

OUR STORY

GOD'S WORK. OUR HOPE.

Chronological Readings

May



NORTH FORT WORTH
2011

PRACTICAL APPROACH TO OUR DAILY READINGS

Commit to a consistent time and place (allow 15-20 minutes).

Read each day's passage prayerfully. Don't ask the question, "What does today's reading mean to me?" Read each day, asking, "What truth is God revealing?" Focus especially upon:

What does the reading reveal about God?

What does the reading reveal about humanity (about me)?

What does the reading reveal about what is "relationally" appropriate or inappropriate toward God? God isn't supplying us with a list of rules to follow.

He's inviting us to relate to Him as God so we might walk with Him by faith.

What does the reading reveal about God's unfolding work of salvation?

Underline what stands out. We want to remember key ideas or verses.

Prayerfully identify one promise, insight, or action to carry with you into the day, and then commit it to the Lord in prayer.

Read each day's devotion for further perspective.

Keep in mind—the goal is NOT to read the Bible thru. The DAILY COMMITMENT is to draw near to God by faith and to experience the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

ENLIST A PERSON OR GROUP TO JOIN YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Agree to hold one another accountable.

Touch base consistently about your readings.

Exchange daily texts, emails, or social media posts to highlight the promise, insight, or action you seek to carry into the day.

Talk weekly or every other week by phone or in person. Discuss specific lessons or questions that especially stand out.

Adopt an approach that works best for you—consistency is the key.

Pray for one another by name for spiritual understanding and growth.

Encourage one another to press through the ups and downs of the journey.

May 1
2 Samuel 22:1-51; Psalm 18

David sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. (2 Samuel 22:1)

Today, our reading is a song (2 Samuel 22:2-50) and a psalm (Psalm 18). The two are essentially the same. Both reflect David's testimony of God's past provision and deliverance. Despite his failures and regrets, David cannot remain silent as he recalls how God intervened on his behalf. The grateful king testifies to God's goodness.

With which verses do you spiritually or emotionally identify? My heart resonates with the following:

*The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock,
in whom I find protection. (2 Samuel 22:2-3)*

O LORD, You are my lamp. The LORD lights up my darkness. (2 Samuel 22:29)

*God's way is perfect. All the LORD's promises prove true.
He is a shield for all who look to Him for protection. (2 Samuel 22:31)*

You have made a wide path for my feet to keep them from slipping. (2 Samuel 22:37)

I love You, LORD; You are my strength. (Psalm 18:1)

*The LORD lives! Praise to my Rock!
May the God of my salvation be exalted! (Psalm 18:46)*

Again, the two passages are the same, with slight variation. Even so, what spoke to your heart as you read both? Compile a list of your favorites as I have done. Once completed, read the testimonies aloud. Indeed, let's read them more than once. Allow the testimony to become your own. My heart is especially lifted when I declare, "I love you, LORD; you are my strength." And you?

Reflecting upon God's goodness, David could not keep silent. Nor should we.

May 2
2 Samuel 24:1-25; 1 Chronicles 21:1-22:19

Then David said, “This will be the location for the Temple of the LORD God and the place of the altar for Israel’s burnt offerings.” (1 Chronicles 22:1)

David sins against the LORD, and it proves costly. Indeed, seventy thousand people die because of the king’s disobedience and pride. David’s action serves as a sobering reminder of the consequences of poor decisions made by a nation’s leaders. His failure would result in a devastating loss. And what is David’s failure?

Israel’s king yields to Satan’s temptation and conducts a military census (1 Chronicles 21:1). Even David’s commander, Joab, recognizes the inappropriateness of the ruler’s action, but David would not be deterred. He demanded that the census be conducted. The nation pays a severe price as a result. Though we may struggle to understand the seriousness of the offense, David recognizes his error and humbly confesses, *“I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt for doing this foolish thing.”* (1 Chronicles 21:8)

David’s repentance and intercession lead to a painful decision. God asks Israel’s king to determine the judgment that would follow. He’s given three options—each of which is troubling. David chooses to place the outcome in God’s hands by opting for the angel of the LORD to afflict the land. Ironically, David’s demand for the census would highlight what he thought was in his hands as king, but now, David places the future outcome in the LORD’s hands as God. Sadly, all of this could have been avoided if David had not allowed his pride to get the best of him.

Yet, the episode provides an instructive conclusion. As the angel of the LORD’s judgment approaches Jerusalem, David again confesses his sin and pleads for mercy (1 Chronicles 21:16-17). The king’s repentance and that of the elders cause the death angel’s progression to stop. There, where the advancement of God’s judgment ceased, David is commanded to erect an altar to the LORD. And, at this location, Jerusalem’s future Temple (Solomon’s Temple) would eventually be constructed.

Pause and think about that. The gathering place for future sacrifice and worship would be where God’s judgment is averted. There’s a lesson to consider in that. Even more profoundly, Jesus will be extended between heaven and earth near this location to prevent judgment on our behalf. If we didn’t already have reason to be thankful today, ponder that truth and offer a prayer of thanks to the LORD.

May 3
1 Chronicles 23:1-25:31

David summoned all the leaders of Israel, together with the priests and Levites. All the Levites who were thirty years old or older were counted, and the total came to 38,000. Then David said, "From all the Levites, 24,000 will supervise the work at the Temple of the LORD. Another 6,000 will serve as officials and judges. Another 4,000 will work as gatekeepers, and 4,000 will praise the LORD with the musical instruments I have made." Then David divided the Levites into divisions named after the clans descended from the three sons of Levi—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. (1 Chronicles 23:2–6)

In David's later years, the aging king does two things worth noting. First, David transfers his responsibilities as king to Solomon (1 Chronicles 23:1). It is important for David's appointed heir to begin to move into his role. And second, David prepares for the future ministry of the Temple. The outgoing king works to provide political and spiritual stability for the nation. David recognizes that one will not function effectively without the other. Do we understand the same?

Today's reading focuses primarily on David's effort to provide the necessary organizational structure to support the Temple's future success. It should be noted that all of this is preparatory on David's part. The Temple has not yet been constructed and will not be built until after David's death. Yet, David is anticipating the day and doing everything he can to ensure its future success. That says a great deal about David as his life draws to an end. It would have been easy for David to focus more on those things that would make his life comfortable. He chooses instead to organize the Levites for their future role. David invests his time and energy in preparing the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites for their upcoming responsibilities.

David also directs attention to the priesthood, for he understands the lack of appropriate leadership will ensure the Temple's failure. Again, think about that. David could have focused in his senior years on building something in his honor or simply relaxing and taking it easy. David, however, directs his energy toward what would bring glory to the LORD and provide for future worship. David's vision looks beyond himself to the generations that will follow.

David's actions should be a helpful example, particularly for those later in life. In our culture, where we are increasingly encouraged to focus on ourselves, David models a better approach. His actions challenge us to look beyond our self-serving pursuits and consider the impact we might make on the generations behind us. Why don't we do the same? Consider the difference we might also make and commit ourselves to it. May David's example influence our own!

May 4
1 Chronicles 26:1-28:21

David summoned all the officials of Israel to Jerusalem—the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the army divisions, the other generals and captains, the overseers of the royal property and livestock, the palace officials, the mighty men, and all the other brave warriors in the kingdom. (1 Chronicles 28:1)

Having arranged the necessary organization for the Temple of God, and with his end in view, David gathers Israel's leaders near to extend a personal challenge. He would have them respond to the LORD in ways that would solicit God's continued blessing and activity on their behalf. Of course, David had experienced the joyful heights of God's blessing but also suffered the painful depths of God's discipline and correction. He had experienced both over the length of his reign. Yet, David longed for better days for Israel, particularly for his appointed heir, Solomon. Indeed, David appeals to Solomon directly and says,

"My son, learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately. Worship and serve Him with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the LORD sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you seek Him, you will find Him." (1 Chronicles 28:9)

The aging king's words are impassioned and flow from his experience. David urges his son, "Learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately." In other words, Solomon, don't go through the motions of religious activity. David had discovered God to be personal and real. He longs for his son to experience the same. The verb "to know" emphasizes more than mere head knowledge. It underscores knowledge acquired through observation, reflection, and doing. It is to know the LORD by experiencing the LORD—by learning to walk with Him.

So David adds, "Worship and serve Him with your whole heart and a willing mind." Notice the combination of heart and mind. It is not merely an emotional response or an intellectual exercise. It is the appropriate blending of both as one responds to the truth of who God is. "Turn to the LORD," David would appeal. "Seek Him, and He will be found." God desires to be known if Solomon would only direct himself to the LORD. Of course, David also cautions his son. He warns, "If you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." (1 Chronicles 28:9). Thankfully, God will prove patient toward Solomon (for David's sake), even as He is patient toward us (for Jesus' sake).

And our lesson? Let's take David's appeal to heart. Resist going through the motions of religious activity. Instead, seek the LORD with a whole heart and willing mind—even today!

May 5
1 Chronicles 29:1-22; 1 Kings 1:1-53

And now, because of my devotion to the Temple of my God, I am giving all of my own private treasures of gold and silver to help in the construction. (1 Chronicles 29:3)

Our reading today describes David's final preparation for the Temple but also includes an attempt by one of David's sons (Adonijah) to seize Israel's throne. David responds promptly to the situation by publicly anointing Solomon as king—ending Adonijah's misguided aspirations. It should be noted that David is not a person we should emulate regarding one's marital or parental practices. His actions contribute to more problems than solutions. Concerning Adonijah, it is stated that David never disciplined his son at any time (1 Kings 1:6), contributing to Adonijah's grab for power. Again, David is not a parental role model to follow.

However, David's actions concerning the Temple should be highlighted. His response is inspirational and instructive. David had already provided the organizational structure. He now addresses the enormous financial resources required to construct a dwelling worthy of Israel's God. And David leads by example. Indeed, he contributes all his private treasures of gold and silver toward the project—a significant sum (112 tons of gold and 262 tons of refined silver). In 2023 dollars, his contribution represents over 7 billion dollars in gold alone. Through his words and actions, David challenges Israel's leaders to respond generously. And the people step up. They contribute an additional 188 tons of gold, 10,000 gold coins, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. Can we even get our minds around these amounts?

Yet, David also explains why such actions are appropriate as he prays to the LORD. *"Who am I,"* he exclaims, *"and who are my people, that we could give anything to You? Everything we have has come from You, and we give You only what You first gave us! We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace. O LORD our God, even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor Your holy name comes from You! It all belongs to You!"* (1 Chronicles 29:14-16)

David is right. What do we possess that is not from the LORD? Are our gifts, abilities, opportunities, and successes unrelated to God's grace and activity? It is presumptuous to assert that we are self-made—that our wealth and resources are somehow the fruit of our labor alone. David reaches no such conclusion. He responds generously to the LORD because he understands that the source of his success is the LORD. That is not to deny individual responsibility or action. Instead, it is to acknowledge that we are not our own. David understood that. Indeed, his final act as Israel's king declares as much. Do we know the same? May David's example cause us to take a fresh look and respond to the LORD appropriately. Will you do so?

May 6
1 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Samuel 23:1-7; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30;
Psalms 4-9; Psalm 11

Then David died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. David had reigned over Israel for forty years, seven of them in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 2:10-11)

David's death is a significant moment for Israel. Though imperfect, David displayed a heartfelt love and devotion to the LORD, resulting in God's people experiencing tremendous blessing and success. The people of God are firmly established in the land of promise and experience a level of prosperity consistent with what Moses promised centuries earlier. David's reign represents a defining time for God's people. It also foreshadows an even more significant period of blessing that a future descendant of David would usher forth. Indeed, the promised Messiah, "*the Christ*," will ascend David's throne and reign forever. The "*Promised One*," Jesus, will establish God's kingdom upon the earth in ways we can only imagine. A better day is coming because a greater King will sit on the throne. May our hearts be encouraged as we look toward that promised day.

Yet, our reading today also begins a survey of David's psalms. Though most of David's psalms are not placed along a chronological timeline, they grant helpful insight into the heart of God's servant. They also deepen our understanding of God Himself and His loving interaction on His people's behalf. The Psalms represent more than the poetic musings of a gifted writer. They serve instead as a testimony inspired by the Spirit of God at work within David's heart and life (2 Timothy 3:16). As David attests, "*The Spirit of the LORD speaks through me; His words are upon my tongue.*" (2 Samuel 23:2)

Let's then approach David's psalms prayerfully and introspectively. I suggest that you read them aloud. Allow David's words to become your own as they guide you through life's peaks and valleys. Identify with his emotions, and like David, move through life's confusing moments by renewing your faith and trust in the LORD. May we seize upon the reassuring truths about God and ourselves that the Psalms supply. I pray our hearts will be strengthened yet also soar as we recognize the wonder of who God is. Indeed, may we join David in his exclamation of praise,

"O LORD, our LORD, Your majestic name fills the earth!" (Psalm 8:9)

Amen and Amen!

May 7
Psalms 12-17, 19-21

O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? (Psalm 13:1)

Our reading today stretches over nine Psalms. As I encouraged you yesterday, take the time to read David's testimonies aloud. Hear the words with your ears as you speak them with your lips. This practice will open your heart more readily to the truth revealed. The Psalms, especially David's, are filled with raw emotion, heart-wrenching questions, and desperate cries for help. They are God's gift for our benefit, enabling us to express our feelings honestly to the LORD.

And, let me stress, be honest. Don't ignore what you feel. Sometimes, like David, we are overwhelmed and confused by the circumstances around us. We don't know what to say or do. The Psalms can give voice to our emotions and guide us forward. They can serve as a splash of cold water to awaken the heart, the soul, and even faith. If we allow it, their testimony can become a timely light in the darkness to remind us that we are not alone.

So, let's not just read through the Psalms. By faith, step into them. Let's enter into the sorrow or the joy revealed. Consider the desperation of Psalm 13.

O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? 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? Turn and answer me, O LORD my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die. Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!" Don't let them rejoice at my downfall. But I trust in Your unfailing love. I will rejoice because You have rescued me. I will sing to the LORD because He is good to me.

Have you ever been there—dazed and confused? Yet, David presses through the confusion to a place of renewed faith. His prayer is forthright, and his trust in God's unfailing love is assured. He refuses to allow the present difficulties to close his eyes to God's continuing goodness and love. Instead, David anticipates God's provision and even lifts his voice to the LORD in praise. I don't pretend that this emotional transition on David's part was easy. Moving from sorrow to thanksgiving can take some time. Yet, David trusts God, and he models a path forward through life's questions and pain.

Again, don't just read the Psalms. Permit David's words to move you toward God and through the circumstances around you. Perhaps we, too, can sing to the LORD because He is also good to us. May we not forget!

May 8 Psalms 22-26

The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. (Psalm 23:1)

Some of David's psalms are testimonials. They shed insight into David's journey of faith. Psalm 23, a beloved psalm to many, is a helpful example. With it, David likens God's care and support to that of an attentive shepherd. David, a former shepherd, reminds us how God will be faithful in the good and bad times. God is there, whether refreshed by the still waters or protected in life's dark valleys. His presence and provision will prove sufficient. It is not coincidental that Jesus adopts the shepherd imagery in describing His role on our behalf—but Jesus is no mere shepherd. As Jesus declares,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know My own sheep, and they know Me, just as My Father knows Me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice My life for the sheep." (John 10:11-15)

Take another look at the 23rd Psalm with Jesus' words in view and be encouraged. Jesus prepares our table before us in the presence of our enemies. Yes, Jesus anoints our heads with oil. Our cups overflow, and there is nothing that our enemies can do about it. Surely, God's goodness and love will accompany us throughout our lives because the "Good Shepherd" accompanies us. His presence will carry us through. Does that mean that life will not be difficult or even cruel? No, that is not the promise. Jesus' followers, like David, may find themselves walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Yet, the Good Shepherd's rod and staff will guide and protect. The LORD is with us!

Some of David's psalms are testimonials. Yet, a few of David's psalms are Messianic—meaning they prophetically point to Jesus. Psalm 22 is an example of this. Read Psalm 22 again and then read Matthew's crucifixion account of Jesus (Matthew 27:11-50). The level of detail foretold is astounding. Jesus even recites the opening of Psalm 22 from the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1, ESV). Consider this thought: Jesus was forsaken on the cross for our sins so that God would never abandon us in life or death. The prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 22 illustrates that Jesus really is the "Good Shepherd." Will we trust Him today? Will you?

May 9
Psalms 27-32

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! (Psalm 32:1-2)

Our reading today includes six of David's psalms. Which psalm especially appealed to your heart? My attention is drawn to David's reassuring words in Psalm 32. It is a psalm that God has used to encourage my heart on many occasions, offering tremendous hope to anyone who has stumbled or faltered in sin.

David is acquainted with moral failure. His actions toward Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11) are beyond excuse or rationalization. He sinned shamefully against God, and David knew it. Yet, he also came to experience God's mercy and forgiveness. Psalm 32 represents a testimony to God's willingness to forgive. David, however, resisted God's mercy for a period. He refused to acknowledge his wrongdoing. Whether it was David's pride or rationalization, he wrongly concluded he had successfully covered his offense—only to be confronted by God's prophet (2 Samuel 12). Once exposed, David wisely throws himself before the mercy of God.

Psalm 32 represents David's journey from the darkness of guilt into the light of God's forgiveness. It portrays a heart set free from the burden of shame. It celebrates the power of God to forgive and restore the worst of sinners. As David declares, "What joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt." My heart is lifted every time I read David's words. It reminds me that God is willing and able to forgive the worst of our offenses. David's actions were appalling to God. Yet, through repentance, David found cleansing and rediscovered joy. His psalm is an invitation for us to experience the same. Will we do so?

Two obstacles stand in the way: 1) our unwillingness to acknowledge our sin or 2) our unwillingness to accept the possibility of God's forgiveness. Both dispositions of heart will leave a person outside of where they need to be. Let's choose then to humble ourselves, turning away from the offense as we turn to the LORD. Let's discover the joy of God's presence and forgiveness anew. As we do, we can join David and declare, "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!"

LORD, may this be said of us. May it be so!

May 10

Psalms 35-38

It is better to be godly and have little than to be evil and rich. For the strength of the wicked will be shattered, but the LORD takes care of the godly. (Psalm 37:16-17)

Do you find yourself turning to the LORD like David? Do you think you should? Each of today's psalms provides a further glimpse into David's heart. They open our eyes to his faith and trust in the LORD. Hopefully, they will also lead us to do the same.

Today, my attention is drawn to Psalm 37, which is unsurprising. Psalm 37 has become one of my LIFE PSALMS in recent years. What is a LIFE PSALM? It's a psalm that you actively carry with you—that lives within your heart. Psalms 8, 13, 23, 32, and 46 are a few others for me. Over the years, these psalms have become spiritual aids or companions to reassure and strengthen my heart. They help guide my way as I respond to the circumstances around me.

Do you have a LIFE PSALM or two? If not, ask the LORD to highlight a psalm or two as we continue our readings. Maybe an earlier psalm has already resonated with you in this way. Once identified, begin to read the selected psalm or psalms daily. Seek to carry the main ideas with you. Even more, attempt to memorize them over time. Before you know it, they will become your LIFE PSALMS and will make a lasting difference. Why is Psalm 37 so important to me? It helps me maintain a proper perspective on life. For example, as stated above,

"It is better to be godly and have little than to be evil and rich." (Psalm 37:16)

Do you agree? I suspect that many in our day do not. Indeed, far too many individuals live as if wealth is all that matters. David would warn us to avoid falling into that trap. Even though unscrupulous people appear to get ahead, Psalm 37 reminds us to take the long view. Their moral compromise is short-sighted, for the strength of the wicked will ultimately be shattered. And those who relate appropriately to God? They are assured of God's continuing support and care. That doesn't imply that life will be easy, for it frequently is not. The promise, however, is that God will make a lasting difference. As David later explains, *"The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand."* (Psalm 37:23-24)

How about that for reassurance? The LORD holds our hand. That's the perspective that comforts my heart for the day ahead. Let's then enter the day with this picture in mind. Even more, let's also allow the LORD to give a LIFE PSALM or two along the way. We'll be stronger because of it!

May 11
Psalms 39-41; Psalm 53; Psalm 55; Psalm 58

And so, LORD, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in You! (Psalm 39:7)

As we continue to read David's psalms, Psalm 39 appeals to my heart. Like Psalm 37 from yesterday, Psalm 39 seeks to influence our perspective for the better. David is frustrated by the circumstances but doesn't want to speak rashly or inappropriately (Psalm 39:1). He recognizes that his current hardship results from his actions (Psalm 39:10-11). Even so, David feels disoriented and struggles to get his mind around the present situation. So he pleads,

"LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is." (Psalm 39:4)

David's prayer is helpful. We would all benefit from a similar point of view. But David's subsequent confession is the key to the psalm. He adds,

"And so, LORD, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in You." (Psalm 39:7)

There it is! David regains his spiritual footing by refocusing his heart on the LORD. He reminds himself of where his true hope is found. It's not found in his circumstances, ability, or the people around him. David's hope rests entirely upon the LORD. That realization would move David toward the LORD in fresh ways, which would be his first step forward.

So, where do we place our hope? Let's be honest. The challenges of life can often leave us disoriented and confused. If so, do we attach our hope to something or someone other than God? Or do we redirect our hearts toward the LORD? Let's allow David's confession to become our own. Let's declare to the LORD, *"You are our hope, our only hope!"* Indeed, I encourage you to say aloud, "LORD, You are my hope, my only hope!" I pray that the words of our mouths will become the testimony of our hearts. As they do, we will (like David) move toward the LORD in fresh ways, which will be our first step forward.

Come on. Let your heart be known! *"LORD, You are my hope, my only hope!"*

May 12
Psalm 61, Psalm 62, Psalms 64-67

I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken. (Psalm 62:1-2)

Do you find it difficult to wait on the LORD? Waiting is not an experience that many enjoy. We live in a culture that demands quick solutions. That's especially true during periods of hardship or difficulty. We seek (even demand) prompt solutions from the LORD, and if the answer appears delayed, we become frustrated or disillusioned. Sadly, our lack of patience exposes a lack of faith and understanding. That's why Psalm 62 is so beneficial. David displays through the psalm a willingness to wait on the LORD, and so should we. Look again at David's opening statement: *"I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from Him."* (Psalm 62:1)

Two observations. First, waiting is presumed. David doesn't expect an immediate solution. He recognizes that some situations require time. Second, David waits "quietly" before God. He's not frantic or complaining because he's confident in the outcome. Why so confident? David recognizes that the source of his victory is not in himself or the circumstances. David's confidence rests in the One who makes the difference. He asserts, *"He alone is my rock,"* pointing to God, *"and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken."* (Psalm 62:2)

I don't suggest that this is a natural response. More times than not, we're prone to impatience and self-reliance. David, however, models the better approach. His example teaches us to place the problem in God's hand and wait on Him—quietly and confidently. Easier said than done? Even David had to realign his thinking at times. See verse 5: *"Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him."* (Psalm 62:5). David appears to be talking himself back into the appropriate frame of mind. The right combination of circumstances can distract the best of us, causing us to become self-focused and impatient.

Like David, we must learn to remind ourselves where our hope resides. It's not in ourselves or the circumstances. Our victory is in the LORD. Indeed, David returns to his earlier testimony, *"He (God) alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken."* And then adds, *"My victory and honor come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. O my people, trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge."* (Psalm 62:6-8)

Will we adopt David's perspective? I don't know what you are currently facing, and waiting quietly on the LORD may feel impossible. But choosing to trust in the LORD is the right course of action. So, let's learn from David's example. Let's trust the LORD, even if waiting is required. Will you join me?

May 13
Psalms 68-70; Psalm 86; Psalm 101

I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar. I hate all who deal crookedly; I will have nothing to do with them. I will reject perverse ideas and stay away from every evil. (Psalm 101:3-4)

Psalm 101 is another one of my favorite psalms. David lays out personal rules to guide his steps as Israel's king. His royal code is just as relevant for us as it was for David. I've organized his insight into the following list.

- 1) Start the day with a song—sing to the LORD (v.1).
- 2) Commit to a life of integrity—especially at home (v.2).
- 3) Take responsibility for where I direct my eyes (v.3).
- 4) Detest crookedness within myself and others (v.3).
- 5) Reject anything that leads me away from God (v.4).
- 6) Expose slander for what it is—a serious problem (v.5).
- 7) Avoid associating with condescending, arrogant people (v.5).
- 8) Associate instead with genuine people of faith (v.6).
- 9) Do not tolerate deceit—inside or outside my home (v.7).
- 10) Stand up for what is right as a way of life (v.8).

Do you see the practicality of David's code? Are we willing to take his insight to heart? To drive the lessons home, consider writing out the above list and begin to pray over each one. Ask the LORD to move you in the direction of David's wisdom. Indeed, may God enable us to live accordingly. It will bless our lives and will make a positive difference in the lives of those around us.

Let's give it a go!

May 14
Psalm 103, Psalms 108-110, Psalm 122, Psalm 124

Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name. (Psalm 103:1)

Let's focus today on praising the LORD. David models a helpful approach in Psalm 103. First, as verse 1 reflects, our praise should be wholehearted. We make a mistake when we go through the motions of praise. It involves more than singing a song or giving lip service to God. Genuine praise overflows from a heart that sees God for who He is and understands the LORD's actions on one's behalf. It's more of a response than an activity. Indeed, genuine praise should burst forth as we recognize God's greatness and activity. Again, David models the right approach. He exclaims,

"Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things He does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!" (Psalm 103:2-5)

What stirs David's heart to praise? It is his awareness of God and God's activity on his behalf. What potentially diminishes our praise? It is our preoccupation with life's problems instead of God's provision. We fixate more on ourselves than on God's goodness. David's focus is appropriately placed, which moves him to declare,

"The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; He does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear Him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him." (Psalm 103:8-13)

Think about it. Everything David expresses is true. When did you last reflect upon God's patience, love, provision, and power? When was the last time your heart overflowed with praise to the LORD? Don't you think it's time? Come on! Let's allow David's psalm to refocus our hearts so we might lift our hearts wholeheartedly to God in praise. Don't go through the motions. With all that we are, let's praise the LORD!

May 15

Psalm 131, Psalm 133, Psalm 138-141, Psalm 143

LORD, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD— now and always. (Psalm 131)

Psalm 131 is brief but tremendously helpful. David writes the psalm to encourage the proper inner disposition as a person approaches the LORD. There's no place for pride or self-promotion. A humble, childlike spirit should characterize anyone who draws near. David's confession is all the more significant when we remember the prominence of David's role. It would have been natural for a king to possess an inflated view of himself, but David refuses to do so. He confesses,

“LORD, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty.”

David adds, *“I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp.”* That is quite a statement for the king of Israel to make. Everyone in David's royal circle would have elevated his perspective or his point of view. He's the king, and his rulings represent the final word on most matters. David, however, did not allow his position to go to his head. He didn't pretend to be someone he wasn't. Instead, David cultivates a quiet, contented heart—like a weaned child. He approaches God gratefully and humbly and urges others to do the same. Indeed, David appeals,

“O Israel, put your hope in the LORD— now and always.”

The psalm is brief, but the message is beneficial. May we take David's words to heart and relate to God appropriately as we seek to draw near!

May 16 Psalms 144-145, Psalms 88-89

I will exalt you, my God and King, and praise Your name forever and ever. (Psalm 145:1)

Psalm 145 is David's final psalm listed among the 150. It's fitting that his concluding psalm in the collection would be another hymn of praise. Yet, it's not just another testimony to God's goodness and greatness. Psalm 145 represents a carefully crafted Hebrew acrostic that systematically glorifies the LORD. How is it an acrostic? David follows the order of the Hebrew alphabet to start each line of the psalm with a different consonant. It is (in a sense) David's ABCs of praise. Psalm 145, however, is not the only example of an alphabetic approach. There are nine such psalms in the Old Testament, with David composing five.

Why employ this technique? It certainly aids the Hebrew reader in memorizing the text, but it also enables the author to organize his thoughts. Twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet push the writer to think in expanded ways. That is very much the case in Psalm 145. David does not settle for a few passing expressions of praise. Following the alphabet, David thoughtfully praises the LORD again and again. It was a healthy exercise for David and beneficial for us. As you reflect upon the psalm, which of David's statements resonates with you the most?

To me, verse 8 stands out. David testifies, *"The LORD is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love."* (Psalm 145:8) The first word of verse 8 in the Hebrew text is the term ḥān-nûn, which is translated as "merciful" or "gracious." As David continues the alphabetic progression, the letter "ḥ" is the eighth consonant in the alphabet. Our focus, however, should not be on the consonant but the testimony—The LORD is MERCIFUL. And He's not just merciful. Our God is *"compassionate, slow to get angry, and filled with unfailing love."* May each of the descriptions linger in our minds. I pray they also find their way into our hearts.

Yet, let me suggest something more. Since David was willing to write out his ABCs of praise, could we attempt something similar? To make it easy, think through the first seven letters of our alphabet (a to g). Let's write seven statements of praise to God, beginning each sentence consecutively with a new letter—starting with a, then b, then c. As we do, we'll discover why the psalmists did the same. It pushes us to expand our thinking toward God, which is spiritually beneficial.

I hope you will give it a try.

May 17
Psalm 50, Psalm 73, Psalm 74

Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High. Then call on Me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give Me glory. (Psalm 50:14-15)

Religious activity does not impress the LORD when it fails to reflect faith and obedience. Indeed, God charges His people with ignoring what's most important. His complaint is not against the abundance of their sacrifices. God's concern is that His people misunderstand their purpose. It's not as if God requires nourishment or food. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10), and all the world is His and everything in it (Psalm 50:12). No, God is not dependent upon the people's sacrifices. It is the other way around. God's people are dependent upon the LORD. Through the psalmist Asaph, God calls for His people to take another look and respond to Him appropriately. God appeals,

"Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High. Then call on Me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give Me glory." (Psalm 50:14-15)

There's a bit of irony in God's appeal. The abundance of sacrifices should have been offered with grateful hearts. However, the people's motivation changed at some point along the way. Instead of humbling themselves before the LORD, dependent upon the LORD, they began to elevate themselves through their religious activity. Their attention shifted from God to themselves. They even allowed their outward displays of worship to become a substitute for their obedience.

God appeals to His people to renew their faith. They are to give thanks, walk in obedience, and rely openly upon the LORD, who sustains and delivers them. Is this a lesson we should also consider? Do we substitute religious activity for faith and devotion?

I pray we take the psalm's message to heart and relate to God accordingly.

May 18 Psalms 75-78

God says, "At the time I have planned, I will bring justice against the wicked." (Psalm 75:2)

What do the psalms reveal about our God? They show Him as our Creator, sustainer, protector, and redeemer. In Him, we experience goodness, love, power, and truth. Light and life are also found in Him. Because of Him, we rejoice. Yet, Psalm 75 reminds us of something more. The God who saves is also the God who judges. The God who rescues is also the God who brings justice. Do we keep this in mind?

God appeals, "I warned the proud, 'Stop your boasting!' I told the wicked, 'Don't raise your fists! Don't raise your fists in defiance at the heavens or speak with such arrogance.' For no one on earth—from east or west, or even from the wilderness— should raise a defiant fist." (Psalm 75:4-6) Do we hear God's words of warning? Do we understand that His judgment is real?

Far too many fail to acknowledge God's role as judge. They pretend their actions are of no consequence. God, through Asaph, warns that His judgment is coming, and He alone will render the verdict (Psalm 75:7). However, Psalm 75 is not intended to terrify God's people but to become the basis of their rejoicing. Yes, God will bring down the wicked, but He will also elevate the righteous. That's why the psalm begins and ends with an element of thanksgiving and praise. Asaph proclaims,

"We thank you, O God! We give thanks because You are near. People everywhere tell of Your wonderful deeds . . . But as for me, I will always proclaim what God has done; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. For God says, 'I will break the strength of the wicked, but I will increase the power of the godly.'" (Psalm 75:9-10)

And our response? Perhaps the language of judgment unsettles us. Maybe our past sin causes us to fear God's verdict. I remind us that the God who judges is also the One who saves. Those who have experienced God's salvation and forgiveness should take heart. Consider Paul's reassuring words,

"And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our LORD Jesus Christ has made us friends of God." (Romans 5:9-11)

Yes, God is the eternal judge. May the proud be warned, but let God's people rejoice. Instead of trembling in fear, may we lift our voices in thanksgiving and praise.

May 19 Psalms 79-82

*Turn us again to Yourself, O God.
Make Your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved. (Psalm 80:3)*

God's people in Psalm 80 are not in a good place. They are like a flock without a shepherd, a vineyard without protection. They find themselves vulnerable and exposed, and the fault lies with themselves. They turned away from the LORD and now suffer the consequences. Thankfully, the people recognize their wrongs and cry repeatedly to the LORD.

*"Turn us again to Yourself, O God.
Make Your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved." (Psalm 80:3)*

*"Turn us again to Yourself, O God of Heaven's Armies.
Make Your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved." (Psalm 80:7)*

*"Turn us again to Yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies.
Make Your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved." (Psalm 80:19)*

The recurring appeal is the same. The people plead with the LORD to turn them to Himself. The request is not for God to turn their circumstances around. The prayer, instead, is for God to turn His people around.

That is insightful on the psalmist's part. Too often, we focus on the circumstances instead of our hearts. We fixate on the physical at the expense of the spiritual. Psalm 80 teaches us to address the spiritual and allow God (in His time) to affect the physical. The objective is to walk again with God and trust His activity. The emphasis of each petition is on fellowship.

The focus is not on improving their circumstances. The appeal is for a deeper, more vibrant fellowship with God—to experience His smile again. It's worth noting that each request is slightly more emphatic as the descriptions of God expand. They appeal to "God," to the "God of Heaven's Armies," and then to the "LORD God of Heaven's Armies." The people's faith and focus upon the LORD become more urgent and clear.

And what about us? Are we praying for a change of circumstances or a change of heart? Perhaps, like the psalm, we should plead, "Turn us again to Yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies. Make Your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved." Indeed, may Psalm 80 turn our faces toward the LORD so we might experience His fellowship in fresh ways.

May 20

Psalm 83; 1Chronicles 29:23-25; 2 Chronicles 1:1-13; 1 Kings 2:13-3:15

That night the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!" (1 Kings 3:5)

Solomon now sits upon Israel's throne, enjoying God's favor upon the nation. The new king should feel blessed above all men. Yet, God extends an offer that must have amazed the young ruler. He pledges to give Solomon whatever he asks. How about that offer? Can we imagine the possibilities? There are so many directions our desires might take us. However, Solomon refuses to be self-serving in his response. He chooses instead to focus on what would be best for the nation, so he requests,

"Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern Your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?" (1 Kings 3:9)

Solomon (like his father) will not prove to be a perfect man, but his response to God's offer is impressive. Selfish desires could have driven Solomon. Yet, Israel's young king directs his thoughts toward the nation's larger good. He asks the LORD for wisdom so he might serve God's people most effectively. Again, let me state that his request is impressive—especially in light of the self-centeredness of our day.

I'm not the only one impressed. God rewards Solomon's selfless act. *"Because you have asked for wisdom in governing My people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies—I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life!" (1 Kings 3:11-13)*

Solomon humbles himself by placing the nation's needs first, and God elevates Solomon by blessing him beyond measure. Is there a lesson to be learned? Consider Jesus' words, *"The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* (Matthew 23:11-12)

Let's learn from Solomon's example!

May 21
1 Kings 3:16-6:14; 2 Chronicles 2:1-3:14

Solomon decided to build a Temple to honor the name of the LORD. (2 Chronicles 2:1)

Construction on the Temple has finally begun. King David dreamed that a structure worthy of the LORD would be built in Jerusalem. Though God would not permit David to construct the Temple, Israel's notable king did all he could to prepare for the future day (1 Chronicles 22). Generous contributions were collected to facilitate the project. The Temple would be more than another building or structure. As Solomon informs King Hiram of Tyre,

"This must be a magnificent Temple because our God is greater than all other gods. But who can really build Him a worthy home? Not even the highest heavens can contain Him! So who am I to consider building a Temple for Him, except as a place to burn sacrifices to Him?" (2 Chronicles 2:5-6)

Solomon's words reflect the appropriate humility and insight. We can be assured that the Temple would not be an ordinary building. It would reflect the otherworldly beauty and majesty worthy of their Redeemer and God. In human terms, it would become an architectural masterpiece. And in spiritual terms? It would serve as a permanent place of worship where the people of God might experience God's divine presence and power. Solomon did not overlook the significance of the building or the moment.

And what about us? My thinking is not toward a physical Worship Center or building. Instead, my attention is directed toward each of our lives. As believers in Jesus, we are now God's Temple. The Eternal God manifests His presence within our bodies. Indeed, consider Paul's appeal to the church in Corinth,

"Don't you realize that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

The question is, "Do we reflect God's glory and power?" Solomon was determined to build a magnificent structure because of the greatness of our God. Do we aspire to do the same concerning our daily conduct and lives? Do we display a beauty and dignity worthy of the LORD's presence? We are the Temple of God. Do we live as such? I admire Solomon's determination to construct a suitable building for the LORD, but may we commit to doing no less. Let's approach our lives with the appropriate seriousness and attention because we know who and what we are. May God's glory and majesty be on display for all to see. Like Solomon, may we understand that this must be a magnificent Temple. May it be so!

May 22
1 Kings 7:1-51; 2 Chronicles 3:15–4:22

*Solomon also built a palace for himself,
and it took him thirteen years to complete the construction. (1 Kings 7:1)*

Do you think Solomon went overboard concerning his palace? The construction of Solomon's residence took noticeably longer than that of the Temple due to the size of his estate. It required thirteen years compared to seven and a half for the Temple and would extend over 11,250 square feet compared to the 2,700 square feet. Of course, by today's standards, Solomon's palace is noticeably smaller than the residences of the rich and powerful in our day. For example, the ground floor, stateroom floor, and residence floors of the White House are approximately 55,000 square feet. Did Solomon overdo it? There's no indication of God's displeasure toward Solomon's actions, and some scholars suggest that it further illustrates God's blessing upon Solomon and the nation.

However, the greater focus of today's reading is on the fashioning of the various temple furnishings. It's reminiscent of Bezalel's crafting of the holy articles for the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 31). This time, Solomon enlists Hiram from Tyre for the task. He is described as "*full of wisdom, understanding, and skill.*" (1 Kings 7:14) He replicates many of the earlier articles prescribed by God (Exodus 26-30). A noticeable addition involved the construction of a great round bronze basin called the Sea (2 Chronicles 4:2). It was estimated to hold 17,000 gallons of water. It added to the grandeur and the glory of the Temple setting. It must have been breathtaking when you factor in the amount of gold, silver, brass, and precious stones incorporated into the artistic design. Solomon's palace may have been larger, but it was not more glorious. The Jerusalem Temple exceeded what anyone could have imagined. Solomon ensured that the permanent location for the ark of the covenant would be worthy of the LORD they worshipped.

And a lesson from today's reading? God deserves our best. As impressed as we might be with Solomon's palatial home, it does not compare with the cost or beauty of God's Temple and its holy articles. Everything about the Temple was designed to highlight God's transcendence and glory. Nothing could compare with it, and perhaps nothing should. Solomon guaranteed that everything about Israel's place of worship would awaken one's senses to the wonder of God. He knew that God deserved his best, and so should we. God deserves the best of our time, effort, resources, and treasures. Do you agree? I pray today's reading might cause us to respond to God for who He is in fresh ways. May He be glorified by our response.

May 23
1 Kings 8:1-53; 2 Chronicles 5:1-6:1-42

When the priests came out of the Holy Place, a thick cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple of the LORD. (1 Kings 8:10–11)

There are specific points in biblical history when I wish I could have been present. To me, this is one of those occasions. It reminds me of when God manifested His presence upon the Tabernacle's completion. As the book of Exodus describes,

“Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. Moses could no longer enter the Tabernacle because the cloud had settled down over it, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:34–35)

Do you see the parallel? If there was any doubt that God was pleased with the Temple's construction, His response says it all. The LORD demonstrates His approval as He did in the wilderness. God manifests His glory, and all activity stops. The people are affected by God's presence—at the Tabernacle and the Temple. To have been there must have been unforgettable.

Do you long for a similar manifestation? Are there occasions when your heart cries, *“Make Your presence known, LORD? Make Your presence known!”* That has been the longing of my heart. Amid the darkness and confusion of our present day, my heart yearns for God to pour out His presence among us in fresh and dramatic ways. Please understand. My prayer is not for God to put on a show. It's not about being impressed or entertained. Instead, it's about being impacted by the fullness of God's presence so we, too, are affected.

Interestingly, their activity didn't stop when God dramatically poured out His presence upon the early church. His presence moves them out instead (Acts 2). Indeed, the disciples leave the upper room empowered by God's Spirit. Make note: their service doesn't cease when God shows up. In some ways, their true service only begins. And that is my longing. Yes, I yearn for God to manifest His presence anew, not so we would have a story to tell. I seek a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit so that the LORD can make a greater difference in our lives. Do you yearn for the same? If so, pray with me toward that end. Let's ask the LORD to manifest His presence anew within the hearts and minds of His people. May God's glory be seen within His Church so an unbelieving world might turn to Jesus, His Son. O LORD, may it be so!

May 24
1 Kings 8:54-9:14; 2 Chronicles 7:1-22

Then if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

The promise above represents one of the Bible's great verses. It consistently appeals to my heart. We should recognize that the verse is an answer to a prayer. King Solomon prayed on the nation's behalf as they gathered to dedicate the Temple. The day is filled with worship, sacrifice, and praise, and God responds dramatically by manifesting His presence within the Temple. Yet, amid the festivities, Solomon lifts a prayer (2 Chronicles 6:14-42) that is not your typical dedicatory prayer. Amid Solomon's petitions, the king describes a series of scenarios to the LORD. The potential events focus on the nation's future failures and the consequences that would result. For example,

"If Your people Israel are defeated by their enemies because they have sinned against You, and if they turn back and acknowledge Your name and pray to You here in this Temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel and return them to this land You gave to them and to their ancestors." (2 Chronicles 6:24-25)

Solomon's question is relevant. When Your people mess up (and Solomon assumes they will) but return to You, O LORD, will they find forgiveness? Surprisingly, the prayer goes unanswered for an extended period. Indeed, years pass with no apparent response until God finally speaks up—in the middle of the night. What is God's response? The answer is "Yes." Forgiveness and restoration would be available as God's people relate to Him appropriately. And what are the prescribed conditions?

God doesn't ask His people to do anything extraordinary. He doesn't require them to jump through a variety of religious hoops. God asks His people, instead, to resume relating to Him for who He is. God calls them back to a life of faith and devotion. Examine God's instructions: God asks His people to humble themselves (as they should always do), to pray and seek His face (again, as they should naturally do), and then return to Him as they turn away from their sins. All the conditions or requirements characterize what we typically consider the life of faith. It's not about making up for their past mistakes. It's about acknowledging their sin and choosing to walk with God again.

Sometimes, we fear that our failures have caused an insurmountable distance. God says, "Humble yourselves, turn to Me, and walk with Me again." It is as simple and direct as that. Of course, simple does not always mean easy. Letting go of the sins that led us astray will frequently prove painful. Yet, God extends the invitation in the form of a promise. "Turn to Me. Forgiveness and restoration can be found." 2 Chronicles 7:14 is a verse full of promise. May we take God's words to heart and humbly step toward the LORD.

May 25

1 Kings 9:15-10:13; 2 Chronicles 1:14-17; 2 Chronicles 8:1-9:28

So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king on earth. Kings from every nation came to consult him and to hear the wisdom God had given him. (2 Chronicles 9:22-22)

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob prosper His covenant people in ways that may be difficult to comprehend. God's blessing of Solomon and the nation reach extraordinary heights. Unlike anything previously known, they enjoy a period of financial growth and expansion. Indeed, Solomon's wealth and success exceed even that of his father, David. King Solomon and the nation rose dramatically in prestige and influence. The testimony of the Queen of Sheba expresses it well,

"Everything I heard in my country about your achievements and wisdom is true! I didn't believe what was said until I arrived here and saw it with my own eyes. In fact, I had not heard the half of it! Your wisdom and prosperity are far beyond what I was told." (1 Kings 10:6-7)

To what do we attribute Solomon's success? Is it the result of his wisdom and insight? Or was it the combination of economic and military forces converging in the right place at the right time? How do we explain the prolonged prosperity and achievement? The answer is not complicated. Plainly stated: *"It is the promise of God."* That's right. This unprecedented period in Israel's history directly relates to God's promise on Solomon's behalf. Consider God's earlier pledge to the young king following Solomon's request for wisdom.

"Because you have asked for wisdom in governing My people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies—I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life!" (1 Kings 3:11-13)

Do we see the correlation? It doesn't diminish Solomon's contribution to the success. Instead, it reminds us that even Solomon's wisdom is a gift from the LORD. We should observe the connection and take note. As much as we are tempted to claim credit for our accomplishments, it may be more appropriate to acknowledge God's hand at work. Yes, we can marvel at Solomon's achievements. I choose instead to marvel at the LORD, who is faithful to His promise. I also find my heart strengthened because I know God will prove faithful to His promises on my behalf. Granted, the LORD has not promised I would be the wisest and most prosperous individual. Nevertheless, He has promised to make a difference in my life that will have eternal ramifications. So, let's be impressed by Solomon's accomplishments, but let's give credit where credit is due—the hand of a faithful God who keeps His promises! May the LORD be praised!

May 26
1 Kings 4:1-34; Psalm 72, Psalm 127

Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. (Psalm 127:1)

Life is good across the kingdom. As 1 Kings portrays, *“The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They were very contented, with plenty to eat and drink.” (1 Kings 4:20)* Yes, it is a good time to be a citizen under Solomon’s reign. His reputation and that of the nation, continue to increase and grow. Yet, as noted yesterday, the key to their success is the LORD. He’s the One who promised to prosper Solomon and the people, and God delivers on His Word.

To Solomon’s credit, the king understood this. Psalm 127 states as much. The LORD’s blessing is the key to building a house, guarding a city, or enjoying a family. He’s the ultimate provider and sustainer. He is the source of life. Is this how we see Him? Look again at Solomon’s opening declaration,

“Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted.”

The New English Version translates the verse, *“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”* I don’t want to labor in vain. I freely acknowledge my dependence upon the LORD. And you?

Early in my ministry as a pastor, I would write at the top of my sermon notes: *“Unless the LORD builds the sermon, I labor in vain.”* Based on Solomon’s words, I wanted to remind myself that the LORD was the key to the sermon’s success. That’s true of a house, a career, a family. It’s true of one’s marriage, reputation, character, or future. Unless the LORD builds it, we labor in vain. Do you see the simple wisdom of Solomon’s words? Insert whatever is of importance or value into the statement: *“Unless the LORD builds the _____, I labor in vain.”* It reminds us where our true source of help is found. It teaches us to turn consistently to the LORD, rely on the LORD, and walk humbly before Him. He is our provider and sustainer. He is our source of life.

Let’s remind ourselves of this as we enter the day. The LORD is even our protector amid life’s uncertainties. Solomon adds, *“Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.”* Again, are we getting the point? I pray God opens our eyes to His sustaining presence and work so we will live humble, dependent, and grateful lives.

The truth is: *“Unless the LORD builds our lives, we labor in vain.”* May we renew our focus and faith as we move forward with the LORD.

May 27
Proverbs 1-4

Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)

Solomon is renowned for his wisdom. Of course, his knowledge and understanding are not self-achieved. He received his insight from above, from the LORD Himself. It was a gift of God. That is crucial because Solomon urges us to seek the same. The question is: “Will we seek the LORD and His wisdom.”

With each day’s reading in Proverbs, much could be emphasized. However, I direct us today to a foundational verse. As Solomon states, *“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” (Proverbs 1:7)*

We need to be sure and understand Solomon’s point. Wisdom is not something we achieve like an educational degree. Biblical wisdom rises from the heart of one who recognizes God for who He is. That’s the idea behind the *“fear of the LORD.”* To fear Him is not to dread the LORD or tremble nervously before Him. To *“fear the LORD”* is to relate to God as God. It is to elevate Him above ourselves. It is to turn to God as the One with a perspective greater than our own. As Solomon appeals,

“My child, listen to what I say, and treasure My commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:1–5)

Again, if we are to benefit from the book of Proverbs, we must lock into this foundational lesson. The goal is not to apply the mind but to direct the heart. We turn to God as God. We trust His perspective more than our own, so much so that we follow His lead. That’s what it means to fear the LORD. Will we do so? In closing, consider another of Solomon’s appeals,

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take. Don’t be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil.” (Proverbs 3:5–7)

Will we do so? I pray that we do!

May 28

Proverbs 5-7

There are six things the LORD hates—no, seven things He detests.” (Proverbs 6:16)

The book of Proverbs is filled with Solomon’s helpful counsel and instruction. Israel’s king seeks to address life’s significant areas of importance and concern—from faith to family to work. We will be hard-pressed not to be impacted by each day’s reading. Solomon’s words offer practical insight into everyday life.

Today, let’s focus on the seven things the LORD hates. Anything the LORD hates, I think we should certainly avoid. That said—don’t be put off by the word “hate.” Think “dislike intensely.” There are certain things that the Creator dislikes in the strongest of terms because they work against who He created us to be. God desires the best for us. What then makes Solomon’s list? They are:

“Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family.” (Proverbs 6:17-19)

In a sense, Solomon describes who we do not want to be from head to toe. He portrays the attitude and actions of a godless individual. Each quality must be avoided, for they are detestable to God and should be offensive to us. Why are they such a big deal? Because they reflect a person who rejects God’s character and wisdom.

In contrast, reversing the list and considering the qualities God loves may be helpful. That would be humble eyes, a truthful tongue, hands that help another, a heart that plans to do good, feet that move in the right direction, a faithful witness, and a person who builds up and strengthens the family.

Which of the two lists do we more resemble? It’s worth remembering that we’re more successful in saying “no” to the wrong pursuits when we are actively saying “yes” to the right ones. Let’s say “yes” to the qualities that reflect the Creator’s influence and character. We’ll discover that it’s better for us and those around us.

So what do you think? Will the LORD hate or love our direction for the day ahead?

May 29 Proverbs 8-10

Listen as wisdom calls out! Hear as understanding raises her voice! (Proverbs 8:1)

Do we hear God's wisdom calling? Yesterday, we were warned against voices that lured us from where we should be (Proverbs 7). Today, Solomon directs our ears to the voice of the One we should trust and follow. In Proverbs 8, a noblewoman symbolizes God's wisdom who appeals to our hearts, offering hope and life. As Solomon describes,

*"For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD.
But those who miss me injure themselves.
All who hate me love death." (Proverbs 8:35-36)*

Sadly, some view God's wisdom as too restrictive. They claim it limits or takes away from the quality of life. In actuality, the Creator's insight is the path to a meaningful life. God is for us, not against us. Figuratively speaking, God's Word turns the light on in the dark so we can find our way forward. As Solomon explains,

*"Wisdom will multiply your days and add years to your life.
If you become wise, you will be the one to benefit.
If you scorn wisdom, you will be the one to suffer." (Proverbs 9:11-12)*

Again, I ask, "Do we hear God's wisdom calling?" Just as importantly, will we act upon it? Let's be honest. Reading three chapters in Proverbs can be like sipping water from a fire hydrant. So many potential applications flood our minds that we do nothing with any. Don't make that mistake. As we continue reading in Proverbs, ask the LORD to highlight a key verse to carry with you for the day. Let's do more than read God's wisdom. Let's act upon it.

Look again at today's suggested chapters. Prayerfully identify a lesson and do something with it. Wisdom is calling!

May 30

Proverbs 11-13

Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

What's your key lesson from today's reading? Prayerfully identify it and commit to carrying it with you into the day. My attention was attracted to Solomon's emphasis on the power of our words. Indeed, there's tremendous power in what we say—for good or bad. Do we understand the potential impact?

Of course, the book of Proverbs offers a great deal of insight into the words we speak. Here's a helpful summary:

- 1) Remember there's power in what you say (Proverbs 12:18; 18:21).
- 2) Develop the habit of listening before you speak (Proverbs 18:13; 29:20).
- 3) Engage your heart before your mouth (Proverbs 15:28; 16:23-24; 25:11).
- 4) Realize that sometimes less said is better (Proverbs 10:19; 17:27-28).
- 5) Recognize that sometimes nothing said is a mistake (Proverbs 27:5-6).
- 6) Be aware with whom you speak (Proverbs 9:8; 23:9).
- 7) Don't forget—tone matters (Proverbs 15:1, 4).
- 8) Keep in mind—slander is never a good thing (Proverbs 10:18; 12:22).
- 9) When all is said, your words are your responsibility (Proverbs 21:23).

How many relational problems would immediately improve if we took Solomon's counsel to heart? Will we do so? Today, let's do more than read the Proverbs. Let's commit ourselves to living God's wisdom—starting with what we say!

May 31
Proverbs 14-16

There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death. (Proverbs 14:12)

We live in a day when people increasingly demand their own paths. It's all about doing what one feels, following one's preference or desire. It's reaching such a level that our culture has begun to question long-held convictions and beliefs. Of course, this is not a new approach. Solomon reminds us that people have been choosing their own ways for generations. It isn't a recent phenomenon or approach.

Solomon warns against choosing foolishly. It's serious enough that he repeats himself two chapters later. *"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death."* (Proverbs 16:25) Did Solomon forget what he had previously written? Certainly not. Solomon repeats himself because he understands our sinful nature. Since Adam and Eve pursued what seemed right in the Garden of Eden, their descendants have been doing the same. It didn't work out for the original couple. It will not turn out well for us.

Despite humanity's failings, the Creator still reaches out to extend a better way. God appeals to our hearts to trust Him by embracing His wisdom. In a sense, that's Solomon's reason for writing much of Proverbs. He's providing God's practical insight and guidance. However, none of God's wisdom matters if we go with what we feel instead. It's incumbent upon us to seek God's perspective above our own. We can be encouraged if what "seems right" aligns with God's revelation. However, if our thinking contradicts God's Word, how will we respond?

Solomon urges us to trust the LORD enough to follow His lead. It's to our benefit if we do. Solomon declares,

*"Fear of the LORD is a life-giving fountain;
it offers escape from the snares of death." (Proverbs 14:27)*

The choice is ours. Will we do what seems right? Or will we choose what is right? God has given us His Word so that we can recognize the difference. I choose to go with God's Word. And you?

Devotions written and prepared by Stephen Lowrie
All references unless noted: New Living Translation