

Psalms for the Summer



A spiritual practice of prayer, scripture and reflection

Dear Reader,

What happens when two Lutherans, a Catholic, and a Calvinist study Scripture together? In the case of our weekly text study, fruitful and thoughtful conversation about God, the call of Christian discipleship, and good ideas for preaching. The idea for *Psalms for the Summer* was dreamed up at our weekly pastors' text study. As we so enjoy accompanying one another on our journeys of faith, we wanted to invite others into a similar experience: to read the Bible together, to pray together, and to learn from the perspective of other Christian faith traditions. We shared the idea of this devotion book with many of colleagues in ministry, who also desire to learn from open conversation with ecumenical voices.

What you have in your hands is the generous offering of many servants of the church from many different denominations. We asked colleagues in ministry, many in their first calls, to share a reflection on a psalm and a prayer/prayer practice. Serving around country and around the world, some are pastors or priests, others deacons or missionaries, and still others serve in camping or campus ministry. Everyday there will be a reading from the book of Psalms, followed by a reflection. Each devotional concludes with a prayer or prayer practice. Many of the prayer practices offered are unique and may be a new prayer practice for you. Think of these prayer practices as a laboratory for experimenting. Approach the prayer practices with an open heart and mind. Maybe you will find a new way to connect with God?

You are invited to these 42 days of joining our siblings in faith from many Christian traditions in prayer and reading Scripture. This resource is being shared in the many contexts we serve. We pray you are blessed by this resource and that you may grow in your relationships, both with God and your fellow followers of Christ.

In Christ,

Rev. Daniel Hanson, St. Paul, St. John's, and Nazareth Lutheran Churches in Franklin Co., IA

Rev. Laurel Meester, First Lutheran Church, Dows, IA

Rev. Kevin Earleywine, Catholic Churches of Franklin and Hardin Countries, IA

Rev. Christopher Meester, Dumont Reformed Church, Dumont, IA

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Day 1:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 63

“Thirsting for God”

More than half of a human body is made of water. Two-thirds of this water lies inside our cells. Water is the very building block of life. We cannot live without it. All creatures, land, and vegetation need it to thrive. Water is also a cherished symbol of faith. In the waters of baptism, the promises of God cling to the water, making the ordinary element of the earth holy.

The Psalmist sings, “My soul thirsts for you” (v. 1) and “My soul clings to you” (v. 8). The Hebrew word for “soul” is *nephesh*. It means “my inmost self,” “most essential being,” or “the real me.”¹ Imagine your essence, every cell within your body, thirsting for God in the way your cells thirst for water.

The Psalmist sings from a place of dry wilderness. He is weary. Yet, he recalls a time when he felt the closeness of God, when he tasted the joy of God’s presence, and expresses his deep trust in God despite his circumstances.

Are you weary? Are you facing a season of wilderness? Are you thirsting for God? Regardless what you are facing, no matter how thirsty you are, God rushes to pour you a glass of water, replenish your body, mind and spirit, and satisfy your deepest longing.

Cling to this promise.

Prayer:

God of the wilderness,
give us strength in our weariness,
provide for our most basic needs and our deepest longings,
restore your spirit of hope and joy within us,
and guide us to trust and cling to You.

Amen.

Contributor: Rev. Kristi V. H. Grieder
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Waterloo, IA

¹ *Lutheran Study Bible*, pp. 894, 915. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009. Print.

Day 2:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46

Psalm 46 is a song of trust in God. It begins with the vision of the sea, symbolizing chaos. We hear about earthquakes, storms, floods, all signs of anxiety, conveying a sense that the world is slipping out of control. That things are not quite right.

The psalmist paints a picture of the world in disarray. Nations fighting against nations; rulers who do not know justice; people, sisters and brothers, at one other's throats. This is far from being just an issue just for our ancestors in the faith. Perhaps you recognize this picture. The division and disarray in our nation and around the world still today. There is still chaos around us, this roaring tumult which drowns out everything else. Perhaps you can relate to the psalmist. Perhaps you can think of times in your life when things felt out of your control, when you were worried, scared, unsure of what was coming.

And then, into the midst of the pain, the terror, the chaos, the worry, the doubt, the fear-
God speaks: Be still, and know that I am God.

Into the midst of your chaos. Your doubts and your fear, the worries of your day.

Be still. Know that I am God.

When the nations rage, when communities are divided and people live in hate:

Be still. Know that I am God.

When you are worried. When you are afraid. When you are uncertain about what is to come.

Be still. Know that God is God.

Prayer Practice:

Take a moment today and be still. Let the peace of God wash over you. Then pray: for your local, state, and national governments. For your neighbors. For those you love. For those you can't stand. End your prayer with these words, these promises: God, you are my refuge and my strength. You are present in times of trouble and joy. Help me not to fear when the world around me is messy and filled with challenges. Help me to be still, to trust in you and know that you are God. Amen.

Contributor: Rev. Tanner Howard, All Saints Lutheran Church, Cottage Grove, MN

Day 3:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1

Psalm 1 begins the whole psalter by laying out a blueprint for human life. The purpose of the blueprint is to guide people toward a life that is filled with happiness, delight, and bliss. Often times I am tempted to believe that life's happiness is to be found in things: fast cars, new houses, more money, and the latest technology. Yet, according to the psalmist, true bliss is not found in things that are outside of our human life, but bliss is found in our life right here and now when we reflect on the word of God. How do we do that?

Prayer Practice:

Here are a couple of ways:

1. Memorize a short scripture and recite it throughout your day or week.
2. Read a gospel story and reflect on an action of Jesus that was moving to you.
3. Identify someone whose life reminds you of Jesus. How do they bless others? Write them a note of gratitude and encouragement.

Day 4:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 137

“A Song of Sadness”

“By the river of Babylon, there we sat and wept, as we remembered Zion.”

Not the type of sadness that comes from a tough day at work or when your favorite tv show gets cancelled.

No, the type of sadness you feel as you look at the smoldering ruins of your house after it was engulfed in flames.

The type of sadness that comes when your spouse has died, and you’re throwing the first handful of dirt in the grave.

The type of sadness, when there is no light, only darkness.

“By the river of Babylon, there we sat and wept, as we remembered Zion.”

This is a song for those, in the depths of despair.

When it is impossible to hope, and even anger is difficult.

It is a song that unites us, with those who most need communion.

That we may weep together, as we long for our home.

“By the river of Babylon, there we sat and wept, as we remembered Zion.”

Prayer

Lord, in our deep sadness we turn to you. In our despair we cling to your faithfulness. Receive our holy offering of tears when we have nothing else to offer. Surround us with the support of community. Bring us to wholeness again. Amen.

Contributor: Fr. David Baunach is a Catholic priest serving in the diocese of Springfield / Cape Girardeau Missouri.

Day 5:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 13

“Will you forget me forever?” How often have we found ourselves bulled over by what is happening around us, either personally or to the world? How often is our response to this pain to look up out of our despair and demand that the world be righted beneath our feet? How often does it cross our minds that God might care what we have to say? That hearing our cry of outrage for what has gone wrong might make a difference to God, to us? The psalmist is unwieldy in this psalm; they aren’t in control of themselves nor their emotions. This is no tidy prayer request list. No perfectly ordered prayers of intercession to argue their case and get exactly what they need. No “God’s will be done.” What we have instead is the psalmist opening themselves to the vulnerability of *gushing* to God. Their despair is overwhelming and instead of shutting down, they cry out, trusting that not only can God handle their spillage, but God might welcome it. It matters to speak our pain. And, as even the psalmist is assured, we can be sure that God’s steadfast love will be there to meet us in abundance.

Prayer Practice:

Free Writing a Prayer

Often teachers and leaders will use free writing to get their students to write without self-criticism or thoughts of “did I do it right?” Prayer is another place where we need to banish such critical thoughts. For our spiritual practice today, take a piece of paper, or a blank document on your computer or a recorder of some sort, and find a quiet place. Set a timer for 5 minutes (you can do more if you’d like, but if you’re just starting out, 5 minutes is good) and settle yourself with your form of recording, removing as many distractions as you can. Turn the internet off on your computer or phone. Clear your desk or table. Turn your phone on silent. Turn off the music or TV. Once settled, take a few deep breaths and just start writing. Free writing is simply your stream of consciousness on paper. Do not go back and reread as you write. Do not correct as you go. Just continue to touch pen to paper (or fingers to keys, etc) for the whole 5 minutes. You do not have to write a “prayer” in the traditional sense, but rather just spill your thoughts, knowing that God is listening. Release yourself from any self-criticism or worry over whether or not you’re “doing it right”- you are and God hears you.

Contributor: Katie Grooms: Director of United Methodist Campus Ministry at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

Day 6:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27

Psalm 27 begins with what seems to be a rhetorical question: As followers of the Lord, what do we have to fear?

Although the Psalmist sounds supremely confident, the reality is there is plenty to be afraid of in this life. You don't have to live very long to learn that bad things happen to good people. Sometimes the diagnosis is bad, the company goes under, or the crops fail. Life is fragile; life is uncertain.

The fascinating thing is that the Psalmist knows this. The question "Of whom shall I be afraid?" does not come from some naive ignorance of the world's harsh realities. In fact, this very Psalm speaks of false witnesses rising up, parents forsaking children, and evildoers attempting to devour the writer's flesh. There is no shallow optimism here!

Instead, this Psalm calls us to a different perspective, a wider view beyond any crisis of the moment, beyond even our entire lifespan. The Psalm's litany of fearsome troubles ends with confident hope: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

Yes, there are genuine troubles in this world. Yes, there are things to fear. But throughout our struggles, the Lord is faithful. The Lord is our light and our salvation, the stronghold of our lives. When we remember that, all our other fears fall into perspective. Let your heart take courage and wait for the Lord!

Prayer Practice:

What are you afraid of? Write down a list of 10 things you are worried about. Maybe they're personal or global; immediate or long term. Then for each, as the classic hymn says, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." Pray for those sources of fear, and next to each one, write "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Give thanks to God for being faithful in the midst of all our fears!

Contributor: Rev. Daniel Flucke, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Greene, IA

Day 7:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 148

One of my favorite activities of the warmer months is to lie on the ground and gaze at the stars. One of my favorite places to do this is in the mountains around where I grew up. Away from the light pollution from town, with the brilliant stars against the deep night sky, with only the occasional sound from wildlife in the area and the smell of pine in the breeze, it is easy to focus in on praising God for all of creation, for the beauty and majesty that is present. In this psalm it is not only human kind that is called upon to praise the Lord but all of creation is urged to join in this praise of the Creator, the one who has raised up strength for the people. As I've read and reflected on this psalm it leaves me with a question I now leave to you, How might we take moments throughout our day to join in the praise of our Lord with God's own creation that is around us all the time?

Prayer Practice:

Using photos or natural elements create a small display or touch point of how God's splendor is displayed over earth and heaven as Psalm 148 says. Place this somewhere you will frequently see it and be reminded to join in the praises that are spoken from all of God's creation for the Creator.

Contributor: Rev. Megan Graves, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA

Day 8:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 86

I am the parent of a toddler. We are definitely in the phase of life where he wants to do everything by himself, even if the task is beyond his abilities. Some things, like getting dressed, he can do alone! Other things, like pouring from a full gallon of milk, require assistance. A desire to do everything on our own is something that many of us never outgrow.

Our independence can mean we feel like a failure when we can't do everything on our own. And it can make us feel isolated, like we can't ask for help.

The psalmist teaches us here how to ask God for help. The Psalmist gives us words to ask God for help when everything is awful. We need humility to acknowledge our need for help and God's ability to give that help.

Just like I am always near my son to help him with the things he can't do alone, God is beside us to lift us up when life gets too hard. God is beside us to give us encouragement when we try new things. God is there beside us to help us up when we fail at something. And God loves us throughout it all! We are supported by God and our communities, because life is too hard to do alone.

Prayer Practice:

- Name something you have been able to help a friend or family member with. Give thanks that they were able to ask for help! Give thanks that you were there to support them!
- Name something you could use help with. Name one or two people who have the gifts, skills, or abilities to assist you. Make a plan to ask them for help. Ask God to help you throughout. Give thanks that you have a community to support you!

Contributor: Rev. Nissa Peterson, Chatfield Lutheran Church,
Chatfield, MN

Day 9:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 37

I was a student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Hong Kong. In the last semester of school I was worried about with my job after graduating. My great worry was that I didn't want to go back to be a pastor in the church which I served before I went to seminary. The reason was I was in conflict with a leader in the church. And I knew the challenges I would face if I returned to the church. One day in last April, I meet a missionary from Japan who worked at my church many years ago. I shared my bad experience with him as well as confessed my struggle. In our conversation, he suggested I read Psalm 37.

When I finished reading the text, its powerful words challenged and encouraged me to change my heart, attitude, action, and prayers for people. The text offers the term "Don't" many times such as; don't be worried, don't be jealous, don't give in to worry or anger and so on. Which contrast with the terms "trust in the Lord, give yourself to the Lord, be humble, turn away from evil and do good and put your hope in the Lord." These terms of the text remind you and me to reflect: how will we act toward someone when they disagree with us? What will we do with our mind, heart and actions when people oppose us? Psalm 37 offers an important lesson for us:

"Be patient and wait for the Lord to act." (37:7).

Prayer:

Dear Lord, when we worry bring us into trust, when we are angry bring us to patience, when we are jealous, bring us into love. Amen.

Contributor: Rev. Chanda Saiyotha, Immanuel Lutheran Church in Bangkok, Thailand

Day 10:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 98

When was the last time you experienced a moment when the Earth was LOUD!? Not loud because of highway traffic, air-conditioner compressors, and blaring podcasts, but LOUD because of the immensity of all creation.

Often the world is loud because we are in it. As a camp director, my world in the summer is loud with the voices of campers playing, exploring, singing, and talking as they make their way through camp. Loud with the crackle of a walkie-talkie with a staff member on the other end. Loud with the noise of the food truck making it's Tuesday morning delivery.

Yet, there are no sounds I can recall more clearly than the ones that happen in our silence. On a night hike, hearing two owls hoot to each other from opposite sides of the woods. During a time of prayer when the wind picks up and blows so hard that you can feel yourself almost start to take flight. Crossing the lake and hearing and feeling the slap of water ripples against the side of the fiberglass canoe. Sitting under a shelter and watching the rain come down and a thunderstorm roll in over the lake. Waking up early to walk to breakfast and hearing all the birds as they too are greeting a warm day.

I've always preferred translations of this psalm that use the term "joyful noise." Noise is something that can be made by anything and anyone. Noise doesn't require a singing voice or the strength to shout. Noise can be whatever fills our ears and blocks out everything else attempting to come in. *Joyful* noise, noise praising God, fills our ears and allows us to block out all the distractions, worries, and stressors that move our focus away from the marvelous things God has done.

Prayer Practice:

Lay in the grass under a tree. Contemplate the vast complexity of the branches and leaves you see above you. Catch glimpse of the sky and clouds passing beyond the tree. Listen and watch for creation as it interacts with the tree and the space around it. Be filled by joyful noise.

Contributor: Collin Grooms- Site Director- Lake Lucerne Camp and Retreat Center,
Neshkoro, Wisconsin

Day 11:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 122

“A Pilgrim Journeys Not Alone”

Psalm 122 is one of the pilgrimage psalms (120-134) and was used when rural people went up to Jerusalem for festivals. This psalm begins with an invitation to the psalmist from other members of the community. I appreciate that this particular journey starts with encouragement from others because some of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life arose from other people's solicitations. People inviting me to camp or to a new church community. People bringing me with them on mission trips or bible studies. These invitations were either the result of, or the beginning of wonderful friendships. Friendships that I consider gifts from God. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was not necessarily an easy one. The journeys of faith that we all embark on are similarly treacherous. Often, the roads we are called to walk demands that we release our own ambitions, face grief and put others first. We can find ourselves discouraged, doubtful and apprehensive. It is encouraging, then, to know that we are not alone. This psalm reminds us that not only God is with us but also those friends, family and colleagues we encounter through God's grace.

Prayer Practice:

Address Book Praying:

Praying for other people can be a profound reminder of how connected we are to one another. It can be overwhelming to pray for all of the people we know or care about at once so try this. Each day for a month bring out your address book, look through the contacts on your phone or pull up your friends list on social media. Spend time in prayer for each person in a singular alphabet letter section of contacts. One day pray for all of the A's Andersons, Annies and Aimees. The next read through your Brandons, Beckstrands and Bartholomews. You might be surprised who you end up praying for and what relationships you are especially grateful for or miss.

Contributor: Rev. Laurel Meester, First Lutheran Church, Dows, IA

Day 12:

Scripture Reading Psalm 16

“Fullness of Joy”

We want to know who will be in heaven. As we age and many of our friends and family have already died, we speak hopefully of being reunited with them in heaven. At times, we can even view heaven as a glorious family reunion. This is an honest and heartfelt hope. We long to see our loved ones and we rightly pray for our children, for our neighbors, and for all who do not know Jesus Christ.

However, the focus of biblical hope is not on being reunited with our loved ones. Who is going to be in heaven? God is. Heaven is where God is. The Christian hope is to one day be fully in the presence of God. Heaven as the dwelling place of God is the focus of the Bible’s reflection on heaven. Therefore, David says, “In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (v. 9-11). Heaven is where we will not only be gathered with all the saints from all the ages, but it is where we will stand in the presence of the LORD. It is where we will find fullness of joy in the beholding the glory of God.

Will we see and know each other in heaven? I hope so. However, what is more exciting is that I will see and know Jesus face to face. In his presence, we will experience fullness of joy.

Prayer:

Lord, of all the faces we long to see in heaven, it is yours we long to see the most. Set our hearts on heaven, where we will see you face to face. Amen.

Contributor: Rev. Stephen Shaffer, Bethel Reformed Church, Brantford, ON, Canada

Day 13:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 32

In 2017, over 5,000 people died because their airway was blocked by a foreign object. One of the largest contributing factors in choking related deaths is this: the victim dies alone. This makes sense, think about it. What is the first thing you want to do when you are choking? Run! It is embarrassing, and we don't want to be seen struggling, so we hide.

Whatever it is, the guilt of the Psalmist's wrongdoing is eating away at him. He puts into words what I think we have all experienced in our lives, the unrelenting weight of unresolved hurt we have caused. When we do those things, what do we do? We run and hide. We are embarrassed, not wishing to be seen. We think, "I don't want people to see that. I don't want to bring *THAT* to God. I don't want to be seen gasping and struggling. I am too embarrassed, I am too ashamed."

But the Psalmist doesn't end there. He realizes something has to give and he turns to God for help. Instead of running away in isolation, the Psalmist turns to God and in so doing is forgiven and can breathe freely again. We would do well to remember that we have that same promise. When we are choked with our sin, God who is merciful, forgives and helps us to breathe freely once again.

Prayer Practice:

Sit with both feet on the floor, hands resting on your lap, and your eyes closed. Breathe slowly and evenly. Think of some pain or hurt you have caused. As you breathe in, imagine your body being filled with God's steadfast love. As you breathe out, imagine yourself releasing guilt and shame, giving the situation over to God. After several cycles thank God for the experience. Pray also for the courage to make things right in the situation you prayed over.

Day 14:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 107

“Role Reversal”

Psalm 107 is a psalm that brims with gratitude, a ballad of God’s deeds in the world, re-lived through a joyful community of the faithful. Throughout the Psalm, the psalmist names various forms of distress—some self-inflicted, some not—and the salvific action of the Lord to turn around her circumstances and lead her into renewed life.

Because isn’t that exactly the kind of thing our wily God is always up to? Throughout the Bible, we are presented with a grand vision of God’s justice—a vision in which roles are always being reversed: The hungry are fed, the rich are sent away empty; the mighty are cast down from their thrones, the humble are uplifted; and the greatest show of glory and might is God’s own submission to a cross. This psalm suggests that we can expect God to turn the tables for the good, but that we should be wary of oppressing our neighbor lest our iniquity be visited upon us. And just as we can expect our faithful God to act in certain ways on our behalf, so we the faithful should respond with shouts of thanksgiving and praise.

We can always expect God to reveal justice in mercy, to meet us where we are, and to refuse to leave us there. *That* is fantastic news—because we could all benefit from a little role reversal now and then. Thanks be to God!

Prayer Practice:
(over)

Prayer Practice:

The Daily Examen

This is a psalm of thanksgiving—and so, it pairs perfectly with a time-worn Christian practice of gratitude called the Daily Examen. The Examen was first introduced by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit movement. He believed this simple practice was so important to the life of faith that every Christian should use it twice a day, and through it, learn to talk to Jesus like a trusted friend. Perhaps, through the Examen, you'll find your soul singing its own psalm of thanksgiving for God's work in your life.

1. First, take a moment to quiet your mind and focus on God's presence with you.
2. Together with God, walk through the events of the day. Note its joys, its delights and gifts, and revel in even the smallest details. Rest in gratitude for what the day has brought.
3. Examine your emotions as you review your day. What might God be saying to you through these feelings? (Ignatius believed that our emotions point us to God's movement in our lives—how exciting!)
4. Focus on one part of the day—whether it was significant or not—and look at it in conversation with the Holy Spirit. Pray about this moment, allowing your thoughts to rise to God like the gentle steam from a warm cup of tea.
5. Ask God to give you guidance for the next day to come, so that you may meet its challenges with a grateful heart. Remember to pay attention to your emotions and ask God to give you hope for tomorrow.

Contributor:

Rev. Mary Beenken, Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Peoria, Illinois

Day 15:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm consisting of 176 verses. In the original Hebrew, the psalmist wrote this psalm as an acrostic poem based on the Hebrew alphabet which has 22 letters. Each section has 8 verses. This psalm focuses on God and His Word. You can find various synonyms used for the Word of God like precepts, statutes, law, decrees, and commands. But what does this psalm say about the Word of God?

*“Blessed are those who keep his statutes”
and seek him with all their heart—v. 2 (NIV)*

*“How can a young person stay on the path of purity?
By living according to your word.” v. 9*

*“Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counselors.” v. 24*

*“Your hands made me and formed me;
give me understanding to learn your commands.” v. 73*

And the most familiar verse: *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” v. 105*

God's Word is our blessing, guide, counsel, and it commands and lights our path. When we meditate and think on His Word, we are comforted, blessed, challenged, and given direction and insight into our experiences. Through God's Word we come to know Him better and build up our relationship with Him.

Prayer Practice:

Study one section of the psalm a day. Read the 8 verses, ponder and consider what they say about God, His Word, and the role His Word has in our lives. What can you do to apply His Word in your life? Pray and apply.

Contributor:

Reverend Au Sze NGUI
Lecturer at Sabah Theological Seminary, Sabah, Malaysia

Day 16:

Scripture Reading Psalm 121

Summer is a time for many spent traveling and enjoying the great outdoors. I know many of my congregation members, who live in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, take full advantage of traveling and being outdoors during the summer months. Now Psalm 121 is one that actually was meant for people who were traveling. This Psalm is known as the pilgrim's psalm. In ancient times those making pilgrimages to Jerusalem would recite the psalm as they looked to the city of Jerusalem which was on top of a hill. The psalm also speaks of the care and protection God gives to those on their pilgrimage. For me, growing up on the prairies of Minnesota, hills were hard to come by. As I grew older and had the opportunity to travel throughout the world, I have seen many hills and mountains all of which never failed to fill me with reminders of God's presences in our lives. Then again, life overall is really one big journey, a pilgrimage if you will, and Psalm 121 give us words of comfort and wisdom to know God is there for us not just in our summer travels, but in our whole life's journey.

Prayer:

Oh Lord, maker of heaven and earth, as we gaze upon your wondrous creation let us remember all of your works and care as we continue on our life's journey. Give us strength and safety as we travel and enjoy the great outdoors. In your most holy name, we pray. Amen

Day 17:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 133

In the midst of strife between family members and friends, this psalm offers us a vision of hope. When my friends and neighbors speak ill about me. When I feel completely alone, unwanted and unloved. When I am in the depths of despair, I am invited into relationship with God and with my brothers and sisters around me in our common sonship. We share in baptism, where consecrated oil has been poured upon our heads. We have been anointed as royalty, sons and daughters of the Most High. Yes, at times, life can be incredibly dry. But the dew of Hermon, the gift from God on high is poured out upon us. How can I remain alone? We are united in our love of God. I will call upon the Lord, and I will call upon my brothers and sisters to worship the Lord. Let us serve the Lord together in joy and peace.

Prayer:

Almighty God, who has created marvelous works, thank you for choosing me to be your beloved child. Help me to be a witness of your love to each person I may encounter, so that your family here on earth may be strengthened. May your grace flow upon our hearts, so that we may be open to your blessings. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contributor:

Fr. Josh Gray is a Catholic priest of the Diocese of San Angelo Texas, and serves as the associate pastor of the Cathedral Parish.

Day 18:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 136

Sometimes prayer might seem a bit much.

Early in my relationship with my (now) wife, we sat down at the dinner table with her family. Before we ate, we prayed. I grew up in a home that prayed before meals, so that seemed normal. But when we finished, and I got up to dutifully (impressively, I'd hoped) help clear the table, her father said, "Just a moment. We'll give thanks to the Lord."

Curious, I sat down. Hadn't we already prayed? Were we going to pray again? That seemed a bit much.

Dutifully (impressively, looking back) the whole family once more folded hands and bowed heads and said, "*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, and his love endures forever. Amen.*" Only then did we move on to the work of cleaning up.

Psalm 136 has 26 verses. Every single one ends with "*...for his steadfast love endures forever*" (New Revised Standard Version). It might seem like a bit much. But so are God's deeds. Psalm 136 in four stanzas (1) directs thanks to God, (2) recounts the creation story, (3) retells the Exodus from Egypt and victories in the Promised Land, and (4) reminds of God's faithful love here and now. The Psalm concludes where it begins: giving thanks to God, "*for his steadfast love endures forever.*"

Psalm 136 reorients us to the God who gives much, and to whom we give thanks. Only then do we move on to the work of what's next.

Prayer Practice:

Consider what you begin and conclude each day: sleeping, being awake, eating, commuting, watching or listening to the news, etc. Consider beginning one or more by saying (actually *saying*), "*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, and his love endures forever.*" Conclude each activity, however long, with the same words as it began. To help, leave reminders in places: post-it notes on light switches, garage opener, door handles, TV remote, computer screen. Set a reminder on your phone, or set your phone's lock or home screen to an image of Psalm 136. Or, simply end each meal with these words.

It might seem like a bit much. But so is God's love. And so we give thanks.

Contributor:

Rev. Benjamin Eisele, Gayville-Bergen Lutheran Churches,
Luther Center Campus Ministry (University of South Dakota)

Day 19:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 138

Psalm 138 offers such a wonderful song of praise and thanksgiving. David was extremely thankful to God for God's protection and response to God's people. Whether we read this psalm in today's context or in the context of three thousand years ago, it secures hope for us and gives God all the glory. It is a psalm that sings to the Lord for the safety God provides. When you reach verse seven, it almost has the ring of the Psalm 23: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me..." (NRSV). It is such a fantastic way to thank God for all the protection God provides, knowing that God will come through in helping us fulfill our purpose in life. Whenever we are wondering if we can make it through a situation or if we are doing what we are intended to do in this life, Psalm 138 can provide that assurance we need.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for all the safety you provide to all of us. You constantly bring us through times of trouble and always nudge us toward fulfilling our purpose in this life for you. Please continue to shower your blessings on all your children. Amen.

Contributor:

Psalm 138: John Sheahan- Pastor at Bergen Lutheran Church, Roland IA

Day 20:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 90

Reflection/Prayer:

Dear Father, may I lift Your Name higher for You are all-powerful, all-knowing, Creator of the universe, God of past, present and future, I acknowledge You as Lord over all. You are my refuge and hope from eternity to eternity, you made me and gave me breath.

You are God, the only true God!

Thank you for being the stronghold of my life. As time passes, I see more clearly the life I should live for. In light of Your power I am dust, you set my secret sins in the light of Your presence. Father, I am sorry for my sinful behavior and wasting my life on things which insult You. I come and bow before You, and ask for Your forgiveness and mercy. Please renew me, and cleanse me from the inside out.

Every time when I was in the darkness and suffering, I saw the light. Thank you, Father, for Your Almighty shadow. You go before me and cover me from behind. Thank you for Your words that gave me hope and strength. I can rest in You no matter how great the storm before me!

Thank you for giving me a life journey that is filled with Your faithful love, grace, and mercy. You delivered me from destruction and set my feet on solid ground. I praise You, Father, in my joyful times and during hardship, as You are the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. I will not grow tired or weary, and Your understanding no one can fathom. You give strength to me and increase the power I need. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but my hope in You will renew my strength. I will soar on wings like eagles; I will run and not grow weary; I will walk and not be faint.

By faith I live, in Jesus' precious name.

Amen.

Contributor: Pastor Anthony Malan, Senior Pastor of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church,
Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod

Day 21:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 88

Have you experienced the utter darkness? There are moments when family, friends, and congregants have invited me into their despair. It's a holy moment, a painful moment. They wish to hear from God. They wish to know they are not alone when God feels so distant. Have you been there? In the darkest moments, the bottom of the pit, when words seem to lose their meaning? Where is God's loving grace as death and darkness surround me?

Even then, Psalm 88 reveals to me an authentic relationship with God, embodying the fullness of life. God invites honest, painful conversation. The words whispered in the dark. The cries hurled into the void. The words only seem to affirm your feared fate: destined to echo, fade, and die.

God wants all of you. The joy-filled praise and the heartbreak pain.

I chose to reflect on this psalm because, sometimes, the hard days win. The world seems lost. Yet, even in the midst of utter abandon, these words are now included in sacred scripture. Holy and honest. Recorded for those who feel God is nowhere to be found. Yet, found in the scripture, God heard their cries. We, too, join with the writer's lament. We, too, can sit in the darkness together. We are not alone.

Prayer Practice:

I had the honor of participating in a retreat led by Rev. Dr. Brett Vander Berg called *Into The Wilderness*. One meaningful experience I had at the retreat was participating in the activity "Flat Stanley." Psalm 88 invites us to have a full authentic relationship with God. I invite you for your prayers today to focus on these real aspects of your life. Follow the steps, turn on some music, and work through the project, having a real talk with God about your joys and pains.

"1. Cut out your Flat Stanley.²

2. Give some personal detail to yourself....

3. Indicate in some way (words or symbols):

1. On one side, your childhood joys, interests, hopes, moments of knowing you were loved.

2. On the other side, your childhood pain, brokenness, and loss.

Words/images/symbols.... use whatever works for you to give meaning to your "Flat You."³

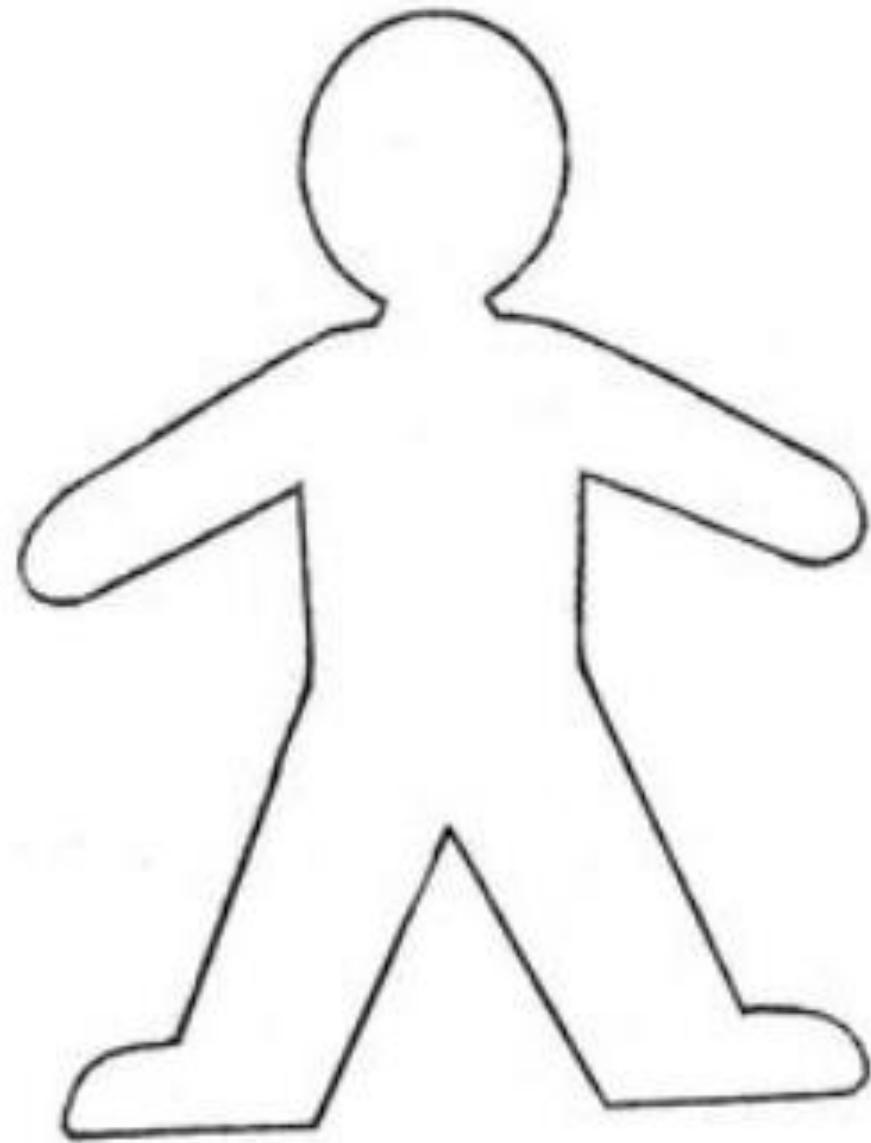
² This activity was adapted from "The Flat Stanley Project," by Dale Hubert.

<http://www.flatstanleyproject.com/default.html>. Flat Stanley image was taken from

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/334533078541294394/> (accessed, 8.27.2018).

³ Brett Vander Berg, *Humility: Pathways and Ritual* (Michigan, Western Theological Seminary: 2019), 78-79.

“Flat Stanley”



Contributor: Rev. Chris Meester, Dumont Reformed Church, Dumont, IA

Day 22:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 34

Have you ever found yourself facing something that you felt you didn't have the courage to face?

Have you ever felt fear, not knowing what will happen or if you will ever feel safe, whole, or joyful again? The Psalms are full of both this sort of foreboding and suffering and also stories of

hope. Psalm 34 was written by King David after just such a situation and his joy and relief is palpable. In it, we find that he sought out God, that he cried out to God in anguish, and that God delivered him. He will bless the Lord, he says, because of the powerful deeds that God has done

for him. But these words can taste bitter in our mouths if we have not yet seen the same deliverance David found. Yet, Psalm 34 tells us, God is there in the midst of those things which seem as though to break us. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (v. 18) and "...none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned." (v. 22 NRSV). While in your life you may feel as though you are crushed, weighed down, or in peril, this Psalm offers us words of hope: you are not alone, you are loved, and God hears your prayers.

Prayer Practice:

Let us pray: Rescuing God, you are here with me in each and every moment, the joyful and the fearful, and you know my life. Grant to me the peace of knowing your presence and the courage to live a life marked by your joy, love, and grace. Amen.

Contributor: Rev. Bryan Odeen, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Osage, IA

Day 23:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 65

Psalm 65 is my favorite psalm, and it is a song of praise and thanksgiving. When I read it I can imagine its author shouting the words for joy. I can see them standing on a hilltop, a river bank, a coastline, a valley – and I marvel the joy I experience by simply imagining this person expressing such joy and thankfulness for the blessings of creation. And like many of the psalms, Psalm 65 uses beautiful imagery of creation to draw readers and hearers into the understanding of abundance and praise. However, that is not why it is my favorite psalm.

This psalm is my favorite because it draws me in with the sensory imagery it uses. Most of the time I experience my faith is in a sensory way as opposed to an intellectual way. I feel my faith, I smell my faith, I see my faith, I hear my faith, I taste my faith. While this may sound strange, I feel closest to God in my moments of experiencing creation through my senses. When I feel the breeze across my skin or when I smell the newness of life after a spring rain or when I hear the birds singing early in the morning and the crickets chirping in the evening. Psalm 65 speaks my sensory understanding of God.

Prayer Practice:

This may be how you connect with God or it may be completely different. There is nothing wrong about that, and for this devotion I want to offer a few different invitations to experience God with your different senses. First, read the psalm and simply sit with the words for a few moments. Then if you feel called, go outside. Feel the breeze, touch the leaf of a tree or flower, feel the grass or a stream or the lake with your toes, smell the growth of life coming from the earth or a neighbor's campfire, and take those moments to feel God in those simple things. Experience God in creation through your senses. If you do not feel called to venture out of doors, I invite you to either listen to Hillsong's song *You Crown the Year* online. Experience God through hearing or seeing God expressed in lyrics and melody. And finally, if you do not feel called to listen to the song either, I simply invite you to read Psalm 65 and take some moments to dwell in the beautiful and glorious imagery of creation and experience God through that.

Regardless of what you feel called to do or what you decide to do, know that God is with us through all that we experience, and creation reflects God's love and grace poured out and over all of us. May you continue the journey of faith through all your senses as well as in creation,

Amen.

Contributor: Deacon Lydia Svenulski, Director of Adult Ministry,
Word of Peace Lutheran Church, Rogers, MN

Day 24:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27

“Trust in God”

Until recently, I thought that I had a strong trust in God. Then I became a mother. So many fears came along with this new role! Fears of babies being sick, injuries as toddlers waddle around on unsteady feet, and not being good enough as a mom have plagued me frequently in this new phase of life. Psalm 27 is a call for deeper trust in the Lord and His goodness. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?” (NRSV). This is a clarion call to not get caught up in the fears and doubt of this life. If the Lord is truly my refuge and savior, then there can be no room for these internal wars within my heart. As the psalm says, “Come . . . seek his face, your face, Lord, do I seek!” In order to nurture and strengthen my trust in God, I must practice trust Him in all moments. From the little moments of doubt to the sleepless nights keeping vigil with sick children, I must remember to lift my heart to the Lord.

Prayer Practice:

My favorite and one of the simplest prayers I use repeatedly in these moments of fear or doubt:
“Jesus, I trust in You.”

Contributor:

Cassie Schetgen is the director of Music and Liturgy at
Holy Spirit Catholic Parish in Dubuque, IA.

Day 25: Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known psalms in the entire book of Psalms, and I have heard it many times over in my life. I think a lot of times when Scripture becomes popular, and we hear it on repeat, we start to close our minds to what it is that the words are saying - we lose the life that is present in these Holy Words. So if this Psalm is one of those pieces of Scripture for you, I ask you start again, read this Psalm like it is your first time, and let the Holy Spirit speak to you through the words found here.

To me, this Psalm is a call to rest, pure and simple.

I have recently been through a very hard battle in my life where people treated me less than human, and tore apart the faith I was fighting so hard to live out. I felt pushed off a cliff, with no plan, no security, and no real plan for what was next. I didn't know where I was going to land.

However, God, as always, had a bigger plan. He gave me a time of rest, a safe place to be, a time to be broken, but surrounded by people who loved me. My husband and I found ourselves in a tiny, one-room apartment, hardly big enough for the two of us and our dog. Yet here, in this broken down place, I found sanity. I sobbed into my husband's arms many nights, and took my dog for many long walks, ranting at the world as I went. I sat by the river near our house and sang songs to God and to those who felt what I have felt. I was broken, and yet at the same time, I was whole. As I look back at this small little house, I see that it was Holy Ground. It was my time to live into what this Psalm is saying - it was my time to rest.

God led me beside still waters, God restored my soul.

Prayer Practice:

Down to the River to Pray is a song I often sang, sitting on the river's edge. I encourage you to find a place in nature, near water, and try singing it, replacing "oh, brothers" with anyone in your life you think needs a call to Holy Ground. I pray you find rest.

As I went down to the river to pray

O brothers, let's go down

Studying about that good old way

Let's go down, come on down

And who shall wear the robe and crown

Oh brothers, let's go down

Good Lord, show me the way!

Down to the river to pray⁴

Contributor: Tina Magner, Program Associate, Green Lake Lutheran Ministries, Spicer, MN

⁴ Public Domain

Day 26: Scripture Reading: Psalm 37

Psalm 37 brought to mind our son's first summer playing tee-ball. This little boy's great patience, so rare for a child his age, often masked his enthusiasm. So much so, that his coach sometimes failed to notice him as he sat waiting for his turn to bat. When another boy would impulsively dash out to the plate, David never protested. He simply waited, trusting that his opportunity would come.

When the season concluded, the team gathered together one last time for the trophy presentation. As the coach walked toward the boys, they swarmed around him, jumping up and down to get a look inside the box he carried. Delivering the coveted prizes into all the little hands thrust toward him, the coach realized he still had one left. Looking around, he asked, "Where's David? Guess he's not here."

But he *was*. David had stood, quietly and patiently, right beside the coach the entire time.

In a world where it seems as though only the loudest and brashest get their way, this quiet little boy reminds me that the Lord truly does not forsake his faithful ones.

Prayer Practice:

Consider including the practice of waiting among your spiritual disciplines; choose the longer line at the grocery store checkout for a change, set your cruise control *at* the speed limit, find moments throughout your day where you can take a deep breath and wait... a minute or two or ten... before moving on to the next task. And notice God's presence in the meantime.

Contributor: Rev. Anita Nuetzman, Calmar and Springfield Lutheran Churches,

Winneshiek County, IA

Day 27:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 121

Several years ago, my husband and I had the privilege of going to Israel. In order to listen well to the story of Scripture, we spent some time hiking through the hot, dry desert. But, even in these harsh conditions, there were occasional bushes and trees that grew. A few minutes in their shade, even if it only covered your face, would give you enough strength and energy to go on.

Today's psalm teaches us that God is our shade. We can find our rest and strength in Him. There are seasons of life where we go through extreme difficulties: the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, struggles with anxiety or depression; the list goes on. But, even in these desert places, God promises to be no further from us than our outstretched right hand. We may not have enough ourselves, but in God we do. In Him, we can find enough rest and strength to continue on.

The Bible shows us how God gives shade through his followers. In Acts 5 we read of how "people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by" (NIV). Perhaps you have experienced God's rest through a brother or sister walking alongside you in a difficult time. We too are called to be God's shade for others. How have you experienced God's shade? How can you be shade to someone else today?

Prayer Practice:

God, we thank you for being our shade, giving strength to us when we need it most. Help us to be shade for others, showing them your love, grace, and strength. Amen.

Contributor:

Rev. Olga Shaffer, Ontario Classis (RCA), Brantford, ON, Canada

Day 28:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 104

Summer is often a time when many embrace the outdoors and experience the vibrant life that has lain dormant through long dark winters; the first buds of spring on barren trees becoming a green canopy flush against a clear blue sky. There is something truly awe inspiring about the simple beauty found in the persistent and abundant life that surrounds us.

Psalm 104 is one of my favorite texts to go to when considering our place in creation. This song of praise valiantly attempts to capture the majesty and scope of God's good work throughout this planet which we inhabit. The young lion's roar is found to be in a chorus with the contented cattle of the fields, as all of God's creatures experience the grace and mercy of a loving Creator.

Today at times, the news may seem bleak, and people's opinions may seem fractured and opposed, but in this Psalm we hear how in spite of all this the very rocks continue to sing the praises of our benevolent God. We might not always get it right, but it's comforting to know that while we stray, creation itself continues to carry the tune. I do not know what the future holds for us and for this wondrous Earth, but I trust that through the grace of God and in the work of God's people, there is hope for new things, and promised life in the face of death. Let our voices sing of God's good works, let our meditations be pleasing to our Lord.

Prayer:

Creator God, all of Creation sings your praises. Thank you for the beauty of this earth. Help us to be good stewards of your work. Bring healing to that which is broken, and renewal to that which has been lost, through the one who took on flesh that we may see you more clearly, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen

Contributor: Rev. Aaron Holmgren, Bethel Lutheran Church, Lester Prairie, MN

Day 29:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139

It's amazing how taking a few moments to consciously breathe can change everything. To be still and silent and aware of our breath as it enters coolly into our nose and mouth, expands our chest and stomach, radiates outward to our fingers and toes and head, and then sits for one glorious moment before it travels back to the center of our body and out again, warmed ever so slightly by the journey.

Most recently I sat with my spiritual director, who had just finished reading Psalm 139, silent and still, breathing deeply. My mind and heart had been spinning in anxious circles all week, a tangled mess of self-doubt and indecision. My torso heavy in my chair, my feet planted on the ground, my hand held over my heart, and my tear ducts yielding to the broken damm behind my eyes, I breathed in one breathe at a time God's affirmation offered in that moment:

“You are known... you are loved... I am here with you, always.”

Prayer Practice:

As a spiritual practice, intentional breathing opens our entire being – mind, body, heart – to the abundance that each moment has to offer. For me, it has been a bridge from fear to calm, disgust to compassion, isolation to embrace, despair to peace.

As you end each stanza in today's Psalm, pause in silence and stillness to take three deep and intentional breaths. Trusting that God is as close as the air that animates your very life, affirm with each breath these simple promises:

You are known.

You are loved.

God is with you, always.

Contributor: Jessi LeClear Vachta, MA

Luther Seminary, '14

Independent Interfaith Consultant, Twin Cities, MN

Day 30:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 67

When you read the first few lines of Psalm 67, who do you imagine “us” is referring to in the text? Do you think of your church or group of Christian friends and community members? Do you think of the Lutheran church [or respective denomination]? Or do you think of all Christians,

or even the whole world? It’s hard to know who the psalmist meant by “us,” but I find the language of “us” and “earth” and “among all nations” more inclusive and a reminder that God’s people are in *every* corner of the world. I have served as a missionary with the ELCA in Asia for five years and the way I have understood God’s greater kingdom - “us” - has gone through many transformations. While I have certainly seen, heard and experienced differences in the ways Christians teach and worship in different parts of Asia, I found our grounding doctrine is the same. We all need God’s forgiveness and seek ways to praise God; we all practice fellowship and study the Word. Plus, we all face conflict and suffering in our communities; we pray for justice and peace; we seek reconciliation, yet face judgment. What kind of schisms do you recognize around you - in your own life, in your community or in the world? This psalm serves as a reminder that we are one kingdom under God. God is gracious to *us* and blesses *us* and wants *us* to praise and fear and sing to our God. Make it known!

Prayer:

Gracious God, you gather us from every corner of the world under the saving wing of your love. Thank you the love you have for the world has not been poured on some, but all. It has been poured out for us. Thank for this gift. Amen.

Contributor:

Jenna Bergeson

English lecturer, Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Hong Kong

Day 31:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 42

Longing for God's Presence in the Temple

“As the deer longs for streams of water,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, the living God.
When can I enter and see the face of God”
Psalm 42:2-3 (NABRE)

The speaker mourns their Northern placement and citizenship in this Lament Psalm.

Because of the division and the split kingdom of Israel, they are not able to *fully* worship in the dwelling place of the Lord with their Jewish brothers in the Temple in Jerusalem for the festivals and sacrifices. This brings great sadness and despair to the psalmist.

We, too, get to enter into this sorrow and pain as we long for our eternal home, the Heavenly Jerusalem, where we will *fully* dwell with the Lord and all our Christian brothers and sisters in Paradise for all eternity.

42:8 “Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your torrents,
and all your waves and breakers
sweep over me” (NABRE)

However, we as contemporary pilgrims in this foreign land of Earth can receive great comfort and solace from this psalm when we remember one important event: the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. His body was broken and then, unlike the divided ancient Kingdom, was fully restored and glorified. The Body of Christ now comprises not only his Holy presence in our churches and worship spaces, but the very depths of the heart of each believing baptized person. The depths of your heart call out to the depths of mine, and demand that we worship together and sing the praises of our Living God who no longer chooses to be bound by time, space, division, or border.

Prayer Practice:

Spend some time today to call out to God from the depths of your heart. Especially for those who suffer: who are lonely, who do not feel loved, who are far from their homes, or who are persecuted for their faith, or who are struggling in any other way.

Contributor:

Father Jacob Rouse is a Catholic priest serving in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, IA. He is currently serving as Associate Pastor of the Catholic Parishes in Mason City, IA.

Day 32:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 6

I did not truly discover the depth of emotions contained in the psalms until a trusted mentor, in a moment of deep grief on my part, lovingly pointed out the obvious. “Read the psalms,” he said.

“And start with Psalm 6.” As I soaked the tissue in my hand, crying over the evil that was breaking my heart, adding to the always low simmer of pain and hurt and sadness that is a constant when one is living in our broken world, I sobbed all the harder reading the words of this psalm. I scribbled across and under every single word, feeling seen and understood and somehow, miraculously, more hopeful for reading it.

I recently rediscovered the same psalm as I thumbed through my bible, finding all the underlining I had done during that first, desperately needed reading. At first, I smiled, thinking of the person I was then, how much I’ve healed, how much I’ve let go. But, slowly, realization dawned, shining an uncomfortable light on the parts of me that I would rather stay hidden. A realization that I am still on that healing journey. And as that realization grew, I also realized how weary I felt. Weary that the heartbreak that drove me to Psalm 6 originally continues to sit in my bones and in my heart. Weary that my tears have dried up, not for lack of pain, but simply because of the draining of energy that it takes to feel this pain so constantly.

And once again, even though I had sunk back into my own pain, after reading the whole psalm, after reflecting, after praying, I felt more hopeful after reading it. Not because the pain was gone, not because I was suddenly visited with insight that broke open my healing process, but because

I was reminded of God’s steadfast love, of God’s deliverance, of God’s presence. My mentor pointed me in the direction of Psalm 6 five years ago. And in those five years, God has shown up and walked with me through my healing, promised me to never leave me alone, and continued to send me the right people who fill me with hope. I pray that God does the same in your life.

Prayer Practice:

May God walk with you in your own healing journeys, may you feel God’s presence in the people who surround and love you, and may the evils in our world, the evil in your life, be so struck with terror in the face of your love and your hope, that they turn and flee, conquered by love and light. Amen.

Contributor:

Rachel Swenson, Intern Pastor, Evergreen Lutheran Church in Evergreen, CO

Day 33:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 110

“The LORD says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”
Psalm 110:1 (NRSV)

There's a lot going on in Psalm 110. Jesus put this to his advantage in his dispute with the Pharisees, quizzing them on what David meant when he said “The Lord says to my lord” (Matthew 22:43-45). In fact, Psalm 110:1 is the most quoted verse in the Old Testament. In addition to Matthew, it shows up in Acts, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, and Revelation. Today, however, instead of sorting through the imagery and its quotations, I'd like to focus on one little word in the middle of this verse: “until.” In our world, filled with a twenty-four news cycle and Twitter and Facebook, it can seem as though every moment is jammed full of panic and crisis. In this environment, it can be tempting to emphasize that God is otherworldly and eternal, in other words, up above our daily messes. In Psalm 110:1, in the little word “until,” we hear something different: there is time in God's plan of salvation. The early church held tight to this verse, because it holds a great promise: After his death and resurrection, Jesus has not departed to sit eternally removed from our world, leaving us to sort out our problems. In the word “until,” there is the promise that Jesus will come again, just as he came the first time: in history, in a specific time. Each day, we wake up and pray for that coming.

Prayer Practice:

Find a compass. When you wake up in the morning, use the compass to find North. Nod to the North, the South, the East, the West, Up and Down. Look at your hands and say “hands.” Remember that you exist in a body, in a specific time, just as our Lord Jesus exists in a body and will come again at a specific time.

Contributor: Kristofer Coffman, Graduate Assistant, University of Minnesota

Day 34:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 131

“As a Child has Rest in its Mother’s Arms, Even so my Soul”

Picture a warm night and farm animals retiring to the barn. Imagine inside a poor family, a wife and husband, and the wife holding her newborn son in her arms. Hear the sounds of the animals, smell the earthiness of the farm, and feel the stickiness of sweat. Picture this scene, and you are picturing the conditions of Jesus’ birth, in Bethlehem.

Let us tune our senses to the earthiness of Christ’s birth. Most of all, let us see this sight: the image of Jesus in His mother’s arms. Christ our Lord, though sharing in His Father’s divinity, shared this simple and human experience with us. He shared the intimacy of His mother’s womb, as each of us did with our own mothers. And as a newborn, he enjoyed the protection of his mother’s arms, as each of us did too.

Jesus often asked his disciples to have child-like faith. What is more child-like than the confidence that a child has in its mother’s love and protection?

Prayer Practice:

Now imagine yourself as a young child—perhaps that classic family photo of you as a baby, or your first day of school. Try to recapture that innocence, and purity, and singularity of confidence in your parents, and direct all towards our Heavenly Father. Spend a few minutes at rest in your Father’s arms. If you wish to recover that child-like faith, consider spending this time with God daily, in the confidence of His embrace.

Contributor:

Sister Jess Lambert is a Sister with the Franciscans of the Eucharist of Chicago, a Catholic Religious Order that serves the poor in the inner city of Chicago in the neighborhood of West Humboldt Park.

Day 35:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 30

I try to be better in my prayer practice. Often I find that my anxiety is a big driver of my prayer, and that can feel insincere if I'm not careful. "Lord, help me on this frustrating drive" or "Please help me get this spreadsheet done today" reflect real fears of mine, but it feels often like I am tamping down my anxiety with a religious veneer.

Psalm 30 is one I have kept in my heart for years as I try to teach myself to pray in gratitude. Life can move by me so fast I sometimes fail to register a moment when my anxiety lied to me about how difficult a task would be, or how badly something could go. It's in those moments that I try to give a nod to mourning that has turned to dancing.

I had a kitchen accident recently. A knife slipped and hit my wrist, giving me a nasty little scar. It was so close to the artery that the doctor wouldn't stitch it: they had to use glue. It was difficult to sleep that night, between the soreness and the anxious thoughts of what may have happened if the knife had been just a little off. But it was Psalm 30 that calmed me, a prayer of thanks for safety in world where knives slip. Going forward, I will try to summon the confidence of the author in saying "I will never be shaken."

Prayer Practice:

Gracious God,

Thank you for safety.

For another day of big and small challenges overcome.

For a morning where sorrow has fled.

For making our mountain stand firm.

For joy where sorrow once stood.

Amen.

Contributor: Mike Gold, MA., St. Paul Area Synod Staff

Day 36:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 57

“Awake, My Soul”

There are days when it's difficult to remember God wills all things for good.

The days when I look out to see a friend slumped from the weight of grief—a son gone, dead of cardiac arrest. When I see another sitting straight up in her church pew—the bout of shingles attacking her body so that it hurts to use the back rest. When I take a walk with a loved one brandishing bandages on her arm, covering where she used a crayon sharpener-made-knife to cut herself. And when my own back explodes with fire, straining to support my weight following a muscle spasm on the eve of the biggest three days of my work year.

“Have mercy on me, God...send help from heaven...”

On these days, pain washes down my face and wounds from way deep down burn my cheeks. Yet, even on these days, when my soul is bowed down, my refuge is found in the Lord.

Awake, my soul. Never sleep to God's abiding love and mercy. Awake, my soul, to the truth that God never forgets us, his beloved. Awake my soul, and know God does indeed will all things for good.

Prayer Practice:

Take some time to consider what it means to awaken your soul. What would a soul wide awake look like, sound like, feel like? Allow the Spirit to awaken your senses and your soul.

Contributor:

Anastasia Nicklaus is the director of Liturgy and Worship at
St. Edward's Catholic Church in Waterloo, IA.

Day 37:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 144

“Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for battle...” (144:1 NAB)

Sometimes in the ordinary daily living of our faith, we can sometimes forget that being a Christian involves very real spiritual battle! You don't have to look far though – simply turn on the news or study a history book – to realize there are very real forces of darkness and evil at work in the world. Our call as Christians is to rise to battle with these forces! But the battle must begin with prayer! In personal prayer and meditation, we do battle with the evil in our own hearts. But also, as a Catholic Christian, I am a very strong believer in the power of intercessory prayer, and thus that we as Christians are called to intercede for each other and the world, as a necessary part of doing battle for the world. And when we worship as the gathered Body of Christ every Sunday, we combat evil in the world. And it has to start here, in our prayer, both personal and as the gathered Church, because it is the LORD who trains our arms for battle, and it is only by His power that we conquer the forces of evil (Much like the story in Exodus 17, that the Israelites only would win the battle as long as Moses' arms were raised to the Lord). For the LORD is the one who call upon to “Flash forth your lighting and scatter my foes; shoot your arrows and rout them. Reach out your hand from on high and deliver me from the many waters: rescue me from the hands of the foe”

Prayer Practice:

Take some time today to “do some battle” for the world. Pray for someone who is struggling in any way (whether in life, in faith, etc.), or for some injustice in the world. Pray and intercede for these things in an intentional way, that the Lord in his might may combat these forces of evil at work in people's lives and the world.

Contributor:

Father Kevin Earleywine is a Catholic priest, pastor of the Catholic Churches in Franklin and Hardin Counties of Iowa.

Day 38:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 22

“The psalms that will not cross our lips as prayers, those that make us falter and offend us, make us suspect that here someone else is praying, not we – that the one who is here affirming his innocence, who is calling for God’s judgment, who has come to such infinite depths of suffering, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. It is he who is praying here, and not only here, but in the whole Psalter... The *human* Jesus Christ to whom no affliction, no illness, no suffering is unknown, and who yet was the wholly innocent and righteous one, is praying in the Psalter through the mouth of his congregation”

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*).

Psalm 22 is one of those psalms that either hits you or misses you. There have been moments in my life where I intimately knew the pain the psalmist expresses in these deeply moving and disturbing words. There have also been times in my life where the imagery of this psalm – either the devastation and paralyzing fear or the hope and faith despite all odds – has felt entirely alien to me. So, the quote here by Dietrich Bonhoeffer helps me remember that at all times there is relevance to God’s Word. The psalms are not just individual reflections, but the communal prayer of all God’s people and of Jesus himself. Uniquely, we get to hear Jesus pray this psalm. At the moment of his execution on the cross he cries out, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which is Aramaic for, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – verse two of Psalm 22. Even with his last breaths, Jesus continued praying the ancestral prayers of his people. When we as a community pray this and every psalm, we are the body of Christ in the world. Whether we know the pain of modern-day crucifixions or whether we simply echo and amplify the voices of our siblings who hurt the most in our world, we faithfully follow Jesus’ example of prayer together.

Prayer Practice:

Today, try to find someone with whom you can pray. If they are willing, recite Psalm 22 together, thinking of those who suffer most in our world. If you cannot find someone to pray with, read the news and then pray this Psalm twice. Once to embody the voice of Christ; and once again to amplify the voice of those closest to the pain.

Contributor:

Rachel Johnson – Seminarian at United Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, camp counselor at Carroll Joy Holling Lutheran Camp in Nebraska, and soon-to-be vicar at The American Church in Berlin, Germany.

Day 39:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 61

I *love* sleeping in tents! I love the endless supply of crisp, fresh air. I love the dew that forms on its walls. I love how the sun – minutes after sunrise – cooks me right up and out of the tent.

But the thing I love most is knowing that the tent is all I have. The tent is all there is between me and *out there*. Just beyond this thin flap of fabric, mosquitos vie for the opportunity to feast on my blood, bears come snooping for food, and clouds threaten to soak me and everything I own.

But they don't!

At first it's scary to trust in just this one thing. But every time I lay down in a tent to sleep, I eventually settle in, noticing (and enjoying) more of the world around me than ever before.

I wonder what would happen if we started to treat God a little more like a tent?

There are a lot of things that pretend to offer us shelter: bank accounts, presidential candidates, stockpiles of weapons... But these things just shelter us from the life God has given us: a life of love, hope, joy, and peace.

Perhaps if we treated God a little more like a tent, we would learn to enjoy this world in a new way. Sure, it might be scary at first. But pretty soon we might begin to notice and enjoy the beauty of the world around us more than ever before.

Prayer Practice:

Sleep in a tent tonight! I'm serious. Go pitch a tent in the backyard and sleep! Now, if that's not possible, maybe just sleep somewhere else. It could be porch, a hammock, or even a couch in another room. As you lay down to sleep, pray for all the new things you notice.

Contributor:

Rev. Joe Natwick, St. John Lutheran Church, Dickinson, ND

Day 40:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 73

Do you find yourself having to learn to trust God's goodness over and over again? I know I do.

Slowness to learn can be frustrating. Sometimes it can make us worry that our faith isn't maturing. Psalm 73 stands in the center the book of Psalms as a reminder that our struggle is not new. Even though we have experienced God's goodness many times, our faith may still waiver when difficulties arise.

Psalm 73 isn't the exact middle of the book of Psalms (though it's close!), but scholars Walter Bruggeman and J. Clinton McCann see it as the theological centerpiece of the whole book.

Psalms 1-72 are reminders of God's goodness. Many of these psalms also make it clear that sometimes bad things happen to good people. Even after 72 psalms of affirmation, praise, and life lessons, Psalm 73 is a song about having to learn that lesson for the 73rd time.

Psalm 73 begins and ends with God's goodness. Sometimes we don't remember God's goodness when we are in the midst of difficulties, but God's goodness is always there. We may "almost stumble" and forget God's goodness, but God will never fail us. Where does the psalmist go to remember this? Into the sanctuary of God (v. 17). Here he exchanges a heart of bitterness for a heart that can rest in God's goodness.

This summer, where are you reminded of God's goodness? When was a time that God's goodness helped you through a tough time?

Prayer Practice:

Lemons into lemonade

In a pitcher, combine 8 cups of water and 1 ½ cups lemon juice. Taste some of the mixture on a spoon. It is sour and bitter. Now, mix in 1 ¾ cup sugar. As you mix in the sugar and pour yourself a glass of lemonade, take time to thank God for God's goodness to you throughout your life.

God, you are good. Take my heart of bitterness, and make it sweet as I remember who you are and all you do for me.

Amen.

Day 41:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 105

“O give thanks to the LORD!” (v. 1 NRSV)

Every day is gift. At this point, I can't remember if this was a saying I learned from one of grandparents, or if it was a life lesson they taught without words. My grandparents taught me every day is a gift from God. Some days were better than others for sure. But still, every day is a gift, a day for which to be thankful. As someone who just turned 30 years old, it is easy for me take for granted the gift of every new day. It's easy for me assume I have 50-60 years of life in the future and to let life fly by. But that's no guarantee. With days packed to the brim with things to do, it's easy to blink and miss all the blessings which come with each new day: friendship, family, shared meals, relaxing music, the beauty of summer flowers, and relationship with God, to just name a few. It's easy to let life pass you by.

Psalm 105 opens with the refrain “O give thanks to the LORD!” Thanksgiving and gratitude are one way we can recognize each day is a gift from God. Thanksgiving causes us to pause and notice what is happening around us. Thanksgiving sends us a place of reflection. Thanksgiving helps us recognize the source of life and each new day. Thanksgiving helps us recognize the wonderful gift of life God has given us each and every day.

One of my favorite ways of opening prayer is:

“Good and gracious we come to you in Jesus' name, and we give you thanks for another new day.”

In your pray time this week, thank God for this new day. Another good gift.

Prayer Practice:

The Psalmist reflects on the story of their ancestors, thanking God for the ways God was faithful throughout the story of their people.

Take six minutes and reflect on your own life story. How has God been faithful? For what are you thankful from your past? What are you thankful for today? Write down a list or story through which you can thank God. Offer the list or story as a prayer of thanksgiving.

Contributor: Rev. Dan Hanson, St. Paul, St. John's, and Nazareth Lutheran Churches in Franklin County, IA

Day 42:

Scripture Reading: Psalm 150

As the last chapter noted in most Bible translations, Psalm 150 provides an appropriate ending to the book reminding us of the importance of worship and praise. The psalmist paints a picture of a symphony and many of its components. Praise God with trumpet, lute, and with harp! Praise God with tambourine, strings, and pipe! Let everything with breath praise God!

As the psalm of praise comes to an end we read, “Praise God with clanging cymbals; praise God with loud clashing cymbals!” Cymbals as an expression of our praise and thanksgiving seems so very fitting. From a musical perspective, cymbals are typically scored to enhance and add emphasis to what the rest of a symphony is conveying; our attention is drawn to what is occurring in a musical climax through the crash of cymbals.

In the Word clanging like a cymbal into the life of the world in the person Jesus Christ we are reminded of God’s presence and promise of life for all persons. The clashing cymbal that is Jesus Christ proclaims our freedom from sin in Christ and therefore our freedom for love amongst our neighbors of the world as an expression of our faith and thankfulness. We as the body of Christ come together as Church just as a symphony comes together to create music. Each of us plays a role in offering praise throughout the symphony of our lives while listening for the climactic clash of the cymbal in our lives, the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ to whom we offer our praise.

Prayer Practice:

As you go about your life in the coming days, ponder how it is that God clashes like a cymbal in your life. Does God crash into your life through a specific person, place, or event? What is it about these situations or persons that cause you to see God? For what are you thankful for within these interactions? As you pray in the coming days give thanks to God for that which you are grateful, especially the situations in which you have observed God coming to you.

Contributor: Rev. Kyle Barton, St. James Lutheran Church, Allison, IA