



Cornton Baptist Church

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

Through the Bible

September 2012

His love endures forever. (v.1)

You don't have to live very long in this world before it becomes painfully clear that nothing lasts forever. The car you were so proud of when you bought it is spending too much time in the garage getting fixed. Those clothes you picked up on sale are now worn out and out of fashion. At home the appliances break down, the carpet needs to be replaced, and the walls need painted again. And what of the modern gadgets called mobile phones? It seems that every two years they need replaced for a newer better model. And as well as that, relationships we think will endure often fall apart.

Nothing lasts forever - nothing but God's mercy, that is. Twenty-six times we are reminded of this inspiring truth in Psalm 136. Twenty-six times the writer gives us something for which to praise the Lord, and then he reminds us, '*His love endures forever.*' Of course that word for love in Hebrew is hesed which means loving kindness, steadfast love or covenant love. It is often translated as mercy as well.

He does this to ensure the people of Israel don't forget how great God's love and mercy are. And as they sing this psalm they remember God's goodness, his creation, his redemption, his leading and his provision. They are drawn back to all God has done for them in the past that they might praise him for that and take hope that he will continue to pour his love and mercy on them forevermore.

Think of what this means. When we sin and need forgiveness, His mercy endures forever. When our lives seem a jumbled mess that we can't control, His mercy endures forever. When we can't find anyone to turn to for help, God's mercy endures forever. When each day is a struggle because of illness, despair, or conflict, His mercy endures forever. Whenever life seems overwhelming, we can still praise the Lord, as the psalmist did - for God's mercy and love is always new and fresh.

Pray: praising God for his love and mercy which endures forever.

Reflect: in what ways have I seen God's love and mercy in my life today?

How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (v.4)

I don't know about you but I can sing a song almost anywhere at any time. People will often say a phrase and I can burst into a song that has that phrase. I used to go around work singing songs to myself. And the great thing was I was able to do that on the good days and in the hard and trying days. On the good days it reminded how great God was and how worthy of praise he is, and on the hard days it gave me hope that God's would see me through and at the end of the day there is far more to life than my work.

One test of our spiritual condition is whether or not we really have a song. Psalm 137 tells us about people who lost their song. They lost it because they lost their sanctity - they repeatedly sinned against the Lord. And in the end the Lord gave them over to the Babylonians who took them out of Jerusalem to their own land far away.

As they sat by the rivers of Babylon they wept as they remembered Jerusalem. Their captors came and wound them up asking them to sing their songs. The psalmist replies by saying how could they sing in a foreign land. They were living on memories of Jerusalem now. They were living on memories of their relationship with the Lord.

When we are not walking with the Lord, we lose our song and start living on memories. It is vital to keep walking with the Lord even when we feel guilty for sinning or low because of how life is at the moment. As we walk with the Lord we are able to sing a song and even in that singing we can remember his goodness and faithfulness and take hope. We can join with Matt Redman who wrote *'Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me, When the world's all as it should be, Blessed be Your name. Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering, Though there's pain in the offering Blessed be Your name. Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise. When the darkness closes in, Lord still I will say. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'*

Pray: thanking God for being with you at all times.

Reflect: do I sing to God even in the hard times?

The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me. (v.8)

At one time Andrew Carnegie was the wealthiest man in America. He came to America from his native Scotland when he was a small boy, did a variety of odd jobs, and eventually ended up as the largest steel manufacturer in the United States. At one time he had forty-three millionaires working for him. In those days a millionaire was a rare person; conservatively speaking, a million dollars in his day would be equivalent to at least forty million dollars today.

A reporter asked Carnegie how he had hired forty-three millionaires. Carnegie responded that those men had not been millionaires when they started working for him but had become millionaires as a result. The reporter's next question was, "How did you develop these men to become so valuable to you that you have paid them this much money?" Carnegie replied that men are developed the same way gold is mined. When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but one doesn't go into the mine looking for dirt - one goes in looking for the gold. That's probably how we ought to learn to look at each other as well.

Sometimes we get frustrated with each other because we see so much dirt in people's lives. We see lots of unfinished "projects", things that need attention. Perhaps we need to think about the "gold" that God has been mining in their lives. Perhaps we need to see if we can catch a glimpse of the "angel" God is trying to release in the marble.

The psalmist saw that God was still at work in his life. He knew there was much still to do but he was confident that '*The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me.*' Those who sit around you in church and that you sometimes get frustrated with are still works in progress. God isn't finished with them yet. And here's a wee truth for each of us to hang on to as well...God isn't finished with me yet either.

Pray: asking God to continue that development work in my life.

Reflect: do I get frustrated with others because I still see sin in their lives and things they need to change? Be patient...God is still at work.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. (v.3)

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun made a note, "Take only one, God is watching," Moving through the line, to the other end of the table, was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One of the boys wrote a note, "Take all you want, God is watching the apples."

The truth actually is, as the psalmist notes here in Psalm 139, that God is watching everything. He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. That is he is all present, all knowing and all powerful. He knows all about the things I try and hide from other people. He knows all my thoughts, not just the nice ones. He knows what I am about to say even before I say it. We may be able to hide so much of our life from others but we cannot hide from God. We might think we can sit in church on Sunday and smile at everyone as we sing and listen to the message and no one will know what we are really thinking or what dreadful things we have been up to during the past few days, but God knows. He knows everything about us.

How does he know this? Well three reasons here in this psalm. Firstly he has searched us. We can go on the internet these days and do a Google search and find out lots of information about people. But it wouldn't have everything listed there. God sees everything. He knows what we're thinking, he knows what we look at it and he knows where we go.

Then the psalmist reminds us that God is always with us. I have spent many years with Morag now (we were married 19 years ago yesterday) and we know each other inside out. God knows us more though for he is with us always 24/7. And finally the best reason for God knowing us...he made us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Pray: thanking God for making us and knowing us.

Reflect: do I try and hide aspects of my life from God?

Hear O LORD, my cry for mercy. O Sovereign LORD, my strong deliverer, who shields my head in the day of battle... (v.6, 7)

Maybe you've heard the well-known Civil War story about the person who asked Abraham Lincoln whether he thought God was on the side of the Union or the Confederacy. Lincoln is said to have replied that he wasn't concerned about whose side God was on; he was far more concerned that he was on God's side.

David was on God's side - so much so the king could pray that God would defeat the plans of David's enemies and bring these evil people down to judgment. David turned to God as his strong Deliverer to protect him in battle, vindicate his trust in God, and deal with violent, evil, and proud men who were out to destroy David. Psalm 140 is David's cry for help to God who he calls '*my God*' and '*my strong deliverer*' (v.6, 7). David's enemies are out to get him. They are trying to ensnare him and trap him. So he turns to God and asks for God's help to rescue him, to protect him, to shield him and to deliver him.

In our lives we would do well to remain on God's side – to love him, serve him and honour him. When difficulties come our communication lines are already open for us to talk to God – to cry out for his help. And he will hear us, strengthen us and vindicate us in the battles of life.

David goes on to pray that God would thwart the plans of his enemies and bring destruction upon them. He calls for burning coals to come down on them. We think of the harsh language as not being very nice, but David is doing what we are supposed to do - he's letting God take vengeance. He concludes by saying that he knows that the Lord secures justice so he happily leaves it in God's hands. The next time our enemies trouble us, hand it straight over to God and leave it with him.

Pray: asking God to help with some trouble you face currently.

Reflect: do I try and seek revenge rather than handing everything over to God?

*Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.
(v.3)*

When Bernard Baruch was an ambitious young businessman, he asked the wealthy J. P. Morgan to partner with him in a Texas sulphur mining venture. Geologists had given the project a favourable report, but there was still some risk. Morgan was interested until Baruch said, “You’ve taken bigger gambles than this.” Morgan glared at him and then replied in an icy tone, “I never gamble.” The word gambles had killed the deal. Morgan thought that investing was respectable but that gambling was a sin.

If one word, innocently misspoken, can cost millions, think of how much damage malicious words can cause. They can ruin a person’s reputation and destroy the closest relationships. That’s why it is important for us to take heed of the Psalmist’s prayer here that God would guard his mouth and watch what his lips said. That’s why James warns about taming the tongue in his letter.

Here in Psalm 141 David is again crying out to God for help. His enemies are after him trying to trap him. He doesn’t want to fall into their traps and worse still he does not want his heart to be drawn to what is evil. And he recognises that it could all start to go wrong with his mouth which is why he prays for God to guard his mouth and keep watch over the door of his lips.

I don’t know about you but it is amazing how many times when something bad happens, without thinking, words slip out of your mouth and roll off the tongue. ‘You idiot’ when someone cuts you up when driving. ‘You clown’ when someone does something silly trying to help you. And on it goes. Let’s be praying like the psalmist that God would guard our mouths so that what comes out is wholesome and encouraging.

Pray: asking God to guard your mouth.

Reflect: do I speak without thinking and cause upset? Ask God to help you with that.

I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. (v.4)

Some of the calls that cause me most distress in pastoral ministry are those from people who are at the end of their tether and are contemplating suicide. For many of these people it comes because life has dealt them some heavy blows and they are struggling to cope with them. As the gloom sets in suddenly everything is bad and no one cares. I will often say during the course of such a conversation ‘People will miss you’ to which I get the response ‘No one will because no one cares.’ And to them no one does because they feel all alone and isolated. Thankfully in most cases I have managed to spend time with the person showing my care and speaking to them of God’s care for them, and also introducing others to them who can help be a support to them.

King David is struggling. He is hiding out in a cave and caves can be dark, lonely and claustrophobic places that bring out the worst in you. He is most likely on the run from Saul who has his army chasing after David. In that dark dingy place with his troubles pouring in on top of him, David looks within and complains about his life and the situation he is in. Introspection sometimes can be good for you, but don’t spend too much time looking within, or you will get discouraged.

David then looks around hoping to find some help and he sees that he is on his own. He says ‘*no one is concerned for me*’; ‘*no one cares for my life*’. He is really struggling. At this point he looks up and remembers his God. He cries out to God for help. And having looked up he is then able to look ahead and see that God will deliver him and free him. He looks ahead with hope.

Many in our world struggle thinking no one cares. It is our responsibility to get alongside them and to care for them – and to point them to the Saviour who gives us all the hope we need for life.

Pray: thanking God for the hope we have in Jesus.

Reflect: how can I care for someone around me this week?

*I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.
(v.5)*

Many years ago, during an exchange of correspondence in The Times newspaper concerning the nature of evil, G. K. Chesterton wrote: “Dear sirs, you ask what is wrong with humanity. I am. Yours sincerely, G. K. Chesterton.” Chesterton knew he was a sinner. The psalmist David knew he was a sinner. As he cries out to God for help he proclaims that no one is righteous before God and asks God not to treat him harshly on account of being a sinner.

David is overwhelmed and distressed. His enemies are still after him and he feels the weight of running and hiding. He doesn't know what to do. And then as he sits he takes time to remember. He remembers back to days of old and recalls how God blessed him and helped and his people. He meditates on the works of God which means he took time to think about them carefully as he remembered them. He considered all that God's hands had done.

As he took that time to ponder he recalled God's loving kindness, trustworthiness, and guidance (v.8); His protection and goodness (v.9-10); His righteousness and mercy (v.11-12). And as he did that his spirit lifted within him. He cried out for God to rescue him and protect him.

There are times in our lives when the troubles that surround us appear to overwhelm us. It is in those dark moments when we struggle to know if God is there that we should turn to our Scriptures and remember all that God has done in the past. It is then that we should remember our own lives and the times God has helped us. And in those memories we will be drawn to recognise that God is still by our side and he will lead us through the situation we are in. All we have to do is keep trusting and keep following him.

Pray: thanking God for his help in days past.

Reflect: take some time to remember God's help in times past – to meditate on them and to give God praise and thanks.

O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? (v.3)

When W. B. Davidson was a young boy, he walked with his father 3 miles from his rural home to his grandmother's house. While they were visiting, the sun set. Davidson writes, "Between our home and grandmother's house was a swamp. That night the croaking of the frogs, the chirping of the crickets, and the shadows of the trees frightened me. I asked my father if there was any danger of something catching us, but he assured me that there was nothing to dread. And so, taking me by the hand, he said, 'I will not allow anything to harm you.' Immediately my fears passed away and I was ready to face the world."

The psalmist knew what it was to have that peace. He knew that the Lord was on his side and with the Lord there he need fear nothing. He describes the Lord as his rock, his fortress, his stronghold, his deliverer and his shield. He feared nothing. When he saw trouble he called for God to protect him and rescue him. And he was able to finish the Psalm by saying '*blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.*'

And all of this is set against the backdrop that human beings are so small yet God still cares for us. David asks in verse 3 '*O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him?*' What are we that God should pay any attention to us? Are we smart? I don't think so. Are we strong? Some animals are much stronger than we are. Are we righteous? No, we have sinned against God. Are we faithful? Too often we disobey Him. From the human point of view, there is no reason why God should pay any attention to us.

And yet he does because he made us and he loves us. Let's cling to God and live for him. Let's rest in the knowledge that '*blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.*'

Pray: thanking God for being our Lord.

Reflect: do I rest secure in the knowledge that God cares for me?

One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. (v.4)

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex was staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. It was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven year old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the little boy, and said quietly, “Good morning, Alex.” “Good morning, Pastor,” replied the young man, still focused on the plaque. “Pastor, what is this?” “Well, son, it’s a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.” Soberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Little Alex’s voice was barely audible, trembling with fear, when he asked, “Which service, the 9:00 or the 11:00?”

It is good to remember what those who have gone before us have done. More importantly though it does us good to remember all that God has done for us in days past. Psalm 145 is entitled a “Psalm of praise”. This is the only psalm in the whole collection that has this title. This psalm reminds us of a number of reasons to be praising God. The opening verses remind us of God’s greatness. God is so glorious and awesome that our minds will never fully grasp it. His greatness also is unsearchable. We can’t begin to measure it. We can’t know its depth, its height or its breadth. And we are called upon to tell others of God’s greatness.

Verses 8-10 show some of God’s attributes – he *‘is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.’* If we were to fully consider all of God’s attributes we would be thinking on them for an awful long time. Verses 11-13 tell us of God’s kingdom – of how it is an everlasting kingdom. Verses 14-16 speak of God’s works and how he satisfies the desires of every living thing. Then the psalmist concludes by referring to God’s salvation. *‘The LORD is near to all who call on him.’* There is so much here in this psalm – meditate on it and spend time praising God.

Pray: praising God for his greatness.

Reflect: which attribute of God speaks most to me today?

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. (v.3)

Years ago a military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in her eyes, the man tried unsuccessfully to remove her fears. Suddenly she grasped his sleeve and cried, “How can you be so calm?” He stepped back a few feet and drew his sword. Pointing it at her heart, he said, “Are you afraid of this?” Without hesitation she answered, “Of course not!” “Why not?” he inquired. “Because it’s in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me.” To this he replied, “I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!”

The officer was not disturbed because he had put his trust in the Lord. Have we learned to put our trust in the Lord? When trouble strikes or tragedy or illness or financial insecurity, who do we look to for help? To whom do we turn? As is usually the case, we have a choice. We can look to kings or princes - our fellow man - for help, or we can look to the Lord.

The psalmist knew where to turn. He reminds us that men will one day die and be no more – what help will they be to us then? He says blessed, happy, in the one who puts their trust in God. Why is God the only true source of security? Why is He the only worthy object of our trust?

The psalmist tells us why. First, because the Lord is ‘*the maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them.*’ Men often are not able to give security because it is beyond their power to give. Not so with God. He is the Almighty. He is the creator who fashioned everything out of nothing.

Second, we also ought to trust in God because He is the ‘*Lord, who remains faithful forever.*’ Men so easily change their mind and fail to keep their word. God is faithful forever. Every promise he has made he has kept. This God we can trust. This God we can rely on with the utmost confidence. This God is an unfailing source of security.

Pray: asking God to increase your faith in him.

Reflect: who do I turn to first when trouble strikes?

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving. (v.7)

A farmer was sitting down to breakfast at local restaurant and bowed his head in prayer. A couple of young men at the next table thought that was a bit odd and they made fun of him quietly as he prayed. When he finished his prayer, they chided him: “Hey old man, does everybody pray over their meals out on the farm?” The man thought about that for a second, smiled back and replied. “Well, no. The pigs don’t.”

There are people who are thankful in this world, and there are people who aren’t. One of the themes in Scripture is that God’s people should always be a thankful people. Psalm 147 is a psalm of praise, a psalm of prayer, and a psalm of thanksgiving. And such a prayer is not that uncommon throughout Scripture. Again and again you see men and women of God lifting up their hearts and praising God. Giving Him thanks.

Here the psalmist gives God thanks for healing the broken-hearted, binding up their wounds, sustaining the humble, supplying rain for the fields, providing food for the cattle, strengthening the bars of the gates, blessing his people, granting peace, and satisfying with finest wheat. The psalmist is making a list of things to be thankful for. He’s counting his blessings...naming them one by one.

Are we a thankful people? Do we stop to pray over our food before we eat it or do we take it for granted? G.K. Chesterton observed that one of the greatest lessons he had learned in his life was that he could either take things for granted...or he could take things with gratitude.

Sit down today and make a list of all the things you are thankful for God giving to you during the past twenty four hours. It might just surprise you what the Lord has done.

Pray: thanking God for all His blessings to you.

Reflect: do I take things for granted or with gratitude?

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens. (v.13)

For close on 50 years, Bill McLaren was the enthusiastic voice of rugby. He delighted listeners with his emotional play-by-play coverage of the Saturday afternoon rugby games. Anyone who heard him knew at once whose side he was on – he was a passionate Hawick and Scotland man. The loyal following that McLaren built up through the years indicates how contagious and appealing it is when a person gives himself wholeheartedly to a cause he loves.

That commentator's fervour reminds us how natural it is to respond with intensity to something that is close to our hearts. The psalmist had a great fervour for praising God. As soon as you start working your way through Psalm 148 you catch that intensity and passion. The psalmist loved God and longed to praise him. More than that, he longed that every created thing praised God.

In the opening verses he reminds us that God is creator of all things – '*he commanded and they were created.*' Not only were they created but God placed them in the right place for ever. Of course in these opening verses he is talking of the angels, and the sun, moon and stars. He goes on to speak of the created things on earth as he calls on the sea creatures, the weather, the mountains and valleys, trees, animals and birds, and then humanity to praise God. And he draws everyone in old and young alike.

I wonder if we get so worked up about praise and worship of God. Do people quickly recognise by our enthusiasm that we love and serve God and are filled with His Spirit? Do our lives give evidence of the wholehearted praise that is called for in Psalm 148? It's time to get passionate in praise, people!

Pray: praising God for his name and his creation.

Reflect: do people quickly recognise by my enthusiasm that I love and serve God and am filled with His Spirit?

*Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints.
(v.1)*

There is always debate in church as to the type of song to sing. Some advocate the traditional old hymns because of the great language and wonderful tunes – and of course the great theology contained in them. Others go for the modern praise song that is upbeat and focussed on the Saviour. I like the best of the old alongside the best of the new. What is important is that we are singing praise to God.

However the psalmist does speak of singing a new song to the Lord here in Psalm 149. Why sing a new song? Well if we were to sit and consider all the hymn writers down through the ages we would soon discover that they wrote many of their great songs on the back of personal experience. All the psalms were written on the back of situations the psalmist faced – both good and bad. He often wrote of how the Lord heard his cry and helped him.

Fanny Crosby wrote ‘All the way my Saviour leads me’ after being short of money and praying to God, then someone miraculously appearing on her doorstep with money. Horatio G. Spafford wrote ‘When peace like a river/It is well with my soul’ as he received the comfort of the Lord following the tragic drowning at sea of his children. These are songs of praise written out of the personal experiences of life.

If we are truly walking with God each and every day in life then we will see him do amazing things in us and through us. And out of those experiences we should be crying out in praise to God. Our hearts should be filled with thankfulness for all God is doing. And so in a sense it is right to sing a new song to God – for that means he is still working in our lives.

Pray: praising God for all he is doing in your life just now.

Reflect: what has God been doing in my life that would make me want to sing a new song of praise to him?

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. (v.6)

We have reached the final Psalm and it is the culmination of the songbook. Here at the end we learn what praise is all about. This psalm answers for us the who, where, why and how of praise. The who is answered in verse 6 – everything that has breath is to praise the Lord. A minister was at the bedside of an elderly Christian who was near death. When he asked her what Scripture she wanted him to read, she said, “Make your own selection, pastor, but let it be one of praise.” Although she was breathing her last, she wanted her parting testimony to echo the psalmist: ‘*Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*’ We are all called to praise God.

Where are we to praise God? Well according to verse 1 we praise God in his sanctuary and in his mighty heavens. That is we are called to gather together Sunday by Sunday to sing his praise in church. Church is not an added extra – it is a vital part of our walk and witness. We are to join together in praising God. Of course God’s sanctuary is where God dwells – and as we well know he dwells in the lives of believers. That means we are to praise God wherever we are – at home, in church, at work, in the supermarket, in the park. We are also to praise him in his heavens and that is a sign for us that we will be praising him forevermore in heaven.

As if we need reminding by this stage the psalmist goes on to tell us why we should praise God. He speaks of God’s acts of power and his surpassing greatness. As we look back in our own lives we see God’s mighty power at work at various points in our lives and we are drawn to give him thanks and praise.

And how are we to praise? Well we are to praise him with every breath we have – and if we have the gift of music we can play our instrument as well – whatever that may be. Whatever is going on in life, we are called to praise the Lord for his goodness to us.

Pray: praising God for who he is and what he has done.

Reflect: do I praise the Lord regularly?

The proverbs of Solomon...for attaining wisdom and discipline. (v.1, 2)

This imbecile decides one day that he is sick and tired of people calling him stupid, so he decides to show his wife that he is really smart. While his wife is off at work, he decides that he is going to paint a couple of rooms in the house. The next day, right after his wife leaves for work, he gets down to the task at hand. His wife arrives home at 5:30 and smells the distinctive smell of paint. She walks into the living room and finds her husband lying on the floor in a pool of sweat. She notices that he is wearing a ski jacket and a fur coat at the same time. She rushes over and says, "Honey, are you all right?" He slowly nods his head yes. "What are you doing?" she asks incredulously. "I wanted to prove that I'm not so dumb," he started, "and I wanted to do it by painting the house." "Well why do you have both a ski jacket and a fur coat on?" she asks dumbfounded. "Well," he says, "I was reading the directions on the paint can and it said: For best results, put on two coats."

We all need wisdom in life. Not simply for painting but for living life well. When Solomon became king, God appeared to him in a dream and asked him to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon asked for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9). God gave Solomon his request. One of the by-products of the wisdom God gave Solomon was the proverbs that he wrote. 1 Kings 4:32 tells us that he spoke 3,000 proverbs. Though most of the book of Proverbs contains things written by Solomon, not all of the book was written by Solomon.

The sayings in this book form a library of instruction on how to live a godly life here on earth and how to be assured of reward in the life to come. Proverbs are sayings taken from everyday life intended to serve as practical guidelines for successful living. Learning principles and proverbs by themselves are not going to benefit you unless you also have a fear of the Lord. If you have a fear of the Lord, then you will not only learn these things, but DO them as well. That's why verse 7 reminds us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

Pray: asking God to help you be wise in life.

Reflect: do I learn things and then put them into practice?

If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. (v.4, 5)

I love the Indiana Jones films. Indiana is a professor of archaeology and an adventurer. In the four films he goes to the ends of the earth in search of the hidden treasure. He faces and overcomes much on each journey in order to find the prize. He doesn't give up. He searches right to the end.

Some people do that with ordinary every day items trying to find a bargain. I remember some of the car boot sales we have held over recent years. Almost before people have started setting up the dealers are in rummaging around their boots and their goods trying to unearth a bargain they can later sell on for profit.

Oh how I wish we were like both of these types when it comes to God's Word. A man was out walking in the desert when a voice said to him, "Pick up some pebbles and put them in your pocket, and tomorrow you will be both sorry and glad." The man obeyed. He stooped down and picked up a handful of pebbles and put them in his pocket. The next morning he reached into his pocket and found diamonds and rubies and emeralds. And he was both glad and sorry. Glad that he had taken some - sorry that he hadn't taken more. And so it is with God's word.

There is a sense to which this is what Proverbs 2 is encouraging us to do. Solomon urges us to search God's Word as if we were searching for hidden treasure. And there is much hidden treasure to be found here in the Bible. Everything we need for life is buried here. Sometimes we read a passage and understand the main point immediately, applying it to our lives. Other times we come back and dig deeper and discover so much more in that same passage.

The encouragement today is to dig deep into God's Word. Work at it and don't give up. And you will be delighted with what you find.

Pray: asking God to help you dig deeper into His Word.

Reflect: do I take time to dig deeply into the Bible?

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. (v.5, 6)

The snow covered the ground where three lads were playing. A man came along and said to them, “Would you like to try a race and the winner receive a prize?” The boys agreed and the man told them that his race was to be different. “I will go to the other side of the field,” he said, “and when I give you the signal, you will start to run. The one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner.”

The race commenced and the first boy kept looking at his feet to see if his steps were straight. The second lad kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing; but the third boy just ran on with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the man on the other side of the field. The third lad was the winner, for his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him.

The lesson of verse 5 and 6 here is to keep our eyes on God; to look to see where he is in any given situation. It’s all about trusting and obeying. In fact these two verses offer us four practical lessons for life. The first is quite simply to trust God. God made us and knows us. He made the world and everything in it. And he knows how life ought to be lived. So we trust him and look for his leading. The second lesson is to stop counting on our own brain and knowledge – for it is limited. We cannot understand everything. Look to God and don’t lean on what we think we know. Thirdly we are to look to God and he will see us through. And of course the fourth part is letting God direct us – for he will make our paths straight.

Let’s focus our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Let’s look to him to lead and guide us through life. Let’s trust in him and him alone.

Pray: asking God to help you trust him more.

Reflect: do I trust God and look for his leading, or do I lean on my own understanding?

He taught me and said “Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.” (v.4)

When asked about his father and learning from him, Mark Twain said “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.”

It is amazing the perspectives we have and the views we take. We often think we have nothing to learn from our parents who are too old and out of touch with today’s culture. How wrong that is. Many of the best lessons we learn in life come from our parents. We listen to them from a young age and take on board their wisdom. We watch them and follow closely in their footsteps. Whenever I had an issue in life that I couldn’t get my head round, or wanted advice on, I would go and see my grandfather. I have spent many an hour sitting in his living room as he asked me what was on my mind and then helped me see the issue with more clarity than I had before.

Proverbs 4 begins with the call to listen to a father’s instruction, to pay attention and gain understanding. The writer says that when he was a young boy he learned from his father’s teaching. And what was the most important thing he learned? To take the words to heart and to obey the commands. That way he would get wisdom and understanding.

And the application for us is to lay hold of God’s Word for it contains all the wisdom we need for living life well. But it’s not enough to simply read it or even to memorise it – its all about then applying it to our lives, using it and obeying it. Then we will be wise. Then we will live life the way God intended it to be lived.

Pray: asking God to help us learn from His Word and apply it to our lives.

Reflect: do I read, learn and obey God’s Word in my life?

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. (v.18)

Proverbs 5 is a chapter speaking of the need for fidelity in marriage. More than that it speaks of the manner in which a husband and wife should delight in each other.

A husband and wife are getting ready for bed. The wife is standing in front of a full-length mirror taking a hard look at herself. “You know,” she says, “I look in the mirror, and I see an old woman. My face is all wrinkled; every part of my body is hanging out a mile. I’ve got fat legs, and my arms are all flabby.” She turns to her husband and says; “Tell me something positive to make me feel better about myself.” He studies hard for a moment thinking about it and then says in a soft, thoughtful voice; “Well, ...there’s nothing wrong with your eyesight.” Services for the husband will be held Saturday morning at 10:30 at Cornton. That’s not the way to do it.

Verses 18-20 remind us that marriage is God’s gift. A husband and wife should give themselves to each other. They should enjoy their marriage. They should love each other. They attract each other, and this is good. The writer asks why one should be captivated by another woman, an adulteress, when he has the most beautiful and loving wife by his side. Whenever our eyes are caught by someone attractive or we are tempted to flirt with someone at work or we are overwhelmed by the attention of a member of the opposite sex, let our first thought be God and then our next thought our spouse. And both of those will stop us making a fool of ourselves and ruining our marriage and life.

There is a reminder at the end of the chapter that our ways are in full view of God – he sees all that we do. In fact he also knows all we think and hears all we say. We might hide our sin from others for a while but we cannot hide it from God.

Pray: thanking God for the gift of your spouse.

Reflect: do I still rejoice in my spouse?

Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes. (v.25)

Today I want to leave a word for the men reading this although the principles apply to ladies too. The reason I want to leave it for the men is because the writer speaks to men here in verse 25-35 and also because according to recent surveys men in our culture, and yes even men in our churches, struggle with sexual sin.

And it all begins with the eye. We see something and like it. We see something and our gaze lingers too long on it. We see something and we want it...and sometimes that comes at great cost. Pornography; ladies in swimwear, low cut tops and short skirts; television shows full of sexual innuendo and simulated or suggested sexual intercourse etc. aren't just harmless past times. They lead somewhere. At the very least, it pollutes your mind toward women. At the most you will end up devastated, and devastating the people that care about you. Solomon warns that if we play with fire we get burned. That means if we view pornography it will end up controlling our lives and ruining relationships.

God has created a way that is better than looking at dirty movies. He has created a way that is better than going to some prostitute, a way that is better than looking at some cheap magazine, than flirting with someone else on the job. It's called loving your wife. If you love your wife and enjoy her and her body, you will find release for what God has put within you. Before Hugh Hefner messed it up, God thought it up. As man and woman come from the hand of Almighty God, they come as male and female. Within that relationship, the sexual relationship of a man and woman is holy, righteous, pure, good and ought to be enjoyed. That's what the Bible says. To men who feel this tremendous urge, don't go running somewhere else, go back to the wife that God has given you.

Pray: confessing your sexual sinfulness to God.

Reflect: do I need help and support with sexual sin issues? Do I need an accountability partner?

Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. (v.25)

Proverbs 7 picks up the theme of sexual sin once more and the warning against the adulteress. This time though he couches it in terms of temptation and how we often put ourselves in the path of temptation. In verse 6 and following we find a young man make the mistake of going to where he would be tempted. The fall into sin has actually already started the moment he made the choice to go down her street. He's already been drawn away by his own inner lust. The easiest place to find victory over temptation is to change that first step down her street. Once the young man turns down her street, it will get more and more difficult to flee that temptation. That is why Solomon warns in verse 25 '*Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths.*'

And that warning of temptation comes for all walks of life and all the varied temptations we face. Think on "The Five Chapter Book": Chapter One: A man was walking down the street. He fell into a hole. He groped his way in the darkness. After a long time, he made his way out of the hole. Chapter Two: A man was walking down the same street. He pretended not to see the hole. He fell in. After a long time, he made his way out of the hole. Chapter Three: A man was walking down the same street. He sees the hole. He falls in. He says it's not his fault. After a long time, he made his way out of the hole. Chapter Four: A man walks down the same street. He sees the hole. He knows it's there. He tries to walk around it. He falls in. He knows it's his fault. He quickly gets out. Chapter Five: A man takes another street.

The lesson for us is to be aware of our weakness and watch out for temptation. Indeed we are warned here to avoid putting ourselves in the way of temptation. If you know you are tempted to flick on to certain television channels late at night – block them. If you know you are tempted to join in the smutty jokes at lunchtime – take yourself out the office for a walk.

Pray: asking God to help you avoid temptation.

Reflect: how can I avoid putting myself in the way of temptation?

*But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.
(v.36)*

In 1977 on a lonely 3-mile stretch of Florida beach, 100 pilot whales hurled themselves onto dry ground in an apparent mass suicide. It was another example of self-destructive behaviour that continues to baffle marine biologists. These huge creatures had beached themselves in a follow-the-leader fashion. People came from miles around to try to turn them back. At one point a human fence was formed between the whales and the shoreline.

But even when those sea mammals were pushed, pulled, and forced back into deeper water, many of them repeated their death surge and lunged onto dry ground again. One marine officer said “We even tried running them in circles in the ocean, trying to make them lose direction. They just kept pulling back toward shore. It was hopeless.”

There’s something about human beings that mimics those whales. Our sinful nature causes us to self-destruct. We were made by the Creator of the world – made in his image. God has shown us how to live life well by giving us an instruction manual to follow. He has sent us various warnings down through the years – from Noah and the flood onwards. And yet somehow for many in this world they are still intent on ignoring God, paying no attention to God’s Word or his warnings. They are set like those whales on the path of self-destruct.

How do we avoid being like that ourselves? By fearing the LORD and finding wisdom. And by listening and following his instruction. When we find the LORD we find life. Jesus himself said in John 10:10 ‘*I have come that they may have life and life in all its fullness.*’

Pray: asking God to help you live life the way he intended.

Reflect: all I following the Lord’s instructions?

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (v.10)

Fear means different things to different people. To professional golfer Padraig Harrington, it is a motivator to help him perform his very best. In 2008, when he won both the British Open and the PGA Championship, Harrington said, “Yes, fear is a big part of me. I’d like to say that I have all the trust and patience and I’m relaxed. No, that’s not my makeup. Fear pushes me on. Keeps me getting to the gym. I have to work with it and use it.”

Maybe it’s the fear of failure, or the fear of losing his edge, but Harrington finds fear to be a useful thing in his professional life.

The follower of Christ can also be helped by fear. We are challenged in the Scriptures to have a reverential fear of God, which is the best type of fear that there is. It causes us to be concerned about disobeying Him or living in opposition to His ways. It is being in awe of our great God, bowing to His perfect will, and seeking His wisdom for living. To that end, the proverb declares, ‘*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*’ (verse 10).

By fearing God rightly, we can live wisely in an uncertain world. Fear of God draws us to learn his word and obey it. Fear of God draws us to turn from our sin and follow the Saviour. Fear of God draws us to worship the one true God and not to worship idols. Fear of God draws us to wise living.

The fear of the Lord is the overarching theme of this book and particularly of the first nine chapters. The fear of the Lord is a state of mind in which one’s own attitudes, will, feelings, deeds, and goals are exchanged for God’s.

Pray: asking God to help you live for him and not for yourself.

Reflect: do I have a reverential fear and awe of God?

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. (v.12)

Even the most devoted couple will experience a ‘stormy’ bout once in a while. A grandmother, celebrating her golden wedding anniversary, once told the secret of her long and happy marriage. ‘On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of ten of my husband’s faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook,’ she said.

A guest asked the woman what some of the faults she had chosen to overlook were. The grandmother replied, ‘To tell you the truth, my dear, I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, Lucky for him that’s one of the ten!’

What a beautiful picture of what Solomon is speaking of here in Proverbs 10:12. He says that love covers over all wrongs. It doesn’t speak of making excuses for it or seeking retribution for it. It says covers over. Love is generous that way. This is a beautiful line. When we love someone, we try not to think about their mistakes. Our love covers their mistakes, so that we do not think about their errors.

How much is that in contrast to us at times when the errors and mistakes of others stir up dissension within us. We get irritated and annoyed by the mistakes of others and make sure they know it. We make them pay for it. Solomon urges us to show that generosity of spirit and love and cover over all wrongs.

God loves us. He sent Jesus. When Jesus died, he suffered our punishment. Because of this, God forgives us. God does not simply cover our evil deeds he removes them from sight - *‘As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.’* (Psalm 103:12)

Pray: asking God to help you be generous in love.

Reflect: do I keep casting up mistakes or do I cover them over in love?

*For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure.
(v.14)*

In October 1962, the world held its breath as the US and the Soviet Union stood at the brink of nuclear war. Premier Nikita Khrushchev had delivered nuclear missiles to Cuba, and President John F. Kennedy demanded their immediate removal. Tensions were at an all-time high.

Kennedy phoned three former US presidents to get their advice. Herbert Hoover had faced the economic problems of the Great Depression; Harry Truman had ended World War II; and Dwight Eisenhower had served as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Each had valuable insights to share. After Kennedy conferred with all of his White House advisors, a balanced course of action defused the crisis. War was averted.

The Bible encourages us to seek the advice of wise counsellors. Proverbs 11:14 states '*For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure.*' The word translated "counsel" is a Hebrew nautical term used for steering a ship. The wisdom of godly advisors can help steer us in the right direction.

There are many times in life when we face crises. Where do we turn at such times? Proverbs would suggest we seek out good and godly counsel. There are many times in life when we are unsure about which road to take and which direction to go off in. Where should we turn? Again Proverbs would suggest we seek the counsel of those we trust to help us.

Many times in my own life I have sought the counsel of others and they have given good advice to think on and follow. There have been times though when I have not sought advice and gone on my own without taking time to think or seek counsel. Those decisions have more often than not been foolish choices. A truly wise person is open to the counsel and insight of others.

Pray: thanking God for wise friends and counsellors.

Reflect: do I seek advice from trusted friends and colleagues?

He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgement. (v.11)

Two friends who hadn't seen each other in years met in a supermarket. One woman asked, "Tell me, Ruth, how is your son George?" "He's getting along fine," Ruth replied. "He's a poet. He just received his master's degree in literature from the university."

"And what about Mary?" "She's just as smart as George," Ruth replied. "She graduated from college with a degree in modern art."

"Wonderful. And how is little Freddy? What is he doing?" "Well," Ruth said, "Freddy is still Freddy. He wouldn't go to college - he became a plumber instead. If it weren't for him, we'd all be starving."

Some people are simply lazy and expect others to help feed them. Others knuckle down and do some hard graft. Those who work hard always have something to show for their labour. Here in Proverbs 12:11 we are reminded that the one who works his land will have much food to eat from it while he who goes after every fantasy lacks the judgement of sitting down to hard work. In verse 27 we are told that the lazy man cannot possibly roast his game because he has done no work whereas the diligent man prizes his possessions.

The work ethic was instilled into me from a young age. As soon as I was old enough I went out and took on a paper round. My hard work soon earned me a place running the shop for the early shift (6.30am-8.30am). And I remember being told at my interview for the bank that having had a paper round worked in my favour for they could see I was not afraid of hard work.

Hard work brings its own rewards. Don't be lazy, get stuck in.

Pray: thanking God for work.

Reflect: do I work hard or simply float by?

He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. (v.24)

Philip Yancey tells about an African safari he was on where he saw an old momma giraffe taking care of her offspring. Shortly after he was born, she went over and kicked her offspring, and it looked like she was really hurting her baby. Then she did it again.

Each time, the little giraffe would get up on his wobbly legs and try to walk. Still she continued kicking him. Finally, he got up pretty rapidly and ran away from her kicks. Phil turned to his guide and asked, “Why does the mother giraffe do that?”

The guide answered, “The only defence the giraffe has is its ability to get up quickly and to out run its predator. If it can’t do that, it will soon die.”

Yancey said that while it looked like it was a cruel thing, it was really the most loving thing the mother could do for her offspring. Sometimes, discipline of our children is the same way – we feel bad for doing it but we know it is the right thing to do (and I’m not advocating kicking your child nor condoning those who use excessive force against their children!).

We have to discipline our children early in life so that they are prepared for living well as they grow. It is a parent’s responsibility to teach a child right from wrong. Now at times we feel bad for that. Our child has just run into the middle of the road without looking so we shout at our child and discipline them for their reckless action. Then we are filled with remorse and hug them tight thankful that they are safe. That is the right action. For they need to learn.

Early childhood teaching requires both parental discipline and balanced kindness and love. If we love our child we will show it in appropriate discipline of them. Proverbs 13:24 reminds us that we show our love to our children by being careful to discipline them.

Pray: thanking God for your children.

Reflect: do I have the right balance between discipline and love?

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.
(v.12)

An anaesthesiologist was administering a controlled mixture of oxygen and gas to a patient in a New York hospital. When one of the tanks was empty, the doctor began using a new one clearly marked “Oxygen.” Almost immediately the patient died.

The coroner’s autopsy revealed carbon dioxide poisoning. Upon investigation, the second tank was found to contain pure carbon dioxide and had been mislabelled. The manufacturer denied any wrongdoing. No one knew how this tragic mistake could have gotten by the inspectors.

Fortunately, such errors are rare. But in the spiritual realm they occur all the time. Regarding salvation, many people will say, “As long as I’m sincere, I’ll come out all right in the end.” They believe they can get to heaven by their good word and good works; but no matter how right it may seem, it’s “the way of death” (verse 12).

Lots of things seem right to us – but some of those things that seem good lead to hell. Things seem right to us because of our fallen human nature. Things seem right to us because we see other people doing them and follow suit. Things seem right to us for they bring us joy. The route that non-Christians choose may seem right to them, but it leads to eternal loss. Keep on the right path, no matter how many are running the other way.

The right way is God’s way. Jesus said, ‘*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*’ (John 14:6). In life we ought to test our thoughts and ways against God’s Word. We ought not to rely on other people and follow their example without first testing it. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and follow him.

Pray: asking God to help us keep on the right track.

Reflect: do I follow the crowd or follow Jesus?

A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence. (v.5)

A man was on the golf practice course, when the club pro, Maury, brought an important-looking man out for a lesson. Maury watched the guy swing several times and started making suggestions for improvement, but each time the pupil interrupted with his own versions of what was wrong and how to correct it. After a few minutes of this interference, Maury began nodding his head in agreement. At the end of the lesson, the man paid Maury, congratulated him on his expertise as a teacher and left in an obviously pleased frame of mind.

The observer was so astonished by the performance that he had to ask, "Why did you go along with him?" "Son," the old pro said with a grin as he carefully pocketed his fee, "I learned long ago that it's a waste of time to sell answers to a man who wants to buy echoes."

Here in Proverbs 15:5 we learn that the one who '*heeds correction shows prudence*'. Had the golfer listened to the professional he may well have improved his game. None of us likes to listen to advice from others – we often think we know best ourselves. The wise person, though, admits that they do not know everything and can actually learn from others. Indeed as we listen to correction we change things for the better.

As young people we often don't listen to our parents as we go through that rebellious phase when they don't know anything at all. When we spurn our parent's advice we are fools says Solomon. With the experience they have, they have much to teach us – indeed often helping us to avoid the mistakes that they made.

It doesn't matter how young or old we are, it is always a wise thing to listen to the counsel of others.

Pray: thanking God for wise friends in your life.

Reflect: do I listen to the advice of others and follow it?