



SUMMER

SONGS OF THE



WEEK ONE: **KNOWN**

JULY 6

PSALM 1

I can still feel the panic that arose up inside of me. All I had wanted to do was walk by the river. I knew it was at the bottom of the hill

from the campsite. As there was no path, I wove my way through the sycamores and made my way down to the Meramec. Walking along the river was calming and I must have gone farther than I realized. I began the steep ascent only to find the campsite was nowhere to be seen. Hence the panic. No one knew where I was and I had no idea where to turn.

Psalms 1 was written as an introduction to this magnificent collection of prayers, songs, and worship material. Jesus loved to quote Psalms. The psalmists reveal the character of God and we are often reassured by their intimate and rather bold conversations with God.

Psalms 1 is a reminder that God knows each day we have a choice of how we will make our way. Will we follow the path toward God? Will we wander away forgetting who made us? God is well aware of our need for direction and a path. The path of the “righteous” has many blessings as illustrated in the well watered tree which is fruitful and prospers. It is rooted in the Word which provides us a direct path.

As a seven year old, I retraced my steps and eventually found my way back to my family. They never even noticed I was gone. We may lose our way in the world from time to time, but the path to God is clear, open, and full of promise for each day. Psalm 1 is a wonderful way to begin the day. It encourages me to seek God’s face. It is also a reminder that God’s Word helps provide me a path from which to begin the morning.

Whom will you chose to follow today?

Sara Perrine



WEEK ONE: **KNOWN**

JULY 7

Psalm 121

Do you remember what it was like as young children when we would sometimes be dropped off for someone else to watch us when our parents were busy or had someplace to go?

I can vividly recall being dropped off at my grandparents home in Kentucky for two weeks while my parents would attend a yearly conference in Montreat, North Carolina. As much as I loved my grandparents and enjoyed my long visit, I missed my parents daily presence and would count the days until they returned.

How long is the Lord with us?

Psalm 121 reminds us the Lord is with us from our first breath to our last. And during that time the promises of our God never fail. The Master of the universe who binds it together with the mere pleasure of his will knows each and everyone of us personally and intimately.

And amazingly, he also desires us to know him too. Those who search for him he lovingly reveals himself.

It is a great gift to know him and meet the Lord face to face.

Psalm 121 reminds us that we are kept safe and free, held up by the everlasting arms of our Lord.

Lift Your Eyes to the Mountains

See where your help comes from...

Rick Clark



WEEK ONE: **KNOWN**

JULY 8

Psalms 139

“O Lord, you examine me and know. You know when I sit down and when I get up even from far away you understand my motives. You carefully observe me when I travel or when I lie down to

rest; you are aware of everything I do. Certainly my tongue does not frame a word without you, O Lord, being thoroughly aware of it. You squeeze me in from behind and in front; you place your hand on me. Your knowledge is beyond my comprehension; it is so far beyond me, I am unable to fathom it.” (Psalm 139: 1-6)

Isn't this passage amazing? That in this immense universe, God knows ME inside and out – he knows my thoughts, my motives, my actions, my habits, and my choices. It is hard to wrap my mind around how much God loves me and how important I am to him! It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God has bigger things to think about and would not care about the details of my life....but the Bible assures me that he does! Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Secure in that, how can we not give our best for him who has done so much for us?

The last two verses of Psalm 139 shows us what our response should be to God's unfathomable love for each of us. *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me, and know my anxious thoughts, see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139: 23-24).*

I know that feels like a scary prayer to pray, but God already knows our struggles, our sin, our shame, and still loves us more than we will ever understand. We ask him to search our hearts, not so he can condemn us, but so we can be free from the sin that keeps us from being all he created us to be. Pray this prayer with an open heart to the answer, and ask God to help you trust his love for you so you can boldly obey where he leads you.

-Marianne Auten



WEEK ONE: **KNOWN**

JULY 9

Psalm 16

We have a very dear friend who just recently lost her beloved Poodle to old age. She and her dog had one close, very strong bond and they shared a great love for each other. In fact, our friend was the only person who could approach that dog and truly, the one person that dog learned to love and trust.

Our friend found her four-legged companion through a pet shelter some years prior. She rescued that little dog on the spot and brought it home to a changed life. The life that dog had lived prior to being rescued was somewhat unknown and a mystery that was never really solved.

All that's known was the dog had experienced severe abuse as a professional "show dog" before making it into the shelter. It doesn't make any sense but it must have been a rough life – in and out of dog shows, living in portable kennels between competitions, forced to perform on command. The dog turned extremely skittish and fearful of anyone getting too close. She never outgrew it but soon after being rescued, that dog would seek out her new owner and immediately jump into her arms – fleeing her fears and leaping toward safety.

Of all the pets in the shelter, that one specific dog was our friend's choice. I can tell you that little Poodle loved her new owner who provided a true 'rescue' – a new life full of love and no more torture.

I think about our lives as humans. We run away from things – fears that haunt us, habits that grab us, hurts that cause lifelong torture. Who are we running to? I'm reminded of David's Psalm 16 from *The Message*,

*1-2 Keep me safe, O God,
I've run for dear life to you.
I say to God, "Be my Lord!"
Without you, nothing makes sense.*

Let's run toward the One who "gets us" - who understands us fully and offers us a true rescue. We are God's choice, and He is there, waiting for our leap.

*5 My choice is you, God, first and only.
And now I find I'm your choice!*

Kevin Kramar



WEEK ONE: **KNOWN**

JULY 10

Psalm 30

God totally changes our standing when we choose to follow Him. The psalmist rejoices in the fact that he is being made new, looking back over his life at the many ways God rescued him from peril. It is a valuable thing to look back at our own lives and realize we are the recipients of God's great mercy and grace. We are new creations. We are given a new identity and receive untold blessings when we follow Him.

Allow me to share an amusing story to illustrate. Facebook was rather new, and one of my daughters thought I should join to see what was happening with family and friends. She set up an account and chose a password. To illustrate my hesitancy to embark on this journey, I had to call her to remind me of that password when I occasionally opened up the account. In time, I felt empowered to explore some of the finer points, one being a place to provide more personal information. (A word of caution for today: don't do it!) It seemed harmless at the time to establish the fact I was married. In a split second, I clicked on "change status," not realizing this new information would be widely broadcast to my now expansive "friend" list. The responses to my changed status brought hilarious comments, including words of congratulation from surprised friends and a comment from one of my grown children, "Would that be to the man we call Dad?"

God changes our status. We belong to Him. Psalm 30 is filled with words of praise as the writer acknowledges the many incomparable reasons God is deserving of praise. He looks back over his life and recalls a variety of circumstances when God showered him with goodness: protection from enemies, healing in times of need, rescue from danger, a firm foundation, and so much more. When we consider the ways God has acted on our behalf, is there any other possible response but to praise Him? You don't even have to click on an icon—He changed our status through a compassionate act of love.

Mary Cartwright



WEEK TWO: **EXPOSED**

JULY 13

Psalms 42

The seasons of the spiritual life ebb and flow as the ocean waters. There are times that we thirst for spiritual nourishment. Our soul asks to see

God because we may not feel him or doubt that he is with us. Spiritual depression sinks in, filling us with darkness. It is in this time that we need to remember who God is, and what God has done for us. He is the one who guides us through these low points in our spiritual journeys, leading us back to the light. He is our Savior, he is our God, we are his people, he alone is our Rock that is our protection and help in times of need.

Times of spiritual drought, much like the desert experience of the children of Israel, may lead us to lose our trust in God. Remember, it was through this experience that they were called to a place of thirst and hunger. Even though, they lost their faith in God and Moses, God was faithful. God called Moses to strike a rock and out of it flowed fresh water to quench their thirst. God is the one who provides living water. So when our soul is downcast, when it is fearful, recall the wondrous works of God, for he is always faithful. Let his Word fill your soul.

Cory Rocha



WEEK TWO: **EXPOSED**
JULY 14
Psalm 6

*Please God, no more yelling ... can't you see I'm
black and blue, beat up in body?
Break in God, and break up this fight; if you love
me at all, get me out of here.*

(selected phrases from verses 1-5, The Message)

David was in a terrible position, feeling yelled at and beaten up. The man who had killed Goliath was thoroughly humiliated. There are times in my life when I need humbling, too. So many times I have patted myself on the back and then fallen flat on my face.

I was an undergraduate when I took a course in group communication. At its end, I was elated when the teacher asked me to assist him next term. I was so proud. One Wednesday, I went through my routine of reading the students' journals in the Newman Center. Later, I drove to church. It was a busy night. Once home, I could not find the bag of journals. Panic! So, in a cold Minnesota night, my husband drove me to the Center. It was closed, but we went through the trash dumpsters outside. No luck. The next day, I inquired at the center, and contacted every relevant department. Still, no journals. I felt lousy. That night, I asked a friend to pray with me. Later, our phone rang. A voice on the other end said he had a message for me. I should not worry because the journals were on the manager's desk in the Newman Center. I wanted to thank the caller in person, but he said that was impossible. The next morning, the manager said that something strange had happened. She was the only one with a key to the office, had locked it up the night before, and then that morning she saw a bag of journals on her desk. She had no idea how it had got there. Being me, I fessed up to my teacher, and then asked him if he believed in miracles. He said that he was beginning to! And I still do! God knew all about my pride, but still "got me out" of my carelessness. Wow!

Moya Ann Ball



WEEK TWO: **EXPOSED**

JULY 15

Psalms 53

The first several times I read through this psalm it left me feeling very uneasy. I felt defeated and discouraged. I felt that I had disappointed God, just as I had always felt I disappointed my dad when I was growing up. Verses 2 and 3 read,

"God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."

As I allowed the psalm to soak in over a period of days, I focused more on verse 5 which states, *"But there they are, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread."*

Did you catch that? *"Nothing to dread!"* This is not a message of doom and gloom, friends. This is a message of hope. The evil that is innate in us poisons our thoughts and sways us to see the negative side of life. Especially now in the midst of this pandemic, daily life has come to a screeching halt and we succumb to our anxieties about the future and easily focus on the terrible things that could result. But throughout scripture God has constantly reminded us to fear not, for He is with us always. Fear not! Fear not!

Use this time when we have been forced to slow down, removed from the hamster wheel of life. Rather, allow yourself the inner peace and tranquility that God will bathe your soul as you take stock of all that is in your life; not the job, the finances, the tests, the endless goals that always keep that pit of anxiety in your stomach. Focus instead on all with which you are blessed. Focus on the people in your life that give you purpose and joy.

I enjoy sitting on the patio in the quiet mornings, feeling the breeze, listening to the songs of the birds, the occasional dog barking, giving thanks to God for His infinite gifts that largely go unnoticed. Notice them now and rejoice!

Rose Johnson



WEEK TWO: **EXPOSED**

JULY 16

Psalms 23

One of the most beloved Scriptures begins with, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” Let’s pause here. Comparing the Lord to a shepherd is a theme repeated throughout the Bible. We

understand a shepherd’s goal is to protect his flock. We can see the connection. God’s greatest desire is to protect and provide for us. It’s the “WANT” part that is difficult. Our lives can be driven by all the things we want. It starts early in life.

When our children were young, my parents wanted some ideas for Christmas gifts. We had enjoyed getting the cassette recorder out so they could hear the grandchildren’s voices. The much-anticipated Sears Christmas catalog had arrived. Sitting at the kitchen table with the tape running, the girls were captivated by all the colorful and enticing selections. What was surprising was the youngest, two years-old at the time, gleefully pointed at things on every page, happily commenting, “I want one of those!” She selected dozens of items, some most inappropriate. Every so often when she pointed at yet another toy, one of her sisters would say, “You already have one.” It didn’t stop her enthusiastic quest to acquire more.

We enjoyed playing that tape over the years, laughing at her childish behavior. But it always nagged at me that as adults we are often like little children. We want what we want, and we want it now. We want what we can’t have. We fail to take into account whether what we want will cause us harm. We are slow to recognize when we have already been given what we continue to request. God already knows what is good for us, and he gives generously. The psalmist provides the answer to our quest for contentment—I SHALL NOT WANT. If we truly trust that God gives us the best gifts, our response should be thankfulness. He is the Good Shepherd.

Mary Cartwright



WEEK TWO: **EXPOSED**

JULY 17

Psalms 56

Have you ever awakened in the morning with the feeling of dread? Life can be difficult and sometimes I let it get the best of me. Once in a while I will wake up and think, “Lord, I just don’t want to do this day, I just want to stay in bed and put the covers over my head.” This usually happens when I know I have a challenge ahead of me and I am fearing failure, conflict or uncertainty. Does having this fear mean I’m not faithful? I truly don’t think so, unless I let my fear get carried away, and maybe not even then. I believe God allows demanding circumstances in our life to bring us closer to him and even to help us long for the day that we will be with Him.

Psalms 56 is one of those gems in the book of Psalms that allows us to see how David spoke to the Lord and work through his fears, drawing closer to Him. It can inspire us to work through our daily fears as well. David mentions how his enemies come at him in many ways. Tough days can come at us in a variety of ways, but David gives us hope. He notes in verses 3 and 4

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

This is our reminder that when the day seems unbearable, God is with us. In every moment of fear and uncertainty he will use that situation to grow us in our faith and trust in him.

Father, please be with me in those days that I am overwhelmed by fear and worry. Help me feel your presence in each step that I take within this day and give me the grace and strength to work through this hardship while honoring you. Amen.

Nicole Peterson



WEEK THREE: **REST**

JULY 20

Psalm 25

I had to hit up the internet for the biblical reference, although if I had to guess it might say something like:

Hold fast to the Lord in troubled times, He will not let you fall.
You may feel weak, Let Him be your strength. He knows you and loves you anyway. Have hope that God's GOT THIS.

Upon my findings, only some of my initial thought was *close*: that we should pray and meditate for only God knows the way. That seems "a given" yet sometimes when we despair or feel guilt for our sins, we like to think we can forget what we have done. God does not forget, and loves us nonetheless.

Psalm 25 is an acrostic, each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This may have been God's humor coming through our artistic human voice to better teach and memorize and remember who exactly is the Alpha and the Omega. It is a song from David to God. For David, his sorrow reminds him of his sins and this drives him back to God. He reaches out to Heaven in the middle of his own sorrows and asks for God's wisdom. David even remembers others in prayer and asks that Israel be redeemed of trouble. Only God can do this for us! There is no better time than the present to keep this as our first, go-to thought!

In studying Psalm 25, I came to the following insights:

- We can use our trials to examine our own hearts.
- We can live so as to please God and be blessed by Him, even in the middle of trouble.
- ALWAYS pray for others, even when we are going through our own difficult times.

We can seek God's wisdom and humble ourselves by affirming our faith that God is GOOD. Although we may not understand His ways, we will be delivered from our troubles for His glory and for our own higher good.

Stephanie Muscat



WEEK THREE: **REST**

JULY 21

Psalms 143

Excerpts from Psalm 143: 7-9, New English Version

... Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.

David's song goes from despair to hope, from a pity party to trust. The phrases above stand out. They are embedded with darkness and light, phenomena that loom large in our physical and spiritual lives. Darkness may mean the loss of light, loss of a job, a relationship gone sour, our health-physical as well as emotional, the loss of a loved one; and in a pandemic the loss of our freedom to do as we wish. You get the picture. On the other hand, from the beginning darkness always preceded light. A mystical incident assured me that God is faithful, and that, as promised, he never leaves us.

Diagnosed with a rare cancer, surgeries, chemo and radiation done concurrently had left me with side effects. In 2015, I began my second round of chemo, but I had spontaneous compression fractures of my vertebrae. My spine was too fragile for them to be treated, and so the pain kept me awake. A mystical incident {it's okay if you think I am "cuckoo"} showed me that God, the light, never leaves us even in the dark. The pain was searing, and so I simply talked to the Lord, saying that he had promised to be with

me always, that his angels were encamped around me, but I was not feeling those promises. Suddenly, it was if the bedroom was filled with bright, twinkling lights, and all I could say was "Thank you!" The lights receded, but not the experience. There remained joy in the darkness, the Lord was not hidden, but had been with me all the time!

Moya Ann Ball



WEEK THREE: **REST**

JULY 22

Psalm 22

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"

(Psalm 22:1=Mark 15:34)

Abandonment by another human, or a community, is one of the scariest of human feelings. As a child when I heard the word 'banished' a certain unknown fear came into my heart. What would it be like to be thrown out by your own human community? Is that worse than death itself? The reality of rejection has been part of the human community since the expulsion from the Garden. Psalm 22 lets us know that in the darkest hour HE is there! It also allows us to say what we really think to God. If Jesus cries from the cross about his forsakenness, it makes us aware that God honors our thoughts and even complaints. Some theologians insist that the cross is the loneliest moment in human history, abandoned by his own disciples and people, he hangs naked on a cross.

In my experience as a chaplain I notice that the sincerest prayers come from the depths of human experience. When we are under distress or persecution by others, we tend to speak our minds. As Jesus makes the cry from the cross, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" we sense distress and that feeling of abandonment. However, the double affirmation of God that begins the question brings certainty of His presence. What follows in Psalm 22 is that affirmation of His presence and deliverance. In verses 5-6 there are three recapitulations of **trust in God** from the history of Israel. The diverse genre of text moves from lament (vs. 2-22), to prayer (vv. 12, 20-22), and finally to praise and thanksgiving (vv. 23-32). I wonder did Jesus speak that first line of the psalm to call to remembrance all of this? In conclusion, lament is part of our human condition, but to trust and **hold tight** brings us into His presence even in the depth of distress.

Brad Auten



WEEK THREE: **REST**

JULY 23

Psalm 34

David was on the run from King Saul. Plagued by danger, David escaped death several times. Later in his life, he wrote psalms about how grateful he was that God helped him through those treacherous times and saved his life. “Always praise the Lord,” David wrote, “and give him thanks for being our refuge.”

While most of us have probably never been on the run from someone trying to kill us, we all have faced problems and difficulties in our lives. There have been times of stress when we prayed for God to take away our pain, give us strength, or change our terrible situation. During those troubled times, we may have even doubted that God was watching and listening, because matters weren’t getting any better. But Psalm 34 reminds us to never stop praying. Take refuge in God and he will provide a safe place for us; physically, mentally, and spiritually. Be aware that God can rescue us from our fears and heal our broken bodies and hearts. As we continually and persistently seek God, our doubts will disappear, and joy and happiness will follow. Yes, joy and happiness will absolutely follow.

Recently, I experienced a lengthy bout of back and leg pain. I, along with my family and friends, prayed daily for relief. But it took several weeks to resolve my problem and, after successful surgery, I felt a profound sense of joy. Life was good again. The life lesson for me is that God does hear our prayers and will help us. It may take some time, but we should always give thanks to God for blessing us with his enduring love.

Dr. Larry Gettman



WEEK THREE: **REST**

JULY 24

Psalm 111

It seems we are surrounded by a steady stream of bad news. No one will disagree we are living in troubled times. It is likely every generation had the feeling that things could not get any worse. We are confronted daily with news of evil forces, natural catastrophes, pandemics, turmoil, and instability of all kinds. A daily assault of the world's woes is enough to send anyone into despair. Yet here we are, and we try to make some sense of things, looking for hope, longing for change.

The remedy for despair is to be found in God's Word. This psalm is the perfect choice for helping us change focus. The writer goes to great lengths to point out why the Lord is worthy of praise. We are to delight in his great works and his majestic deeds. We are reminded that his righteousness endures forever. He is gracious and compassionate. He makes provisions for us. He always keeps his promises. He is eager to give us good gifts. He is faithful, just and trustworthy. He is holy and longs to redeem us. He offers wisdom to those who follow his teachings.

Setting one's mind on these things will not change the headlines, but it will change the way we respond to them. We are called to have an eternal perspective as we navigate through this life. That includes knowing God's love is more powerful than any troubles of this world. Having an eternal perspective is being confident God is still in control and can bring good from evil. It means he gives us strength to endure whatever difficulties we encounter. It reminds us we have hope. We are his precious children, placed in this world to pass on his truths to those who are desperate for Good News.

Mary Cartwright



WEEK FOUR: **BEAUTY**

JULY 27

Psalm 8

Entering Zion National Park's East entrance, there is a tunnel just over one mile long. As you progress through the tunnel, there are small cutaways that allow one to catch glimpses of what is outside, and finally, one large opening reveals the spectacular view of Zion's beauty. I like to think of Psalm 8 in this way as, sometimes I neglect to be aware of splendor around me. In this song/prayer, David tells us of this beauty both beginning and ending with the phrase, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

It is praise to the God of everything created, sung by the 'gittith', a stringed instrument like our contemporary harp. Notably, this psalm has inspired many hymns, including "How Great Thou Art," which has over twenty allusions to the text. Psalm 8 has the beautiful qualities of being brief, providing sharp contrasts, and finishing with repetitive force. The babbling of babies, and the adult human mind attempting to grasp the infinite universe are held together in ironic humility. Then, the obvious question comes, "What is man that you are mindful of him"? Am I just a babbling baby trying to understand incomprehensible YOU? Does the baby understand more than I?

The answer that comes is just as bewildering as the distinctions mentioned above. God has crowned humans with "glory and honor..."! He gives us the responsibility of using wisdom with His creation. One translator puts it this way, "You have given us the fantastic responsibility of carrying on Your creative activity." This psalm helps us be aware of God's majesty, and the astonishing responsibilities of being human.

Psalm 8:2 = Matthew 21:16 - Jesus answers the critics!

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes that we may see more of your beauty!

Brad Auten



WEEK FOUR: **BEAUTY**

JULY 28

Psalm 66

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. – C.S. Lewis

Many know C.S. Lewis as this incredible author who weaves beautiful stories of God's love and faithfulness through his son Jesus. What you may not know is that at one time he was an atheist. At age seventeen, C. S. Lewis explained bluntly to a Christian friend he'd known since childhood, "I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best." Fifteen years later, he would write to the same friend on a very different note: "Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things,' . . . namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection." This turnabout did not reflect a "Damascus road" conversion; it took Lewis those fifteen years to change his mind.

I can relate to C.S. Lewis. Growing up in the Catholic church, I went through the rituals every Sunday with my mother. Once I reached high school, I was given the freedom to choose to go to church. I chose to spend my energy elsewhere. What I find interesting is the fact that my personal turnabout was fifteen years as well.

My "conversion" did not come about after reading the Bible or attending a sermon. It was through faith — the faith I witnessed first hand in a girl whom I fell in love with. Although I did not understand her faith, I knew that I wanted what she had. God, in all His wisdom, slowly turned on His light for me. Having been in darkness for so long, I believe He realized the shock of His full brilliance might have been too much.

Wherever you are along your journey, you can have faith that God is there, waiting...

The words of Psalm 66 can provide us with confidence that God is always listening, even when we may be silent for extended periods. He is ALWAYS faithful. Oh, if you were wondering, I ended up marrying that girl!

17 I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue.

18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

19 but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer.

20 Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

Dr. David Perrine



WEEK FOUR: **BEAUTY**

JULY 29

PSALM 103

I love this psalm! The very first thought that pops into my head in the first verse is the song "10,000 Reasons." The sentiment of this

passage is like overwhelming joy bubbling out of me as I consider God's enormous creation and how my life has been blessed with so much. Who am I? In the broad spectrum of all that is and ever was in existence, all at the hands of our heavenly Father, who am I? And yet, he knows more about me than I know of myself. And loves me just the same.

This psalm paints a picture of the magnitude of God's fingerprint on all creation and the perspective of how fleeting minuscule our existence is in comparison. Yet His tender love and mercy for each one of us catapults our seeming pathetic insignificance to a level of royalty. Consider the following verses, which particularly speak to me:

Verses 3-5:

"Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things..."

Verses 8-9:

"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever."

Whenever I feel down, I can count on these promises, comforted by God's love for me — a love that extends as high as the heavens above the earth. How can I possibly stay down for long after hearing these words?

Rose Johnson



WEEK FOUR: **BEAUTY**

JULY 30

Psalm 95

My first glimpse of Arizona was from a plane window as I made my way to the West coast with a very brief layover in Phoenix. All I saw on that day was a sea of brown. It would be another 10 years before I actually set foot on the Sonoran Desert floor. The beauty of the desert in April overwhelmed my senses. Standing majestically, towering above the blooming prickly pear and vivid wild flowers of the desert stood the mighty saguaro.

As much as I dread the approaching heat of summer, I always look forward to the end of spring and how beautifully God ornaments the saguaro with a crown of flowers, as if they needed just one more mark of God's fingerprint. The majestic saguaro is a daily reminder for me of God's creation and his presence! How unique and regal all at the same time. As grand as the saguaro is, I also take note of its humble stance; arms lifted in continuous praise to God!

Psalm 95 reminds us that we are to be in daily praise of God. We do not need to wait until Sunday morning. Each day is a day of praise and wonder; of taking note that God is present with us today and every day! Just as the saguaro raises its arms in praise, I too can delight in God's creation and presence.

Sara Perrine



WEEK FOUR: **BEAUTY**

JULY 31

Psalms 19

Beauty will save the world.

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky

The promises of “what’s next” has captured my imagination since I was little. Even now I find myself daydreaming, eagerly awaiting the next technological development to come by and fulfill my desire to make my life easier or more entertaining. I know I’m not the only one - stocks rise and fall based upon predictions about the future. Calendars get filled with vacations, work trips, and other events we look forward to that give us hope for “what’s next.” The only problem with all this? It never ends. I’ve never been on a vacation that was so good that I never needed another vacation ever again. I’ve never had a new phone that has been a “forever” replacement of my old one. As good as things may be for a period of time, it all ages and becomes a part of the past while we look expectantly toward the future.

“Beauty will save the world” is a brilliant observation from the great Christian writer Dostoyevsky. Beauty will save the world, not because it wears a cape and can lift heavy things. Beauty will save the world, not because it can eliminate excess carbon dioxide from our atmosphere or ensure a Phoenix Suns championship - as nice as that all may be (GO SUNS!). **The promise “beauty” brings us is that there is something beyond our own small desires.** There is something greater in our future that transcends even the greatest things we can imagine. Beauty brings us hope of a future where there need not be any “next things.”

Psalms 19 says, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*” From the beginning of all things, God invited us to experience and take care of this dangerous and terrifyingly beautiful world, and if we’re paying attention we may even find meaning in that beauty. Meaning that offers hope to a world awaiting hope.

Austin Martin



WEEK FIVE: UNLEASHED

AUGUST 3

Psalm 118

True joy is never dependent on our circumstances. Joy is a fruit of the spirit and it comes from praising God and thanking him for putting us in safe places. David glorified God by writing this psalm; “The Lord is my strength and my salvation!”

Recently, we were significantly distressed by a global virus pandemic. We were shut in, isolated, and paranoid about even getting out of our houses and being physically close to our friends. Thank God we had audio and visual technology to keep us connected both at home and through our church. Through the magic of electronic communication, we stayed in touch with each other, studied the Bible in Zoom Groups, and even attached jokes to our emails to keep our sense of humor.

This psalm reminds us that whenever we face adverse conditions, it is best to take refuge in God and thank him for protecting us. “The Lord is our strength and our salvation!” We need to let go of our personal pride and the thinking that we are in control. We need to let go and put our trust in the Lord. If the Lord is for us, who can be against us? What can mere mortals (or a virus) do to us? Nothing, if we exalt our God and praise only him. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love for us endures forever.

Dr. Larry Gettman



WEEK FIVE: UNLEASHED

AUGUST 4

Psalm 133

I love the movie Apollo 13. First, I appreciate that there are no bad guys in the movie. I also love the fact that it is a true story. It clearly exemplifies a story of unity and how we can accomplish incredible things when all people work together. It is one of those moments in history that reveal how much we need one another, even when we are separated by hundreds of thousands of miles.

Apollo 13 became a global obsession when a malfunction in one of the oxygen tanks caused an explosion. This would change the focus of the mission from landing on the moon to survival of the crew. The question was simple but complex, how can we save these three men and safely bring them home? Mission Control in Houston worked diligently together to find a solution as the nation prayed. It took hundreds of people working together day and night as God answered prayers.

Psalm 133 is a psalm that shares how much God delights in unity. We are reminded of John 17: 22 and 23.

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Psalm 133 illustrates unity as refreshing, soothing, and beautiful.

Sara Perrine



WEEK FIVE: UNLEASHED

AUGUST 5

Psalm 20

These are quite turbulent times in our country as racial strife has once again reared its ugly head. This struggle that has endured in our country for 400 years continues to bring pain and sorrow to our black brothers and sisters. As fractured as our society may be at this time, it pales in comparison to The Civil War when battles raged and death reigned from 1861 to 1865.

I've always loved American history. As it is with many American's, one of my heroes is Abraham Lincoln. As the war ground on, Lincoln stated the following upon receiving a gift of a Bible from a group of former slaves:

"In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to men. All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it." [Sept. 9, 1864]

King David was well aware of incredible power in trusting God. Although he was a mighty warrior, above all he put his trust in God's providence rather than his abilities. In Psalm 20, he writes:

6 Now this I know:

The Lord gives victory to his anointed.

*He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary
with the victorious power of his right hand.*

*7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*

While you may not be leading a nation through a time of war, we all face daily battles of our own. We can continue to take solace from those great men and woman of history who have put their trust in God and prevailed. The power of God continues to be available to all. We simply need to ask.

Dr. David Perrine



WEEK FIVE: UNLEASHED

AUGUST 6

Psalm 85

By the time the Psalms were written, the Israelites had amassed quite a history with the Lord. Abraham had been selected to be the “father of all nations.” Moses had been appointed to lead the chosen people out of Egypt. They entered the Promised Land He had provided. At times, the people enjoyed God’s favor. Other times, they succumbed to the beliefs and practices of the pagans around them. When they reached a place of desperation, they called on God to rescue them. It was a process that cycled through their story again and again—follow the Lord, get distracted by other teachings, stray from His Word, suffer the consequences, repent, follow the Lord.

Sound familiar? Our lives in some ways reflect a similar pattern. Things go well and we credit our own intelligence, good fortune or hard work. Before long, we have forgotten that all things come from His hands. We become proud and stray from His ways. But when troubles come, we look for a way back, humbly regretting our actions and choices, praying for Him to take us back. What is interesting about this psalm is in the beginning there is recognition that God is a good God who had shown favor, who restored, who forgave sin, who set aside wrath. The psalmist is hopeful the Lord will once again offer His blessing upon the people. The truth is, it was not that God withheld His blessing—it was the people had turned away from Him and missed the blessing. The psalm ends on a hopeful note: “The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.”

The story is told about a humble little shop on a back street. The owner had a gift for restoring things that were no longer working. Over the door was a sign: “Nothing broken beyond repair.” The Lord would like us to know that truth. No matter how we have messed up our lives, He is ready to put the pieces back together.

Mary Cartwright



WEEK SIX: UNLEASHED

AUGUST 7

Psalm 3

So you think we are living in crazy political times these days? David, king of Israel, a man after God's own heart, loved by the people, successful in numerous battles, and yet not without his flaws, finds himself in a tough situation towards the end of his reign. His son, Absalom, whom he loves, has decided to mount an insurrection against his father, King David. Absalom steals the hearts of the people and announces a takeover of the kingdom. David, fearing for his life and for the fate of the Israelite people, decides to flee the capital city, Jerusalem. Many things happen during these tumultuous times, which you can read about in 2 Samuel 15. As David flees, those loyal to David follow him out of the city, along with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant.

Rather than leveraging the powerful ark, David does the honorable thing and tells the priests to return the ark to the temple, where it belongs. Even in this time of trouble, he puts himself in God's hands and writes Psalm 3 where he says, "God is our shield and He will answer our call for help."

What makes this all the more a powerful is the fact that David brought this on himself. After his fling with Bathsheba and his arranged death of her husband Uriah and the death of the son produced by their affair, the prophet Nathan proclaims the word of the Lord to David, "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you," (2 Samuel 12:11). This prophecy must have haunted David during the years after his illicit deeds. Yet, as he continued to grow in his relationship with God, David realized that only in God could he find hope to bring him through the tough times of life.

As we read David's psalms, we see a man who gives glory to God for the good things in life and trusts in God during the hard times. Psalm 3 is a great example of the latter.

Jim Langdal

