of God were present and pulsating regardless of the flaws of one or the unswerving praise of the other.

Tears and trials

King Solomon would have considered Job's circumstances among those he writes about in Ecclesiastes 4: "Next I observed

all the oppression and sadness throughout the earth — the tears of the oppressed, and no one helping them, while on the side of their oppressors were powerful allies” (v. 1).

Job’s situation was one of tens of thousands that occur daily. Like many of us, Solomon, although wise, was confounded about many of them. He writes, “As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart, ‘This also is vanity’” (2:15, NKJV).

So many matters in question contradict common sense. In the end, however, Solomon summarizes matters that are in our control: “fear God and obey his commandments, for this is the entire duty of man” (12:13). God’s precepts are not cumbersome or unreasonable but are meant for our benefit.

Jesus also warned us in John 16:33 that Christ’s followers would experience tribulation. Our sacred duty is not to react negatively, succumbing to the world’s woes. Praise, thanksgiving, gratefulness, and embracing God’s precepts are ways to respond, just as Job did (Job 1:20, 21). We can rest in the truth that “God will judge us for everything we do, including every hidden thing, good or bad” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Step back, draw near

Until that day, the Lord gives us every opportunity to be transformed by renewing our minds so we can respond in a godly way. As the bride of Christ, we do this by stepping away from the things of the world and drawing near to the things of God.

This is especially true if we are in the depths of mourning a significant loss or have been unnecessarily burdened by world events.

Here’s a simple, practical way to respond to our life problems and combat the tendency toward depression and isolation, leading to faulty thinking: *praise!* We can start with Psalm 34.

I will praise the Lord no matter what happens. I will constantly speak of his glories and grace. I will boast of all his kindness to me. Let all who are discouraged take heart. Let us praise the Lord together and exalt his name (vv. 1-3, emphasis added).



Our countenance will change as we continue to praise the Lord for His goodness to us. As we do this, we can recall God’s faithfulness at other times, thus increasing our praise and faith.

Parental care

Some truths about God can help us respond rather than react to challenges in our families. As our Father, He does not react to our shortcomings. He is not surprised when we mess up but is always ready to respond by forgiving our earnest repentance.

He knows when we are in need and provides for us. He knows that we will often be unfaithful while He remains faithful. Even when earthly events are out of order and desperately wrong, He lovingly shares His goodness and mercy.

God also responds to us with the tender care of a mother. When we fall, He binds up our wounds. When we hurt, He cries too. When we go astray, He leads His little lamb back home.

In practicing intentional spiritual growth, we can endure afflictions when they come our way. Our best witness is responding in God’s complete, genuine nature. We are transformed only by following God’s example.

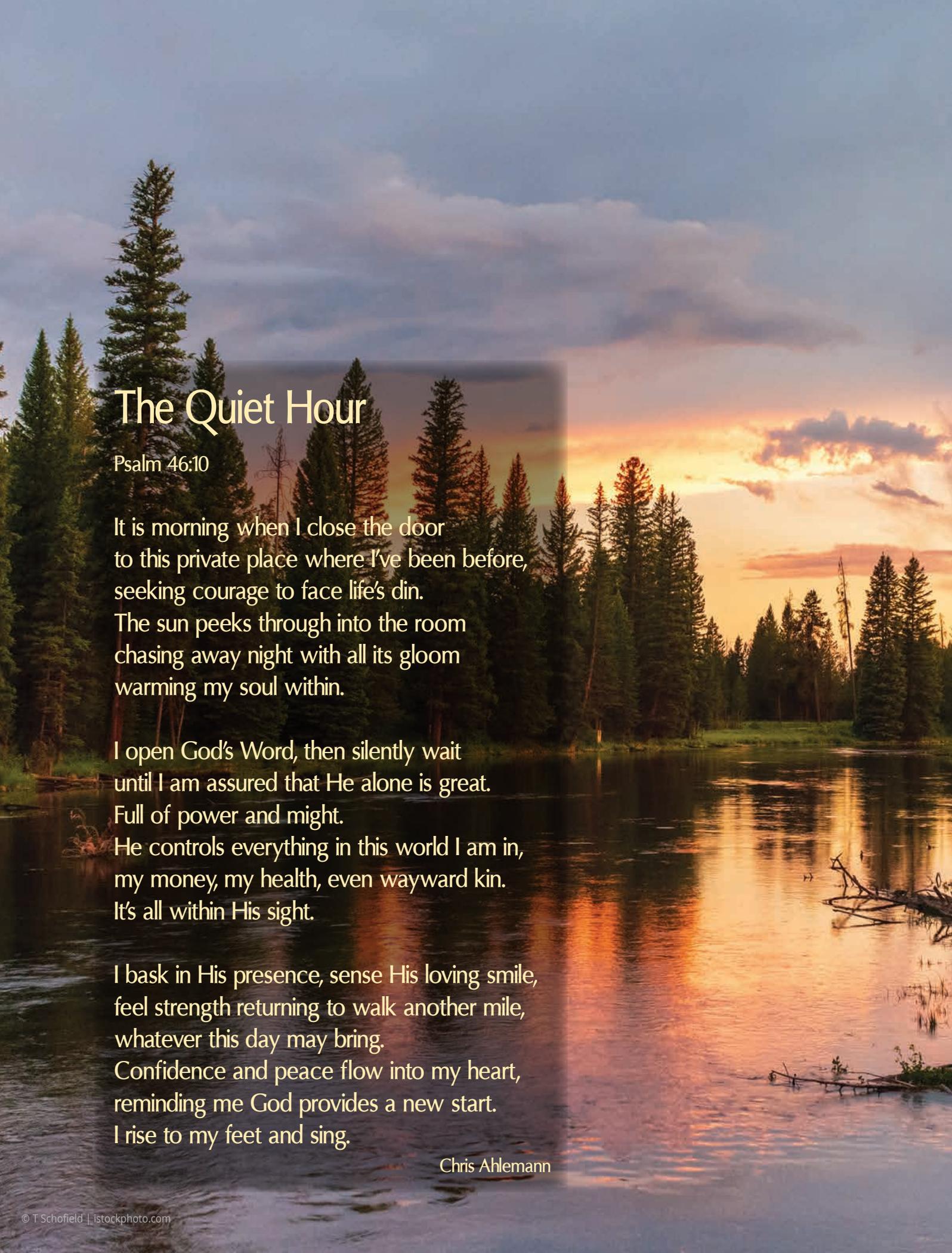
Our friend, Job, knew these things about God because he walked closely and humbly with Him. He also seemed to perceive quickly that his wife’s words were the torment of Satan. Job responded, speaking the truth.

Thanks to God’s mercies, the end-game plan for Mr. and Mrs. Job was fulfilled: “So the Lord blessed Job at the end of his life more than at the beginning. . . . Job lived 140 years after that, living to see his grandchildren and great-grandchildren too . . .” (42:12, 16).

May we follow Job’s example when life becomes chaotic or when trouble pounds on our front door. A better day is coming! **BA**

Kathleen Barrett writes from Port Saint Lucie, FL. Scripture quotations are taken from *The Living Bible*, except where noted.





The Quiet Hour

Psalm 46:10

It is morning when I close the door
to this private place where I've been before,
seeking courage to face life's din.

The sun peeks through into the room
chasing away night with all its gloom
warming my soul within.

I open God's Word, then silently wait
until I am assured that He alone is great.

Full of power and might.

He controls everything in this world I am in,
my money, my health, even wayward kin.

It's all within His sight.

I bask in His presence, sense His loving smile,
feel strength returning to walk another mile,
whatever this day may bring.

Confidence and peace flow into my heart,
reminding me God provides a new start.

I rise to my feet and sing.

Chris Ahlemann

Here Comes the Bride

continued from page 21

about His kingdom. A groom and bride beautifully represent God's intended relationship between Jesus and His church. In his revelation, John writes that he "saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

It will be a beautiful day when the bride (the church) meets her husband (Jesus) for an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (v. 4).

Jesus will return to claim His bride. The final verses in Solomon's song could represent Jesus' words to us and the sense of urgency we need as we look forward to that occasion.

The Beloved (the Groom):

You who dwell in the gardens,
the companions listen for
your voice — let me hear it!

The Shulamite (the

Bride): Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices (Song of Solomon 8:13, 14).

Let us echo the bride's sentiment: "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

BA

Caroline S. Cooper
writes from
Harrisonville, MO.



Bible-Based Riddles

Job - Song of Solomon

Who/What Am I?

If you are lazy and work do not like,
Then observe my conduct and manner of life.
No one tells me to work hard, it's just what I do.
Gather and store to survive, am I smarter than you?

Preacher's wisdom in this book you find.
How to be content as you drink and dine.
We all go to one place, fear God and obey.
Live life rejoicing, there comes another day.

I was the youngest of his friends, I listened and observed.
They concluded his awful lot, he justly did deserve.
I finally spoke, and said take note, God you can not blame.
In the end, God defends, his just and holy name.

A story in poem of matrimony bliss.
A banner of love, the tenderest kiss.
For each other their hearts do long.
King's perfect song, the song of songs.

My latter end was better than the beginning.
My daughters, fairest in the land, their beauty never ending.
My three friends are renewed, much wiser they became.
No matter what, trust the Lord and never, ever, blame.

I am called "wisdom literature" for what I contain.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, I explain.
Mostly written by a king, guiding young men on living.
Read and apply, find the wisdom it does surely bring.

*Answers on page 26. Excerpted from 250 Old Testament Riddles
by David Keith Robinson. Used by permission.*

Get Ready for Salt Lake City!



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While there's no GC Convention coming up this summer, you can help us plan for a big 2025 reunion!

Join your friends from the US and Canada as we congregate in Salt Lake City, Utah, June 30 - July 5, 2025.

Assist us in conducting Church business.

See some new sights! You can float in the great Salt Lake, check out Park City (www.visitparkcity.com), where the winter Olympics were held in 2002, and take in the many national parks in Utah, including Zion and Bryce Canyon.

Enjoy the unity of the Holy Spirit as we worship our Lord together.

Start saving your quarters now! (Yes, it used to be pennies, but you know how inflation goes!) Watch for updates in this publication and on our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/COG7.org>).

— GC Convention Committee

Riddle answers (p. 25)

The ant (Proverbs 6:6-11; 30:25)

Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 1:1; 2:24-26; 3:20-22)

Elihu (Job 32:1-13; 37:23)

Song of Solomon (Song 1:1, 2; 2:4; 3:11)

Job (Job 42)

Proverbs (Proverbs 1:1-7; 2:1-5)



Equip 24. On February 4, the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership hosted its virtual winter session: Equip 24 Strategies for Getting Through 2024.

With the class designed to equip leaders to guide their people through another difficult election year, over 40 participants — in English and Spanish — came away from this event feeling supported and knowing they do not walk alone. They benefited from a rich menu of practical presentations, participated in discussion, and received helpful resources for further learning and growth.

If you missed it, don't worry! Equip 24 was recorded. Register to watch it at my.artioscollege.org/resources.

Newsletter. Wondering what Artios has been up to? Check out our newsletter at <https://artioscollege.org/about-us/>, where we highlight what happened in 2023. Then subscribe to receive the newsletter in your inbox a couple of times a year so you don't miss out on the latest news, encouragement, and celebration!

Scholarship opportunity. The GC Equipping for Excellence Scholarship exists to encourage and assist students with a 3.5 GPA or better to complete a program through Artios Christian College. The scholarship provides the balance of tuition for the final 25 percent of courses required to complete a degree or certificate, as long as funds are available and the student remains on schedule to complete the program. Find more information at <https://artioscollege.org/sponsorship/>.



Shaping your mission. GC Missions would like to share how God is working around the world. If you want to encourage your church or minister to the world through this outreach, we can make a presentation at your church or via Zoom. Email gcmissions@cog7.org to schedule a presentation today.

God is doing amazing things through the help of those who have been faithful partners of this ministry.

GC Missions updates. Visit the CoG7 YouTube channel and learn about the new things this ministry is doing around the world. Visit https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZt1RwqAGRk_Td-h1v9jz9Zj3WMTfqO4N&si=rlxlCnXDTLshUogg.



Visit our **YouTube channel** and discover the new things we have available: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8PEXV2AFMv2VY7D9P4O3uQ>.

Subscribe to our **Instagram**: [@cog7media](https://www.instagram.com/cog7media).

Giving helps us develop our GC Ministries. We encourage you to send donations an easier way through Zelle, using give@cog7.org. In the memo box you can designate where you want the funds to go.

All Ye Lands!



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Finding the Great Commission in Psalms. by Jason Overman

In his powerful little book *Mission in the Old Testament*, renowned Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser Jr. begins his chapter on Psalms with this quote from George Peters: “The Psalter is one of the greatest missionary books in the world.”

You may not have considered that before. After all, the Great Commission comes to us in the New Testament after Jesus’ resurrection. But once you start looking, you can’t un-see God’s consistent, bold message of mission in Psalms (e.g. Psalms 2, 33, 66, 67, 72, 96, 98, 100, 117, and 145).

Worship as witness

From its earliest passages, the Bible reveals that our Creator God is on mission to redeem creation. In the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 and God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, the stage is set. And as with Eve and Abraham, we are called to be co-workers in God’s global mission.

The good news planted in Genesis begins to blossom in Psalms. In Israel’s worship and song, God’s gospel is declared loudly and often. In its myriad of music, Psalms bears witness to both the scale and substance of our mission and its message. Four central themes in Israel’s worshipping witness emerge:

God reigns over all. “God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. . . . Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns’. . . The LORD reigns; let

the earth rejoice” (47:8; 96:10; 97:1).

God warns the nations. “Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. . . . Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him” (2:10, 11; 33:8).

God’s salvation is declared. “Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation . . . The LORD has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. . . . All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (96:2; 98:2, 3).

All are invited to worship God. “Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! . . . Come and see the works of God; . . . Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth” (66:1, 5; 96:1).

Psalms repeatedly presents the worship of God's people as a witness. The scale is universal; all are under God's sovereignty. The message of the mission is clear as well. God's salvation is declared, and all are invited to worship Him.

Psalms 67 and 100 are two short but splendid examples worth examining closely.

Psalm 67 and blessing

God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, Selah. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations (v. 1, 2).

This beloved psalm has often been called the "Our Father" of the Old Testament. It is beautiful in delivery and powerful in message. If you read closely, you see that it is a mediation on two key verses from the law: Genesis 12:1-3 (God's covenant to bless the nations through Abraham) and Numbers 6:23-26 (the Aaronic blessing).

The use of the word *bless* in Psalm 67 mirrors Genesis 12:1-3. As God promised to bless Abraham and all the families of the earth through him, here the psalmist is asking that God "bless us" (His people) so "that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations" (v. 2). The mission of God is accomplished in and through His people as He blesses them and they share that blessing with others.

We also find the Aaronic blessing blending into this psalm of worship: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you" (Numbers 6:24, 25; cf. Psalm 4:6;

31:16; 80:3, 7, 19). By linking both the Abrahamic and Aaronic blessings, we learn and celebrate that the Lord's blessing is not just for us, but for the whole world through our witness.

As we sing Psalm 67, we are caught up in this dynamic between the blessed people of God and the nations that God would bless through us: "Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (vv. 3, 4).

This pattern forms the structure of the psalm. We see the same dynamic in verses 1, 2 and

with a mission. But we see it in its opening verse, the invitation for *all lands* to worship Yahweh. Our witness is in the context of our worship.

Psalm 100 reveals not only the scope of our witness but its substance as well. All are called to worship the Lord, but in the process all learn who God is and who we are in relation to Him. "Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves" (v. 3). God is Creator, not us! We are His. So our orientation to Him is always with thanksgiving and praise (v. 4).

“Psalms repeatedly presents the worship of God's people as a witness.”

5, 6, climaxing in verse 7: "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him." Amen.

Psalm 100 and worship

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing (v. 1, 2).

This beloved psalm is a celebration of who God is and a universal call to worship Him. It is beautiful and familiar, but not always recognized as a psalm

Psalm 100 concludes with a triple revelation: "For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations" (v. 5).

This is the Lord God we witness and worship before all. And this Lord God, the object of our worship and witness, is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ. All the psalms witness to Him. Indeed, Psalms was made for mission and for the making of missionaries like us.

Outgrowing the Boy

continued from page 14

to our own code of conduct. Psalm 119:9 asks, “How can a young man cleanse his way?” and immediately answers the question succinctly: “By taking heed according to Your word.”

God’s Word lays a solid foundation for teaching our sons about sexual purity. Deuteronomy 6:7 emphasizes the need to teach scriptural principles to our children at every turn: “when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

Even before our sons enter kindergarten, we need to teach them to respect girls, to run from temptation, and to set biblical standards for themselves that will win out over raging hormones. Self-discipline and delayed gratification are crucial elements of godly leadership.

Wine

While the Bible soundly condemns immorality of any kind, many Christians do not believe it speaks as clearly on alcohol use. According to a 2017 Barna Research poll, a significant percent of practicing Christians admitted to drinking as much as the average adult. Little wonder that alcohol consumption and its peripheral issues create problems even among faithful churchgoers.

King Lemuel’s mother identified wine as one of the top three detriments to her son’s ability to lead effectively. Knowing that alcohol obstructs and perverts good judgment, the future king’s mother warned, “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not

for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink” (Proverbs 31:4). In today’s culture, we can broaden this to include substance abuse of any kind. Clear thinking and sound judgment are essential for godly leaders.

Power

British politician Lord Acton said, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power absolutely corrupts.” We should teach our sons that a position of influence is a stewardship from God and that answering to Him will help them dodge the corruption that



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casts shadows self-deification. King Lemuel’s mother thrilled at how her son’s power, if used righteously, could bless his people. And she despaired at how, if employed flippantly or selfishly, it would surely destroy his nation.

A person’s character is often revealed in how they treat the underprivileged. “Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die,” King Lemuel’s mother urged. “Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy” (vv. 8,

9). Her words are applicable for leaders-in-training today as well.

Introspection

If our sons are to govern others, they must first learn to govern themselves. It is a pathetic reality that our children often adopt our sins and weaknesses. How are we measuring up against the standards King Lemuel’s mother set for him? Are we heeding her pleas regarding sexual integrity? Do we set an example of sobriety? Do we demonstrate compassion, especially for the downtrodden?

We would do well to echo the prayer in Psalm 139:23, 24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

We tend to withdraw from such painful searching of our own hearts. We don’t want our sins on parade. We don’t want condemnation and guilt. Neither does God. He intends introspection to be redemptive — to lead us to Him and to gain blessing through His forgiveness for our own sins.

Then we are equipped to guide our sons in leaving the arena of boyhood to become the men God designed them to be. **BA**

Esther Zeiset
writes from New-
manstown, PA.





Protect and Provide

About twenty years ago, my son, Sean, entered my office to share something he had just read. In a book written by Josh McDowell, Sean had found what the author called the true definition of *love*: to protect and provide. McDowell found this definition in instructions given to husbands concerning their wives in Ephesians 5:28, 29 (ESV throughout): “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.”

Within the definition of the word *nourish*, McDowell found the idea of provision. Within the definition of *cherish*, he found the idea of protection. Therefore, McDowell reasoned, to love is to provide the loved one what is needed for growth and well-being, and to protect the loved one from anything that may hinder or harm. Protection + Provision = Love.

Whether or not “protect and provide” is the one true biblical definition of *love* is debatable. However, it is not debatable that *protect* and *provide* are true and biblical descriptions of what our God, who is love (1 John 4:16), does for those who love Him and “are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

No doubt because of running from his enemies and because of his later responsibilities as king, David wrote so often and so passionately about God’s protection:

Psalm 34:7: The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Psalm 46:1: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 121:7, 8: The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

The same encouragement and recognition are given through Moses and Isaiah:

Deuteronomy 31:6: “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

Isaiah 41:10: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

God’s Word is also replete with testimonies of and promises to believers concerning God’s provision:

Matthew 6:31-33: “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Philippians 4:19: And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:8 tells us that “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus Christ is the greatest demonstration of God’s love. In Jesus, God protects and provides for those He has given spiritual life, saving faith, free forgiveness, imputed righteousness, forensic justification, and growing sanctification.

— Loren Stacy



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