



Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action
in the community of Cornton

Through the Bible

Exodus
Nehemiah
2Chronicles Luke
Acts 2Timothy 2Peter
Zephaniah
Ecclesiastes
1Timothy Joshua
Psalms James
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Malachi
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3John
Jude
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Philippians
1John
Proverbs
Esther
Obadiah

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We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. (v.1)

The older we get the more we start to speak of the ‘good old days’. It’s funny to listen to people sometimes as they recall how great things were in days gone by when we know fine they had their ups and downs then too. And yet there is something good and soothing about looking back. As we look back we do tend to remember the highlights and forget the low moments. And as we remember the highlights we are reminded often of God’s presence and power at work in our midst.

That’s true for the psalmist and his people here in Psalm 44. They are in the middle of a difficult situation and it would appear they need help. As they begin they remember God’s deliverance in the past. The psalmist recalls hearing with his own ears the stories of how God had helped in days long ago and he describes how God had driven out other nations and planted the nation of Israel. When Jewish people reviewed their history, they reviewed one miracle after another: the deliverance from Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, the path through the wilderness, victories over great armies, the opening of the Jordan River and the conquering of the Holy Land. What a history!

It is good for us to open our bibles and read of God’s deliverance in the past for it will remind us in the dark moments that he can do it again. We have good old days to look back on too where we see God’s hand at work. We take encouragement from those times and are ready to face the current situation with hope because God is *‘able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us’* (Ephesians 3:20). All we need do is ask for his help and trust in his continued faithfulness. That’s what the Psalmist does in verse 26.

Pray: asking God for help in a difficult situation you find yourself in.

Reflect: how has God worked in power in my life in the past? Praise Him for that.

My tongue is the pen of a skilful writer. (v.1)

We often wish we had the skills of a Billy Graham or the dedication of a Hudson Taylor or simply the ability to share our faith with others. Many of us find it difficult. And many of us think we need to have more before we can say or do anything. The truth is we all have tongues. And with our tongues we can speak of God to others. We don't need to be great orators. We can simply share what is on our heart and what God has done in our lives. That's what the Psalmist does here.

He speaks of God's blessing, of His riding forth in majesty to bring forth victory, of His throne lasting forever, and of His righteousness. He wants others to know how great His God is. And so he says that his tongue is like the pen of a skilled writer. With his tongue he speaks of who God is and what God has done. Wesley got that right in his great hymn 'O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise.' We can sing of God's greatness too and we can do it with the one tongue we have.

A man from Chicago was blind and had neither arms nor legs. But like the psalmist, his heart was overflowing with God's love, and his tongue was fully dedicated for His use. This man learned to read the Braille Bible using his tongue! As a result of this painstaking accomplishment, he was able to use his tongue in a different way - to teach the Word of God and to share his radiant testimony.

Joni Eareckson Tada, another believer with physical disabilities, has spoken to millions about Christ. She often affirms, "With God, less is more."

We too can be like them. We have Christ's love in our heart, we know His grace and mercy in our lives, and we know the joy of living for Him day by day. Let's use our tongue then to speak of that to others around us.

Pray: that your tongue would be the pen of a skilful writer.

Reflect: who can I speak to today about God's love and goodness?

Be still, and know that I am God. (v.10)

A gifted and active Christian woman was stricken with an illness that confined her to bed. On her wall hung a motto, Be Strong - and Work for the Lord, based on 1 Chronicles 28:20. But those words, which used to bring her encouragement and strength, now brought only distress.

A friend recognised her troubled state of mind and read the last part of Numbers 9 to her. She pointed out that during Israel's wilderness wanderings, they rested whenever the guiding cloud remained over the tabernacle. But when the cloud moved on, they journeyed forward.

The friend then said that there are times when God expects us to move ahead in our work for Him. At other times He expects us to rest. To emphasise her point, she walked over to the wall, took down the first motto, and replaced it with a new one: Be Still, and Know That I Am God (Psalm 46:10).

So often in life we like to be "hands on" people. We like to do it all ourselves. Even in the Christian life we try and do things in our strength and in our own way and in our own time. The psalmist recognises that here which is why he says '*be still and know that I am God.*' Sometimes in the midst of our striving we need simply to stop and look to God. He will allow us to rest and he will take over.

Sometimes in the rush of doing everything we forget about God and our eyes are taken from him. Which is why the psalmist says '*be still and know that I am God.*' In those still moments we will draw closer to God and receive the rest and reassurance we need that he is '*our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.*'

Pray: thanking God for his presence with me always.

Reflect: do I take time daily to simply be still and know that God is with me?

For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (v.7)

On the left side of the aisle three people sat stiffly in the pew; on the right side sat a man in a wheelchair. When the congregation stood to sing, the man on the right had someone help him stand. The three on the left had their arms folded; the man on the right strained to lift his weak arms toward heaven. As the music swelled to a crescendo, the man on the right closed his eyes and struggled to make his mouth form the words of the familiar song; the three on the left stared straight ahead, their lips sealed.

Obviously I do not know the hearts of anyone in this story, but when I heard it, I knew I had to examine my own. How many times in worship do I not give my all in praise and adoration? And how often in worship do I look at what others do and criticise them. I criticise them for clapping their hands not in time with the music or for raising their hands or for dancing on the spot. And yet that has nothing to do with me. I ought to be concentrating on my own worship of God.

The psalmist reminds us here in Psalm 47 that we are to worship God with all we have. He tells us to clap our hands and to shout to God with cries of joy. He urges us to sing praises to God our King. He calls for us to remember how awesome and mighty our God is. Remember David in 2 Samuel 6:22 said '*I will become even more undignified than this.*' He was talking of worshipping God with all he had and in any way he could.

The psalmist urges us to consider God as we praise. I don't know about you but sometimes I am guilty of simply singing the words because I know them so well without thinking about what I am singing. God deserves our everything in praise and worship. The next time we worship God at home or in church, let's forget about everyone else and let's simply focus on God. Let's look at the words we are singing and remember how great our God is. And as we remember that all we will want to do is sing praises to him.

Pray: praising God for being awesome and mighty.

Reflect: do I consider seriously the words I sing in praise to God?

For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our Guide even to the end. (v.14)

In 1956, five young missionaries were speared to death by the Auca Indians as they sought to take the gospel to that primitive tribe. One of those men was Roger Youderian. His wife, Barbara, wrote in her journal, “Tonight the Captain told us of his finding four bodies in the river. One had tee-shirt and blue-jeans. Roj was the only one who wore them.... God gave me this verse two days ago, Psalm 48:14, ‘*For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our Guide even to the end.*’ As I came face to face with the news of Roj’s death, my heart was filled with praise. He was worthy of his homegoing. Help me, Lord, to be both mummy and daddy. ‘To know wisdom and instruction...’”

This psalm teaches us that the history and destiny of God’s people is inextricably linked with God Himself. Knowing that this God is our God gives us a sense of peace when we’re under attack. It gives us a sense of purpose to serve His great cause of spreading His glory to every people. It gives us a sense of belonging to be a part of the city of this great King.

And we are called to share this with others. The psalmist reminds us that the Lord is great and most worthy of praise. He recalls how God is our fortress. He meditates on God’s unfailing love and he proclaims that God is our God for ever and ever. He is our God. He owns us. He purchased us. He made us. He lives in us. He is our God forever and ever. The thought overwhelms me! We have great news to share.

But He is more than just our God - He is also our Guide. He will be our guide even unto death. He guides us in this life, so we don’t have to be afraid. He has a path for each of us to follow today. He wants to keep us off detours and help us reach the goal He has planned for us. Verse 14 applies to you and me today. He is our God and our Guide, so we don’t have to be afraid. Whatever He starts, He finishes. Look to God and follow his leading – wherever that might take you.

Pray: thanking God for his leading and guiding of your life.

Reflect: do I follow God’s leading always?

But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. (v.15)

A bored student at the University of Washington used an Internet auction site, eBay, to sell his soul to the highest bidder. As it turned out, the top offer was only \$400. Since the soul is immaterial, it can't be extracted from a body like a physical organ such as a heart. The student had to admit, "I don't think the high bidder is going to be able to collect on my soul."

That light-hearted offer calls to mind our Saviour's serious question in Matthew 16:26, '*What can a man give in exchange for his soul?*' Jesus was urging his listeners to consider the future and to realise that on judgment day all the wealth in the world will be worthless.

The Psalmist has a handle on that here in Psalm 49. He speaks of the fact that money cannot buy us a place in heaven. According to verse 8 '*no payment is ever enough*' and the ransom for a life is too costly. Indeed the only one who save our souls and save us from our sin was Jesus. He paid the price that we could not pay in order that we who trust in him could be in heaven with him for ever.

He goes on to say that money cannot beat death. Verse 12 '*but man despite his riches, does not endure.*' Whether we are rich or poor, all die. That is a fact of life. We can spend all the money we want on medicines and treatments but in the end one day we will pass away.

So the encouragement from the psalmist is not to trust in wealth but to trust in God. He is certain, verse 15, that '*God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.*' We have that certainty too when we put our trust and faith completely in Jesus. He alone can rescue. Let's not trust in our wealth, but trust in God.

Pray: thanking God for our salvation.

Reflect: do I trust my wealth more than God?

He who sacrifices thank offerings honours me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God. (v.23)

Psalm 50 brings us to a court room scene. God, the righteous judge, is calling the people before him. He wants to speak to them about their worship of him. This psalm becomes a warning for us about being heartless and hypocritical in worship. The first group of people that come before him, God refers to as my people. Their hearts are not in their worship. Their devotion is faithful but only routine. They were worshipping the Lord out of habit rather than from the heart. Outwardly they were doing what the Lord commanded and were bringing him their sacrifices but inwardly they lacked love and fellowship with God. God reminds them here that he does not actually need their sacrifices for after all he owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

And that is true for us too. All we have comes from God. And yes he calls for us to give in return but as we know from New Testament teaching he loves a cheerful giver – someone who gives willingly and gratefully. Our giving should be part of our worship. And we should not give out of duty or habit or ritual but because we want to honour God.

The second group are referred to as the wicked and the charge against them is hypocrisy. They hear God's Word and then they ignore it. They join in with those around them – stealing, committing adultery, slandering others. And then they come to church pretending all is well. They come and act very religiously in order to cover up their sins.

How often do we come to church and just go through the motions. We pretend to be good Christians but we are only "Sunday Christians" for the rest of the week we do what we want forgetting all about God. The call from this psalm is to come to worship God because we want to and not simply to make ourselves look good.

Pray: asking God to increase your love for him.

Reflect: do I truly worship or am I going through the motions?

For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. (v.3)

The elderly woman didn't like the way her pastor prayed each Sunday morning, so she told him. It bothered her that before he preached he would confess to God that he had sinned the week before. "Pastor," she said, "I don't like to think my pastor sins."

While like that lady we would like to believe our spiritual leaders don't sin the reality is, as we well know, that '*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*' (Romans 3:23). None of us is sinless. And no matter how hard we try we all still continue to sin. Now hopefully the difference is that we do not set out wilfully to sin.

David knew he had sinned. He had tried to hide his adultery with Bathsheba but it had not worked. He ended up sending her husband to the front of the battle so he would be killed. Nathan has come to confront him and following that we see David's confession here. And this is a beautiful reminder to us of the need to come and confess our sin before God, asking him to cleanse us, restore us and use us. It doesn't matter what our sin is, it still needs confessed before God. In 1 John 1:9 we are reminded that '*if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*'

I wonder how many times in life we try to cover up our sin, or try and argue it away. We try and play down our sin by calling it something else. David doesn't even argue the case here. He doesn't try and call it something else or hide it away. He comes and says in verse 2 '*cleanse me from my sin.*'

Friends, we all sin. The lesson here is not to cover it up or call it by any other name. It is to confess it before God, calling on him for his mercy and forgiveness.

Pray: confessing your sin to God, asking him to cleanse you, restore you and use you in his service.

Reflect: do I daily confess my sin before God?

I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. (v.8)

We all know the saying “he who laughs last, laughs best”. I get the sense that is what David is saying here in Psalm 52. And what he says in these few verses ought to be an encouragement to us. Life does not always run smoothly and we often see good people struck down while evil people seem to prosper. In those moments we feel like throwing in the towel or complaining. David says keep looking to God and trust in his unfailing love.

Ahimelech was a priest who assisted David. Because of that, he was considered a traitor, and Saul ordered Ahimelech and his family killed. When David heard about it, he was saddened and wrote this psalm. He speaks firstly of the sinners boasting. They think they are big shots but in reality they are nothing in God's eyes. They have sharp tongues that cause destruction and hurt, and they are prone to lie without considering the consequences. Even when they told the truth, as Dueg did about David, they did it with evil intent. Knowing their words and evil ways had ended up with Ahimelech's death, you would not blame David for being down, giving up or seeking revenge.

Instead David says I'll have the last laugh. He is confident that God will judge the evil doers for their sin. David describes the righteous Judge (v. 5-7). God will break down this evil man and uproot him from the land of the living. Those who depend on themselves will one day be uprooted and destroyed. David trusts in God's justice. He knows he might not see it immediately but he is happy to leave that to God.

And David finishes by reminding us that faithful servants of God will be fruitful and victorious. He likens himself to an olive tree that he sees standing outside. An olive tree lives for many years and keeps bearing much fruit. David finishes by praising God knowing he can trust in his unfailing love. Evil may seem to triumph but God has the last laugh.

Pray: thanking God for his unfailing love.

Reflect: do I continue to obey and serve God despite discouragement?

The fool says in his heart "There is no God". (v.1)

Have you ever wondered why some people try to disprove the existence of God? When you think about it, their very efforts undermine their own arguments. When C. S. Lewis was an atheist, he rejected the idea of a divine Being because of all the injustice in the world. But when he asked himself where he got the idea of justice in the first place, he had a problem. He wrote, "Man doesn't call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"

Lewis realised that injustice in the world pointed to the One who set the standard of justice. He saw that his case for atheism was too simple, and eventually he became a believer. The truth is many say in their heart 'There is no God' but they haven't thought it through properly. The challenge for us is to encourage them to look at the facts and to think it through. For only when they think it through will they understand and seek God.

Here is Psalm 53 we see eight reasons why the atheist is a fool. Firstly he does not acknowledge God (v.1) which then leads him not to obey God (v.1). The fool doesn't understand God (v.2) because his eyes are blind. The fool does not seek God (v.2). No one by himself seeks God and comes to know Him. God invites us to seek Him, and He has mercy on us. He does not follow God's way (v.3). The fool does not call on God (v.4). Such people are mercenary and do not treat others right. He does not fear God (v.5). The day will come when the fool will be afraid. He lives with a false confidence and one day will face judgment. He does not hope in God (v.6). The person who leaves God out of his life has no future.

Let us not be fools and let us seek to share with those around that they may understand and seek God.

Pray: thanking God for our understanding of Him and for our salvation.

Reflect: do I live as a fool, pretending there is no God?

For he has delivered me from all my troubles. (v.7)

The story goes that a big storm was on the horizon, and the police cars went through the small farming community to warn the citizens to head for high ground. Farmer Bill heard the warning, but decided that he was just going to stay put and trust God. When the rain began to fall, and the water began to rise, the firemen came by in a boat, offering to evacuate Farmer Bill, but he said, “No, I’m going to stay put and trust God.” Finally, as Bill had to climb out onto his roof to get away from the raging flood, a helicopter came by offering assistance, but Farmer Bill stayed put. When Bill got to heaven, he was kind of ticked off at God. He said to God, “How come you didn’t rescue me from the flood when I trusted you!” God gently replied, “Bill, I sent a police car, a rescue boat, and a helicopter. What did you expect?”

God promises to give us a way of escape from every temptation, but we have to take it. God will deliver us when we trust in him, but sometimes that means we need to take a step of faith to allow that to happen.

David knew what it was to be in fear of his life and yet to trust God. Here in Psalm 54 we see him praying to God to save him. He is worried that the people around him will attack him. This Psalm was written around the time of the events in 1 Samuel 23. David is on the run from Saul and he hides out in Ziph. The people there expose him and as Saul closes in David is fearful. And as he calls to God to save him, God acts. News comes to Saul of an attack by the Philistines and he turns to go and deal with that. This gives David the window of opportunity to escape. And he takes that get out. He moves on from there.

God will rescue us in many different ways from the struggles around us. We have to keep our eyes open and be ready to act in faith when the opportunity comes.

Pray: asking God for strength to resist temptation.

Reflect: do I trust God fully and put my faith into action?

Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you. (v.22)

There was a man who was bearing the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. His name is Dr. George McCauslin, the director of a YMCA near Pittsburgh. And in that western Pennsylvania YMCA that was losing membership, that had financial difficulties and terrible staff problems, George McCauslin found himself working 85 hours a week. He found himself getting little sleep at night. He took little time off. And when he was off, he was worrying and fretting about the problems of this YMCA.

He went to a therapist who told him he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He had to learn somehow to let go and somehow to let God into his problems. He didn't know quite how to do that. So George McCauslin took an afternoon off, took a pad and paper, and took a walk in the western Pennsylvania woods. As he walked through the cool woods, he could just feel his tight body and his tight neck start to relax. He sat down under a tree and sighed. For the first time in months he relaxed.

He got out his pad and paper, and he decided that he would let them go, the burdens of his life. He wrote God a letter. He said, "Dear God, today I hereby resign as general manager of the universe. Love, George." Then with a twinkle in his eye that is so characteristic of George McCauslin, he said, "And wonder of wonders, God accepted my resignation."

The cares and concerns of life tend to stick to us like superglue; but we don't need to carry them alone. Maybe its time we realised, like the Psalmist and like McCauslin, that we can take them all to the LORD and leave them with him. Don't let the cares and concerns weigh you down, turn them over to the LORD who is more than able to help you and sustain you. As Peter says '*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.*' (1 Peter 5:7)

Pray: casting your cares on the LORD and asking him to help you and sustain you.

Reflect: do I keep my cares to myself or do I entrust them to God?

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. (v.3)

A little boy was afraid of the dark. One night his mother told him to go out to the back porch and bring her the broom. The little boy turned to his mother and said, “Mummy, I don’t want to go out there. It’s dark.” The mother smiled reassuringly at her son. “You don’t have to be afraid of the dark,” she explained. “Jesus is out there. He’ll look after you and protect you.” The little boy looked at his mother real hard and asked, “Are you sure he’s out there?” “Yes, I’m sure. He is everywhere, and he is always ready to help you when you need him,” she said. The little boy thought about that for a minute and then went to the back door and cracked it a little. Peering out into the darkness, he called, “Jesus? If you’re out there, would you please hand me the broom?”

We all have fears. Every single one of us. Some of us have some pretty good reasons to be afraid. Perhaps we’re facing an illness, loss of a job, or a broken relationship. Others of us face more subtle things like the fear that we don’t look attractive, the fear that we’re not good enough, or the fear that we’re going to fail again.

David is afraid, which is why he writes this Psalm. He fears for his life. David has lots of enemies right now and not many friends. King Saul is after him. And now that he’s in Gath, he’s found out the Philistines aren’t exactly in love with him either. David was a man who was afraid, but he was also a man learning to trust God in the middle of his fears. There are two things he does here: this first is pray. He asks God to be merciful to him and to protect him and save him. And then he trusts. He trusts in God’s Word (v.4). He trusts in the promises of God contained within that word. He stands on God’s Word.

As we read God’s Word we come across countless promises of God that have already been kept and countless promises that we can stand on for God will keep them in our lives. We need not be afraid, we can trust in God – go to him in prayer and then stand on the truths of His Word.

Pray: asking God to stand with you in this moment of fear.

Reflect: do I stand on the promises of His Word?

I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. (v.1)

Last spring we enjoyed a break in Northumberland. We were out in the country in a little hamlet and went walking one day. As we walked through a field we noticed sheep and their lambs. The lambs were bouncing around happily until they saw us coming and then they scurried straight to their mother's side. The mother then walked so she was between her little lambs and us so that she could protect them if need be. We walked on past admiring the little lambs and after we had passed we looked back to see the lambs come out from behind mum and start bouncing around again.

What a wonderful picture of God. And as I read this Psalm I recalled those lambs and that sheep and saw in that the picture the Psalmist speaks of. He is crying out for God's help and mercy. David wrote Psalm 57 while fleeing from King Saul, who had hatred in his heart for the former shepherd boy. David ducked into a cave and barely escaped his pursuer. He was safe temporarily, but the threat was still there. In that moment God came to him and sheltered him. He was safe in the shadow of God's wings.

God does not always remove the difficulty in our lives, but He is present to help us. We wish that He would swoop in and whisk us to safety - just as David may have wished for a quick end to Saul's pursuit. We plead with God to stop the pain and make the road to tomorrow smooth and straight. We beg Him to eliminate our struggle. But the difficulty remains. It is then that we have to take refuge in God as David did. While hiding in that cave, he said, '*I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.*' (Psalm 57:1).

Are you in the middle of a struggle or some trouble? Then run to the Father and take refuge in the Most High God. He will shelter you and remind you of his love and faithfulness.

Pray: asking God to shelter you from the storm that is in your life currently.

Reflect: do I run to the Father in times of trouble?

Surely there is a God who judges the earth. (v.11)

A recently divorced woman is walking along the beach contemplating how badly treated she got in the divorce settlement, when she spies a magic lamp washing up onshore. She rubs the lamp, and out pops a magical genie. The genie notices her anger and lets her vent her troubles to him. As a consolation, the genie informs her that he will give her three wishes. But he cautions her that because he does not believe in divorce, he will give her ex-husband ten times the amount of whatever she wishes. The woman is steaming mad, thinking that this is hardly fair, but she makes her first wish. The first wish was for a million pounds. The genie grants her wish and she finds herself sitting in pile of one million pounds. The genie then reminds her that her husband is now the recipient of 10 million pounds. The woman can barely contain her anger when she makes her second wish. The second wish was for a beautiful mansion on the shore of her own private beach. In an instant it was granted, but the genie then reminds again that her ex-husband now owns ten of what she wished for, and points out to a small development of ten such mansions down the beach. Upon hearing this, the woman takes her time to contemplate her last wish. Just as the genie was about to give up on her, the woman informs the genie that she wants to make the last wish. But before she can do this, the genie again warns her that her ex-husband will get ten times what she wishes for. “No problem,” said the woman as she grinned in ecstasy. “For my last wish, I’d like to give birth to twins.”

There are times in life when we struggle with the injustice around us. We want to mete out justice and do not always judge rightly. It is in those moments we have to learn to be like the Psalmist and hand matters over to God. God rules justly and acts with righteousness. David prays that those who do evil and ignore God will be dealt with properly. Judgement is not ours to deal with, it is God’s. Let’s praise him for his justice but remember his great mercy as well.

Pray: Asking God to help us stop judging others.

Reflect: do I judge others or do I hand it over to God?

O my strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God. (v.9)

After a man shot and killed two people at Los Angeles International Airport in 2002, some began insisting that armed guards be placed at every check-in area. Others said that individuals should be screened before entering an airport terminal. But a consultant on airport security said, “If you move the checkpoint, all you’re going to do is push the problem to another part of the airport. There will always be a public area that is vulnerable to these kinds of attacks.”

In a world where violence and terrorism may strike anytime, anyplace, where can we find security? Where can we be safe?

The psalmist tells us the answer: God is our strength and fortress and our refuge in times of trouble (v.16). Saul was trying to kill David. He had tried it himself and now he had others on the look out for him and had given orders that David be killed. David is in fear of his life. And in fear for his life he prays to God. He asks God to deliver him and protect him. He has already witnessed God’s protection and deliverance and he is confident God will do it again. That’s why there is a statement of faith here in verse 9 then 17. David is completely dependent on God. He trusts him fully.

When troubled times come in our lives what do we do. Are we as quick to turn to God? Or is God more of a last resort? David’s first thought was to trust God and ask for his help and yet often prayer is the last thing we do. Let David be an encouragement to us today. And when trouble comes let us remember that God is our refuge and strength; He is our fortress and he will shelter us and protect us.

Pray: Asking God for the faith to trust him at all times.

Reflect: do I turn to God in prayer first or is it more of a last resort?

*With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.
(v.12)*

At the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, Norwegian Bjorn Dahlie proved once again he was a champion. He won the 10,000-kilometre cross-country skiing event, giving him his sixth lifetime gold medal. When he crossed the finish line, Dahlie didn't rush away to a victory celebration. He waited there for another competitor, the man struggling last in the 92-man field: Philip Boit of Kenya.

Philip had first laid his eyes on snow only two years before. Trained by a Finnish coach, he had accumulated enough points in competition to be invited to represent his country in the Winter Game - a first for this African nation.

Philip lagged behind the victor by nearly a half-hour. Bjorn waited patiently at the finish line, and finally Philip struggled into view. The few remaining spectators began to cheer him on. As Philip crossed the finish line, Bjorn the champion took him by the shoulders. His tight squeeze conveyed his respect and admiration for this one who was determined to finish.

The psalmist is determined to keep going, looking forward to the victory that would come through God. In the opening verses we see him struggling with defeat. They have felt rejected by God and overcome. Yet in the middle section they turn to God in prayer asking for him to save them. And as they turn in prayer it would appear he has remembered a promise of God and this gives him the confidence to declare that God will give them the victory. Trusting in God's Word has resulted in the psalmist moving from defeat, discouragement and despair to hope and victory. May we trust in God's Word too for ultimately Christ has won the victory as well. Let's fight on through to the end.

Pray: Thanking God for victory in Christ.

Reflect: when I am discouraged do I read and trust in God's Word?

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. (v.1)

David is discouraged and weak. He is overwhelmed and his heart grows faint. It appears he is facing another battle. Scholars suggest this Psalm was written as he was fleeing from his own son Absalom. I think we all we face times when life just gets to us and our hearts grow weary and faint. Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Fits of depression come over most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron, but surely the rust frets even these.”

What do you do in such times? Where do you turn in that moment? Who do you look to? David got it right...when his heart grew faint he turned in prayer to God. And prayer led him from being overwhelmed to being filled with praise for God. What a privilege prayer is. David cries out to God and pleads with Him to hear his prayer. Prayer isn't your last resort, it's your best resort. Mathew Henry wrote, “Weeping must quicken praying, and not deaden it.”

David was a man of prayer. All through the various stages of his life, you see David “enquiring” of the Lord, asking God for direction, seeking God's face. The Psalms themselves are mostly songs of prayer. Jesus was a man of prayer. He prayed at the beginning of His ministry. He prayed as he chose 12 disciples. In His greatest time of difficulty, when His heart was overwhelmed in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed.

As David prays here he looks up to God asking that he be led to the rock that his higher than I. As he prays he looks back and remembers God's presence and protection as he declares God has is refuge and strong tower. And he also looks forward in prayer - David is looking to God's mercy and truth for protection. Next time you are feeling overwhelmed turn to God in prayer – it is our best resort.

Pray: asking God to help move you from despondency to praise.

Reflect: what is troubling you just now? Turn it over to God in prayer.

He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. (v.2)

Over a century ago an ocean liner sank off the southwest coast of England, taking many people down with it. A 16-year-old galley boy, who was tossed up along the rugged shore, survived by clinging to a rock all night long. When he was finally rescued, he was asked, “Didn’t you shake as you were clinging all night to that rock?” The boy replied, “Yes, of course. But the rock never shook once.”

David understood this. The Israelites knew this. They learned from their experiences in the desert that rocks were more than masses of stone. A rock could serve as shelter from a sudden storm. It could provide a cool shadow from oppressive heat. It was a stronghold and a place of safety from enemies. And those rocks they sheltered behind were never shaken or moved.

That’s why David then likens God to a rock. He protects us and he provides for us. Many times throughout his life, David faced powerful enemies who wanted him to fall (v.3-4). At such times, he turned to the only possible source of hope - God. Notice how many images David used in order to convey his confidence in God. God was his rock, his salvation, his fortress, and his refuge (v.6–7).

By describing God as a rock, David used another metaphor to describe God’s strength and solidity. Rocks in ancient Israel often provided hiding places, or refuge, in the harsh wilderness. We know that David was forced to flee to the desert more than once in his life. So, again drawing upon his own experience, David knew that the greatest possible refuge was none other than God Himself. No wonder he urged the people to ‘*Trust in him at all times*’ (v.8).

Pray: thanking God for being your rock and salvation.

Reflect: do I trust in God at all times?

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. (v.3)

The superscription to this psalm tells us that David is in the wilderness. This was most likely during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15:23). However, he didn't look back in regret at the mistakes he had made as a father, nor did he look around in fear or complaint at the discomforts and dangers of the wilderness. Instead, he looked up to the Lord and reaffirmed his faith and love. In an hour when he might have been discouraged, he was excited about God, and in a place where there was no sanctuary, David reached out by faith and received new strength from the Lord.

He sought after God and remembered his power and glory. He recalled God's love and the word used there is that wonderful Old Testament word 'hesed' which speaks of God's loving kindness – that faithful, kind and good love. He remembers God's help and protection. He has decided that he will praise God despite the circumstances of life around him.

Charles Spurgeon offered this counsel for those facing overwhelming circumstances: "Plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead."

Spurgeon knew what David knew. That no matter what we are facing, if we turn our eyes on to God we will get so lost in Him and all His wonderful attributes that we will forget the struggles we face. David could praise God in the wilderness based on God's love, not his circumstances. Measure God's loving kindness in your life. Is it worth more than life to you? If not, perhaps you need to take some more time to look at God's love for you.

Pray: thanking God that His love is better than life.

Reflect: how great is God's loving kindness in my life?

Surely the mind and heart of man are cunning. (v.6)

An avid duck hunter was in the market for a new bird dog. His search ended when he found a dog that could actually walk on water to retrieve a duck. Shocked by his find, he was sure none of his friends would ever believe him. He decided to try to break the news to a friend of his, the eternal pessimist who refused to be impressed with anything. This, surely, would impress him. He invited him to hunt with him and his new dog.

As they waited by the shore, a flock of ducks flew by. They fired, and a duck fell. The dog responded and jumped into the water. The dog, however, did not sink but instead walked across the water to retrieve the bird, never getting more than his paws wet. This continued all day long; each time a duck fell, the dog walked across the surface of the water to retrieve it. The pessimist watched carefully, saw everything, but did not say a single word.

On the drive home the hunter asked his friend, “Did you notice anything unusual about my new dog?” “I sure did,” responded the pessimist. “He can’t swim.”

Some people are always looking for something wrong. Indeed the mind and heart of humanity is often wrong. David called out for the Lord’s protection in this psalm because he recognised people’s evil and wrong intentions. He saw that their tongues were sharp ready to cut someone down with their words. David knew that the heart was cunning and that there were always new dangers to avoid, so he constantly sought the Lord’s wisdom as he made decisions.

Not only did David seek the Lord in prayer but he trusted in the Lord for victory. He knew that God would deal with the wicked and uphold the righteous.

Pray: asking God to protect us from the wicked ways of the world.

Reflect: do I constantly seek the Lord’s wisdom in making decisions?

O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come. (v.2)

‘Letters to God’ is a film about a young boy fighting cancer who writes letters to God, touching lives in his neighbourhood and community and inspiring hope among everyone he comes in contact with. An unsuspecting substitute postman, with a troubled life of his own, becomes entangled in the boy’s journey and his family by reading the letters. They inspire him to seek a better life for himself and his own son he’s lost through his alcohol addiction. To Tyler, God is a friend, a teacher and the ultimate pen pal – Tyler’s prayers take the form of letters, which he composes and mails on a daily basis. He wants to share with God in prayer all that is going on in his life and he is confident God receives these and answers his prayers.

The Psalmist is one who trusts in God as well, and believes that God hears and answers his prayers. Here in Psalm 65 he speaks of praise awaiting God for answered prayer. And there is an important lesson for us in this: how often do we go back and praise and thank God for answered prayer? The answer is probably not as often as we should. When someone does something for us in life we tend to thank them – with words or even with gifts. The Psalmist lifts his praise to God for answered prayer.

As the Psalm continues we see that God has answered the prayers of the Psalmist and the children of Israel. Firstly and most importantly he has forgiven their sin and redeemed their lives. And the same is true in our lives – the greatest thing God has done for us is in rescuing us from our sin through the substitutionary death of his son on the cross.

More than that though, the Psalmist recognises that God has blessed them abundantly and richly in so many ways. He has crowned the year with his bounty (v.11) God blesses us richly. Let’s remember to pray because he answers and let’s remember to praise him for answered prayer and for his many blessings.

Pray: thanking God for answered prayer.

Reflect: what prayers have been answered this week? Thank God for hearing you and responding.

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (v.18)

As I type up this devotional we have just gone through the process of changing internet provider and it has caused all kinds of issues with our email. I found myself today typing an email and then hitting the send button on my computer. As I hit the send button I worried ‘will my email get to its destination?’ On top of that some people worry ‘will someone be there to receive it?’ or ‘will I get a response?’ Fortunately after some minor changes I managed to get my email up and working and the recipient duly received my email and responded.

You may have had those same questions in another realm of communication - prayer. But there are some important differences. For my e-mail to arrive, my equipment and my programs must function correctly. Prayer, on the other hand, is just me talking to God, with no chance of a glitch. If I haven’t clogged the lines with sin, my prayers will always be heard (Psalm 66:18; 3:4). And when I do sin, God is always waiting to forgive me (1 John 1:9). The Psalmist recognises that sin can be a barrier to prayer and we ought to recognise that too. That is why when we come to pray one of the first things we should do is confess our sin – even asking God to reveal any sin in our lives that we may have skipped over or not realised or remembered.

With e-mail, my message could sit unread for days. Not so with prayer. God is always there (Psalm 6:9). And although I may never get a response to some e-mail messages, with God the answers will always come (Psalm 86:7; 91:15).

So don’t worry if you don’t even know what e-mail is. Prayer is indescribably better. It’s our direct line of intimate communication with the Creator.

Pray: thanking God for the gift of prayer.

Reflect: are there any barriers to my prayer life?

May God be gracious to us and bless us...that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. (v.1-2)

In this Psalm the psalmist is asking for God to bless his people. And we would all nod our heads and say oh yes we would love God to bless us. But the psalmist is not asking for God to bless them for any selfish reason. Note that the Psalmist is not saying: “Bless me so that I can be comfortable.” He is not saying: “Bless me so that I don’t have to work hard to make a living.” He is not saying: “Bless me so that others will be envious of me.” He is not saying, “Bless me so that I can be successful in the eyes of the world.” He is not even primarily saying, “Bless me so that I can bless others.”

This last is a biblical reason for God’s blessing, as He makes explicit in His call to Abraham (Genesis 12). By all means, God blesses us and gifts us so that we might serve and bless others. But still, this is not the underlying, fundamental reason for God’s blessing. God blesses us first and foremost so that we can bring glory to His name.

And that is what the psalmist prays for here. He prays that God would be gracious to them and bless them in order that God’s ways would be made known. He longs for all people and all nations to praise God and sing praise to His name. The Psalm begins by asking that God will bless us, and ends by underlining that He will indeed bless - in part through an abundant harvest of food - then concludes by once again giving the reason for the blessing: that all the ends of the earth will fear Him, revere Him, hold Him in awe.

So this Psalm begins and ends with the statement that God’s blessings lead to His glory. That is the reason God blesses us. Let us pray for God’s blessing too, in order that God would be glorified and honoured in our midst.

Pray: that all people would come to praise the Lord.

Reflect: do I speak of my faith to others?

*Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.
(v.19)*

Perhaps you've heard the phrase 'One day at a time'. You may have seen it on car sticker, fridge magnet or plaque. If your of a certain age you may remember Lena Martell sang a song with that title and it had a line which said 'One day at a time sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking of you. Give me the strength to do everything that I have to do.' The slogan is often used by recovering alcoholics as a reminder that a person doesn't have to stay sober forever - just for today. A month, or even a week, without alcohol may seem impossible for them. But the key to success is to trust God for the strength to say no to a drink today.

And that theme of one day at a time runs through Scripture. The Israelites received from God manna each morning while the wandered through the wilderness for forty years (Exodus 16:4). We learn that God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). Jesus taught His followers to ask for their 'daily bread' (Matthew 6:11) and to refuse to worry about tomorrow (v.34).

And yet we struggle with that greatly don't we. When we face a situation that seems overwhelming, we may drift toward hopelessness or despair, wondering how we'll be able to see it through to the end. The secret is to look to God daily. The Psalmist knew what it was to take one day at a time. And as he looked to God he found comfort and encouragement and hope. In verse 19 of this Psalm he recalls that God daily bears our burdens. God is with us each day giving us the strength to deal with what comes our way. Nothing takes him by surprise. Nothing catches him out.

Rest secure in that daily provision from a loving, caring God. When tomorrow seems too long to endure, God reminds us to trust Him - one day at a time.

Pray: thanking God for daily bearing our burdens.

Reflect: do I seek God's help one day at a time?

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. (v.1-2)

I remember leading a service some years ago in which one of the older gentlemen in the church was giving the children's talk. He spoke well of how he and his son were playing football and the ball ended up being kicked into the River Almond in Livingston. The river was a bit dingy and was littered with shopping trolleys and other items. His son ran straight for the water but soon realised it would be too deep and it was too dark. So Andy waded in thinking it would be an easy task. He began to sink in the miry depths and almost went under before a passer by gave him a hand out. Andy likened this to us being overwhelmed by our sin and crying out to God for help. And God reached out to lift us up. The reason I remember the story so well is I had chosen the next hymn not knowing what Andy would say – 'I was sinking deep in sin'!

The Psalmist is in similar circumstances. He feels the pressure of life and is overwhelmed by his enemies. He feels he is sinking and that the water is up to his neck. He looks around and sees the miry depths and the floods that engulf him. He is sinking. And in that moment he cries out to God to rescue him. The first half of the Psalm sees his distress and his repeated cries to be saved.

The Psalm ends with praise to God. The Psalmist is confident God will hear him and answer him. And we can have that same confidence too. God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He hears our cries for mercy and help and he reaches down. Next time you feel like you are sinking, cry out to God. Look up and take his hand of mercy.

Love lifted me! Love lifted me! When no one but Christ could help, love lifted me!

Pray: thanking God his hand of mercy.

Reflect: recall a time when God heard your cry and reached down to lift you up. Now praise Him for that and take confidence He can do it again.

Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. (v.1)

A man rushed into the doctor's office and shouted, "Doctor! I think I'm shrinking!!" The doctor calmly responded, "Now, settle down. You'll just have to be a little patient."

I don't know about you but I'm not great at waiting. My patience wears thin and I get a little upset and grumpy. And yet so often in life we have to wait. Waiting at the dentists or doctors has to be the worst. I understand why they call it a "waiting room" at the doctor's surgery since sometimes you can spend a lot of time "waiting". I wonder why you are called a "patient" though. I don't usually feel patient when I'm waiting for the doctor - usually impatient.

We don't like to wait in a queue at the supermarket, or wait on the traffic lights as we sit idly in our car, or wait for someone coming he seems to be taking there time. We get impatient. David, the Psalmist seems a little impatient here in Psalm 70. He doesn't like waiting. He has called on God to save him and then in his next breath he says hurry up. It seems David is feeling the pressure of his enemies trying to capture him and kill him. He cries out for God to save him and then he says get on with it quickly.

What we need to understand though is that God's timing is not ours. God is never in a hurry and He's never late. God's idea of time is a bit different than ours. Sometimes the idea of what we think we need isn't quite right, and it's going to take some time for God to tweak it until we get it right. Sometimes we aren't ready to receive the answer. Sometimes the refining work that the trial is causing isn't finished. Sometimes the people affected by our situation aren't ready for the change. Sometimes we need to slow down and wait.

I'm not sure David gets that patient here. He trusts that God is his help and deliverer and yet he keeps asking God to come quickly and not delay. Let's learn to trust God and wait on him for his timing is perfect.

Pray: asking God to help you wait on Him.

Reflect: how can I learn to be still and know that God is in control?

Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. (v.9)

You know you're getting older when...

most of your dreams are reruns,
the airline attendant offers you coffee, tea, or Milk of Magnesia,
you sit down in a rocking chair and you can't get it started.
your mind makes commitments your body can't keep,
the little grey-haired lady you help across the street is your wife,
hurts, and what doesn't hurt doesn't work,
you sink your teeth into a juicy steak and they stay there,
you watch a pretty girl go by and your pacemaker makes the garage
door open.

The psalmist here is feeling his age. He is probably past middle age and was greatly concerned about the burdens of old age. He wanted to end well. And so he prays firstly for the Lord's help in the present. He asks that the Lord rescue him and deliver him so that he might remain true to the faith and not be ashamed.

He then remembers the past. He recalls how he has trusted in the Lord since his youth and the Lord has never disappointed. His hope and confidence remain in God. When you are discouraged and worried, look back and count your blessings – see what God has done in days gone by. For what He has done in the past He can and will do again.

And then he looks ahead and declares that he will always have hope because he trusts in God. If we trust God, then the trials of life will work for us and not against us and will lead to glory.

When we feel discouraged because of age and failings, let us look to God for help. Let's remember His help in days gone by and let's move forward in faith knowing he will continue to lead us home.

Pray: asking God for strength to face the day ahead.

Reflect: look back and count your blessings; then praise God.

Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous deeds. (v.18)

In 1825 a wealthy Scottish industrialist and social reformer named Robert Owen purchased the small town of Harmony, Indiana, which had been home to a religious group from Germany called the Harmonists. Owen renamed the town New Harmony and attracted settlers with the promise of a utopian society. New Harmony became a famous experiment in community living as scientists and scholars came to study the movement. But the people eventually split into several factions, and by 1827 Owen's dream of an ideal society was gone.

At its demise New Harmony joined a long line of failed dreams and experiments by idealistic people who thought they could create their own small slice of the kingdom on earth. Many of these people looked at the world around them and reasoned that the only way values such as peace, justice, harmony, and shared wealth would ever prevail would be in self-contained communities.

The human race has been dreaming of utopia since the days of Plato and his Republic. But an ideal world requires a ruler who is perfect in wisdom, righteousness, justice, and mercy. Only one person fits the bill...Jesus. This psalm looks forward to the Messiah coming and reigning. He is the righteous king who will rule compassionately and justly. He is the one who will rescue the poor and needy and downtrodden. He is the one who will deliver us from sin.

The psalmist got it right in verse 18 when he says that God alone does marvellous deeds. We will never have complete peace, justice and harmony on this earth...we will experience it one day when the Messiah returns to take us to be with him for ever and ever. Let's look forward to that day whilst striving in this day and age to live at peace with each as far as that is in our control.

Pray: asking God to help us live his way on earth today.

Reflect: do I look ahead to heaven or am I so caught up in life today?

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (v.25)

Have you ever watched a young child closely? In their own home and familiar surroundings they chase around with reckless abandon. In a new and unfamiliar environment they stay close to mum or dad. When mum takes the child to the supermarket, the small child makes sure mum is close by. If a stranger should come upon their path, the small child throws their arms around mum's neck and hangs on for security. If they fall down or bump their head they run straight for mum. Where else would the child go? She's always been right there when they needed her, and she's been what they've needed her to be.

We get a sense from Asaph who wrote this psalm that this was his relationship with God. When surrounded by the confusing and troubling circumstances of life, he could turn to the Lord. He reminded himself that God was in control and would care for him.

In the opening verses he looks away from God and looks at the world. And as he does that he becomes envious. It looks like they have made it and have no struggles. And we often do that in life as we see the wicked prosper while good people struggle. As he focuses his mind back on God though he realises God will deal with them one day for their wicked ways. He remembers that God has always been there for him and holds his right hand.

In this psalm, after honestly expressing his questions and his doubts, Asaph concluded, '*Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You.*' (v.25). It's useless to look elsewhere for something that God alone can give. By faith, throw your arms around Him. Where else would you go?

Pray: thanking God for always being there for you.

Reflect: is God all I desire?