

The Pavilion:

God's Playlist for Dark Days

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication

Preface

Introduction

Chapter 1 – Think On These Things: Christian Meditation

Chapter 2 – God’s Playlist: Why the Psalms Are So Important to the Christian Experience

Chapter 3 – Track #1 – Psalm 3

Chapter 4 – Track #2 – Psalm 27

Chapter 5 – Track #3 – Psalm 86

Conclusion

## Dedication

This is the first of many books I hope to write. This initial book is dedicated to Angie. Angie, we have enjoyed God's playlist together through this dance of life. I could have asked for no better partner and friend. You have hidden in the pavilion with me and weathered untold storms.

May we enjoy many more years together as we continue to hide in the pavilion.

I made a wish and you came true!

Yours always and forever,

Bryan

## Preface

I wanted to say a quick word about the nature of this book. This book has a pastor's tone. This is, by no means, a theological treatise or exegetical commentary. The target audience of this book is River City Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. I have the privilege of leading this amazing assembly of believers. During the COVID-19 crisis of 2020, I began sharing devotionals at 7:00 each morning with my church family. My heart was to use the Psalms to teach them how to pray and look to God in troubling times. The response was overwhelmingly positive. As the days turned into weeks, I chose to slow down and only cover a couple of verses a day, instead of an entire Psalm each day.

When the study took me to Psalm 27, I opened up my Bible software (I use [Olive Tree](#)) to Psalm 27 and noticed that I had a note by each verse. These notes were dated. I realized that during a past season of great difficulty in my life, God used a slow, meditative approach to Psalms in order to guide my heart and encourage my spirit. When I began to read through those notes, God reminded me about some of the lessons He had taught me during challenging times. I felt that my church could be helped by taking the same approach during their personal time of struggle.

This meditative approach became the focus of the morning devotional time. Starting the last week of March, I slowed down the study even more and unpacked each verse. Again, the purpose was not to do a deep exposition of the Word as much as it was to display a devotional approach to God's truth. My prayer was that my church would learn to read the Bible devotionally. I wanted them to begin reading for quality, not just quantity. I wanted my church to learn how real, relevant, practical, and helpful the Word of God really is. I share that same burden for anyone who may choose to read this. I fear that many Christians are told that they

need to read the Bible, but they are not always told how to commune with God in reading the Bible. The difference between the two is critical. The difference between the two is meditation.

So, as you read this short book, I pray you will keep that in mind. I pray that you will be helped in developing your devotional life. I pray that you will take the examples that I have given, my personal Psalms playlist, and launch into a season of meditation on the Psalms like never before! I would recommend purchasing a journaling Psalter in the English translation that you love the most, grab a pen, fill up your favorite mug with your favorite coffee, and begin the journey of leaning into the Psalms during difficult days.

Pastor Bryan Samms

Jacksonville, FL

April 2020

## Introduction

I live in sunny Florida, and I love it! As this introduction is being written, Jacksonville, Florida, has just experienced two days of record high temperatures (92 degrees and 93 degrees in March!). It was so hot I saw a dog chasing a cat, and they were both walking (that was a joke 😊). I love the warm summers, bright sunshine, and the great outdoors! I have always joked and said that if God called me to minister in Wisconsin, I would become Jonah! But seriously, it gets hot in Florida.

In the summer of 2018, my wife and I were blessed to purchase a beautiful home near our church. We had recently moved from California and were fortunate to have built significant equity in our home. Together, we decided to use our equity to build a pool in our backyard. In the design of the pool, we made sure that there was room on the side of the pool for a large sitting area. This is our spot. Here you will find us sipping on iced coffee with our friends as our children splash and play in the pool with their friends.

This sitting area has one very important feature: a canopy. This canopy was installed so that we could sit under it in the summer and be protected from the heat and the sun. The canopy stands between us and the hot sun to protect us from the heat and harmful exposure to UV rays. We know that extended exposure to these elements can actually be harmful to our skin. So, a canopy was erected to ensure that we were covered.

## God's Pavilion

The summer of 2019 was the most difficult season of ministry that I have ever experienced. My heart was broken into a thousand pieces. The church that I love and have given my life to serve, was in turmoil. The details are insignificant to share, but the experience is not. I experienced betrayal and personal attack. The majority of the people who had called me to be their pastor just three years before had left me. Many of them even actively tried to stir up a group against me to remove me from being the pastor. I was yelled at to my face and talked about behind my back. People posted vindictive and hurtful comments on social media. It was a complete disaster.

Honestly, I was scared, hurt, and discouraged. I remember sobbing in the arms of one of my deacons at the height of the conflict. I couldn't sleep. I wanted to quit. It was literally heartbreaking. I identified with David when he said, "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes" (Psalm 6:6-7).

During this season, Angie and I collected meaningful Gospel songs into a playlist that we listened to constantly. This playlist was labeled "The Pavilion." It was a group of songs including:

"The Goodness of the Lord" recorded by Travis Ryan

"Sovereign Over Us" recorded by Shane and Shane

"The Lord is My Salvation" recorded by Keith and Kristyn Getty

"Whom Shall I Fear" recorded by Chris Tomlin

"Be Still My Soul (In You I Rest)" recorded by Kari Jobe

“Just Be Held” recorded by Casting Crowns

These songs became our anthems during this season. You may be asking, “Why did you call them ‘The Pavilion’?” The “pavilion” is a term found in Psalm 27:5. I will look at this Psalm in some detail later in the book, but let me explain the word here for just a moment. David says that when he is in a time of trouble, God will hide him in “His pavilion.” This particular word is a reference to a small hut, cottage, or tent. Another biblical word is “refuge.” The seeming difference between the two is that a refuge is a permanent fixture while the pavilion is a temporary fixture.

I am so thankful that God is a refuge. Psalm 46 speaks to this. He is the constant, solid fixture upon which my faith can rest. What struck me about the word pavilion is that, because it is a temporary fixture, my trouble during this season must have been intended by God to be temporary. His pavilion is a place for me to hide temporarily from the trouble that was coming my way. Thankfully, the pavilion worked. God provides His Word to minister to our hearts in specific seasons to help us get through. That is what happened to me. There were Psalms that had particular significance to me during this season. It was like God wrote them just for me, just for this season.

## **Somebody Has You Covered**

For many years, my wife and I traveled in an itinerant Gospel ministry. An average of 50,000 miles per year was spent on the road traveling from church to church. We traveled in a large truck and pulled behind us a fifth wheel trailer as our home on the road. There are many funny and crazy stories I could tell here, but one stands out as relevant to the conversation. In



the early 2000's, Angie and I were traveling along Interstate 35 from Kansas City, Missouri, to Emporia, Kansas. Storm clouds began gathering in the sky. Heavy rains began to pummel the windshield of our truck. My wife's phone rang with a call from her dad.

"I'm just checking on you," he said. "There are tornado warnings in that area. What town are you in? What mile marker are you at?" Notorious for devastating tornadoes, the state of Kansas can be a scary place to be in when the weather is bad (Remember the Wizard of Oz!). For the next several minutes, Angie's dad stayed on the phone as he gave us real time radar updates. He told us that it would be a good idea to pull under the next overpass and wait out the storm. That's exactly what we did. We pulled over under that shelter and waited until the storm passed. We were under the careful watch of Angie's father, who was able to see what we couldn't see and give us appropriate direction.

This is a great picture of our Heavenly Father watching over us. He knows the storms. He even allows the storms. He knows where to place us temporarily so that we will make it to the other side. That is what this book is about. It is about how God led me through a stormy season of life and the pavilion that he placed me under until the storm passed.

## **The Word of God: The Ultimate Pavilion**

During my dark and cloudy ministry season, I knew that what I needed to do was lean into God and press into His Word. That season pushed me into the Psalms. It was here that I could identify with the emotions of the biblical songwriters. The situations that David experienced were different than mine. However, the feelings I experienced were remarkably similar. I am thankful that God's Word, though written in some cases thousands of years before,

is living and sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). This book will help you lean into the Psalms using the Biblical tool of meditation and grow close to God in times of trouble.

## Think on These Things: Christian Meditation

In Philippians 4:8, Paul encourages his readers to “think on these things.” The point here is not to provide detail on the eight stellar virtues that should occupy the Christian mind. The point is to draw your attention, first of all, to the fact that God cares what we think about. This verb “think” is imperative. The believer is told to think about certain things. The second truth in this phrase is that we have a choice in our thinking. Paul lays out these eight virtues that should consume the Christian mind. These are the specific things that I am supposed to think about. I can evaluate my thoughts in light of this list and determine if I am pleasing God with my meditation. It is the responsibility of every believer to have his mind oriented to God and to things that please God. Meditation is the link between God’s Word and the transformation of my mind.

### What is Meditation?

While mysterious Eastern religions and cults have hijacked the word *meditation*, Christians must be reoriented to the biblical teaching of meditation. The most notable verse in the Bible regarding meditation is in Joshua 1:8:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but ***you shall meditate*** in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

The Hebrew word for *meditate* means “to muse or mutter.” As it applies specifically to meditation, it means to speak to oneself. It means that we are to take God’s Word and talk to ourselves about it. The following verses show us that this was commonly practiced by the Psalm writers themselves:

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And *in His law he meditates* day and night. (Psalm 1:2).

I will *meditate on Your precepts* and contemplate Your ways. (Psalm 119:15)

Oh, how I love Your law! *It is my meditation* all the day. (Psalm 119:97)

The focus of our meditation is the Word of God. By meditating on the Word of God, we are led to contemplate the ways of God (Psalm 119:15), the works of God (Psalm 77:12), and the nature of God (Psalm 145:5). The Word of God is the gateway to intimacy with God. If I want to know Him, He must be pursued, thought of, and adored. The act of meditation places my thoughts on God and, naturally, my affections upon God. If we know God, we love God. And loving God is our greatest goal (Matthew 22:37-28).

Perhaps the greatest definition of meditation came from the late Bible scholar, Dr. J.I. Packer in the book, [\*Knowing God\*](#). Packer says, “Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.”<sup>1</sup> This shows that meditation is intentional, devotional, and applicational.

## **Why is Meditation Important?**

Meditation is important because God’s Word weighs in so heavily on how we think. We have learned that meditation is about thinking intentionally, devotionally, and applicably about God’s truth. Paul told the Colossian church that they needed to set their minds on things above

---

<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity, 1973), 23

(Colossians 3:1-2). Godward thoughts are good thoughts. God should be the center of our thoughts and our affections. This is important because how we think leads to how we act (Proverbs 23:7). This is why our thoughts and meditations must be pleasing and acceptable to God (Psalm 19:14).

Meditation is also important because our minds need to be transformed to the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). The goal of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of Christ (II Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:28-29). This process is called sanctification. Sanctification is often mistaken as conformity to a list of rules and regulations that govern human activity. These are often labeled as “standards” by some Christians and, unfortunately, become the tests of Christian maturity. The Bible paints a completely different picture of sanctification.

Sanctification is an inside out work. God works on the inside of our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Scripture pierces us like a sword into the very thoughts and intentions of our lives. This is where God does His work in us. In a classic passage on sanctification, Romans 12 says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Ephesians 4:22-24 speak of the same plan as God transforms old habits into new habits. The key to sanctification is a transformed heart and mind. The key to a transformed heart and mind is Scripture. The key to getting Scripture in your heart and mind is meditation.

Meditation is important, therefore, because God’s Word has the power to transform us. God’s Word is wonderfully powerful. One spoken word caused creation. One spoken word calmed a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee. One spoken word brought Lazarus back from the dead. While those stories are compelling, the power of the Word is best seen in its power to change the human heart. The Bible cleanses us (John 15:3), builds us (Acts 20:32), and grows us (I Peter 2:2). I love how Psalm 19 speaks to this:

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

It should be obvious that we need the Word of God. We need the Word of God in our hearts and minds. Thankfully, we have a tool that can accomplish this in our lives.

## **How to Meditate**

I want to take this final section of the chapter and practically walk you through how you can begin practicing meditation. Although this will not necessarily be exhaustive, it is a start. You may not be an expert on meditation, but thankfully, you don't have to be. Just do it. In a later appendix, I have listed some tools and other resources for you to further your study and better develop your practices of meditation. However, in order for you to begin, these five steps should get you moving in the right direction.

- 1. Read** – Really, it all begins with reading the Bible. Again, for the purposes of meditation, I want to encourage you to pick a book of the Bible and walk intentionally and slowly through the book. Your plan is to read the book. However, the pace of reading the book is no longer a consideration.

Reading the Bible utilizing a reading plan is a good thing, but it will not lead you to intentional meditation. Although I would like to give you an easy plan to follow, meditation best occurs without an agenda. Just read one phrase, one verse, or one paragraph, and begin to think about it.

At this point, you will need a good Bible dictionary or web resource ([blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) is my personal favorite). Look up the definition of every word in the verse. Think about every promise, every statement about God, and every truth about yourself. Additionally, you should have some reference materials to help you with historical context, background, and other relevant data to ensure proper interpretation. A good, conservative Bible commentary like [Warren Weirsbe's Bible Exposition Series](#) would prove most helpful.

**2. Rephrase** – Now you will want to rephrase the statements of the Bible to make it personally applicable. I will show you some examples of this as I walk through my own playlist beginning with the next chapter. This stage was summarized well by [Robert Morgan](#) when he said, “Meditating is pondering, picturing, and personalizing the Scripture.”<sup>2</sup>

Ask the following questions about your passage:

- How does this verse directly apply to me right now?
- What ways could I imagine God saying this to me if He and I were talking over coffee?
- How would this verse be worded if directly spoken to me and my current situation?

These questions can help you look at the verse with fresh eyes. Remember, at this point you are taking the Scripture from interpretation to application. Here, you are bridging the gap between the original intended audience and you.

---

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, Robert, *Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2017), x

- 3. Recite** – This is the devotional stage of meditation. Meditation is always intended to turn your heart to the Lord. Here I am reciting Scripture back to the Lord. The most effective way to commune with God is to listen to Him speak through His Word and to speak His Word back to Him in prayer. Reciting Scripture to God in prayer is the best way to develop a real walk with God.

As you recite passages back to the Lord, you can expect several necessary aspects of your faith to be developed. **First, your understanding of God Himself will increase.** David said when he sought the Word of God, he was actually seeking the Person of God (Psalm 119:10). **Secondly, confession of sin will occur.** (Psalm 119:9). As we open up God's Word, He opens up our heart. We will see His perfect glory and, at the same time, see how short we have fallen from His standard. **Thirdly, your faith will be built.** As you pray back Scripture to God, you will be claiming promises as your own. You will be building your life on the words of God. You will be living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Praying to God based upon your meditation of His Word will rescue you from disengaged prayer filled with vain repetitions.

- 4. Record** – Once you have read, rephrased, and recited, you then should proceed to recording. This is actually writing out the verse and its application to your heart. Journaling has been a long-standing spiritual discipline. I would recommend reading [\*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life\*](#) by Donald Whitney for a full treatment on spiritual disciplines. There is even a chapter in the book about journaling. However, for our purposes here, I just want to encourage you to journal along with your meditation. Journaling will help you clarify and capture your thoughts.



Nothing can clarify your thoughts and feelings as well as writing. Sometimes you really don't know what to say until you try to say it. Writing aids you to actually begin saying what you want to say or what you are trying to say. You may not feel like you are a gifted writer and, thankfully, you don't have to be. This is not something that you are doing in order to be recognized or noticed. It is not likely you would ever consider publishing what you write. These words are simply to be kept between you and God.

In addition to clarifying your thoughts, writing captures your thoughts. If you record it in a digital journal, it will be captured and easily accessible. I keep my journal in two places. First, I keep a journal in Evernote. This is a general journal where I record life events and experiences. Secondly, I journal on my digital Bible reading application. Olive Tree allows me to take notes on the verses that I am studying. It is easy to recall and go back to anytime I need. In fact, it was this very practice that sparked the writing of this book.

- 5. Review** – David expressed his desire to “remember” what God had done on many occasions (Psalm 42:6; Psalm 77:10; Psalm 105:5; Psalm 119:55). Interestingly, each of the verses referenced here about “remembering” was all utilized by David at a dark moment in his life. I am by no means suggesting that the only time you need to remember God is on your dark days. I am suggesting that remembering God on your dark days can be particularly helpful.

The point of each of the four previous steps is to grant us the ability to review and remember what God has done. The songwriter said, “Oh God, our help in ages past, our

hope for years to come!” This is the point of remembering what God has done. By remembering what God has done, we are filled with hope about what He is going to do.

I hope this brief lesson on meditation will encourage you to begin a new pattern of meditation in your own life. The next four chapters of this book will share with you a journey in biblical meditation that I walked through during a very dark season in my life. I imagine that you are reading this book because you, like me, are currently experiencing some dark days or maybe you have experienced some dark days. I pray that the lessons I learned from these four Psalms will encourage your heart and help you learn the practice of meditation. My hope is that you will find your own pavilion to hide in.

## **Chapter 2: Why the Psalms are So Important in the Christian Experience**

We know that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). This means that every word came directly from God and men accurately recorded the words that He gave them. Inherent to the belief in inspiration is the belief in “plenary” inspiration. This means that every word from God is equally inspired. It may seem odd, then, that I am suggesting one portion of Scripture to be “so important.” While all Scripture is certainly important, I believe that the Psalms are particularly important in the experience of life for four reasons.

### **Reason #1 - Because I Need to Know God**

There may be no better theology book in the world than the book of Psalms. My hope for this little essay on the nature of God in Psalms is to show you how the Psalms can teach you about God. Daniel said, “the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits” (Daniel 11:32). It is imperative that we know God. When we know God, we will trust God. When we know God, we will attempt great works for God.

God wants you to know Him. The Scriptures reveal God to us through human language. David said that as he sought the Word, he sought God Himself (Psalm 119:10). Jesus said on at least two occasions that the Scriptures gave witness to Him (John 5:39, Luke 24:27). So, if you want to know God, you need to know the Scriptures. The Psalms are a great aid in teaching me theology because the psalmist speaks truth about God in clear and concise statements.

Additionally, these statements about God are mixed into the drama of human experience. So, the theological statements are not just academic musings, they are intended to be statements of faith and trust. God can be known and trusted. God is real and relevant. Who He is matters to who you are and what you are going through.

Eternity will not be long enough to exhaust the glories of God. I could not possibly hope to accomplish this in my small book. Therefore, I am not going to attempt to write a theological masterpiece on Theology Proper. For brevity's sake, I want to draw your attention to just one specific section of a Psalm that illustrates the point at hand. The attributes of God are established in the Psalms as an anchor for the soul and a shelter from the storm. Psalm 31:19-24 will serve as a case study.

### **Psalm 31 . . . God Ministering to Hearts**

A number of years ago, I was asked to preach at a midweek Bible study at my local church. I don't exactly remember all the circumstances or if there was an ongoing series at the time, but I do remember that the Lord impressed upon me the need to preach on Psalm 31. The statement in verse fifteen caught my attention, "My times are in Your hand." That would become the title. This statement is rich with truth about confident dependence upon God. As I began to outline and shape the sermon, I identified with a commentator who said that this Psalm was difficult to outline because David seems to bounce back and forth from trust to despair. Yet, I managed (I think).

As I was about to enter the service, my pastor shared a prayer request with us. One of the faithful members of the church had just received word that their daughter was tragically killed in a car accident on their way home from church. We prayed and went into the service. As we sang the songs, I looked over and saw that this dear couple was sitting in the auditorium. They were singing the songs. They were about to listen to me preach. I felt overwhelmed and ill-equipped to minister to them. Thankfully, I didn't have to. The God who knew them, loved

them, and was there to receive their fainting souls, had already dialed in the sermon for that night.

Psalms 31 is about committing our lives into the hands of God (v. 5) in critical moments when we desperately need Him. Verse five is quoted directly by Christ as He died on Calvary's cross. I assume if it was good enough for Christ to quote with His dying breath, then it must be good enough for me to quote on my darkest day. The psalmist talks about difficulties that were under the direct providence of God. He also speaks of pressing prayer needs as he leans into God and says, "Bow down Your ear to me, Deliver me speedily" (v. 2). Also, the personal pain of sin is mentioned (v. 10-14). Intermingled with the hardship are moments of praise-filled dependence.

After one final explanation of the difficulty that David is experiencing, he concludes the psalm in triumphant praise. The final verses (v. 19-24) remind me of the grand finale of a spectacular fireworks show. Statement after statement extols the virtues of God. These short and powerful declarations give us a small example of how the Psalms declare unto us the glories of God. Here are some statements about God found in these six verses:

- God is good. (v. 19)
- God is present. (v. 20)
- God is kind and gracious. (v. 21)
- God is patient. (v. 22)
- God is protective of His people. (v. 23)
- God provides strength for His people. (v. 24)

This is indeed a wonderful list of qualities about God. This list would provide encouragement for any believer on his most troubled day. Here's a wonderful truth: this is just one Psalm and this is just one sample of how God is revealed in the book of Psalms. There are one hundred fifty of these! They proclaim God to us. They exegete God's nature for us. They demonstrate how God's nature is a place of refuge for His people.

## **Reason #2 - Because I Need to Know How to Pray**

Many of the Psalms are direct prayers to God. The Psalms carry us through a world of prayer. We enter into the prayer closet of a man who was arguably closer to God than any other man in the Old Testament. David's heart was after God. This is not just some abstract idea. His relationship with God was an active pursuit. This journey with God caused David to lean into the law of God for meditation and encouragement. This journey with God also brought David to his knees in prayer.

### ***Prayer Qualities***

David's prayer life as revealed in the Psalms is instructive. We can learn several key qualities of prayer. First, David was real in prayer. Sometimes when you read the Psalms you can almost feel uneasy about the way that David addresses God. Our prayer lives are often cluttered with vain repetitions, self-centered requests, and flowery liturgical words. That's not how David did it. David brought questions to God. David asked, even begged, God to listen to

him. David approached God with child-like faith. He knew God intimately and talked with him accordingly.

Secondly, David was urgent in prayer. He cried out to God as a man who was drowning (Psalm 69:1). He asked God to “make haste to help” him (Psalm 40:13) and said boldly, “do not delay” (Psalm 40:17). These types of requests show that David turned to the Lord in his needs. Prayer to him was not just a routine that he recited. It was not a static list that never changed. Prayer was a lifeline to David in his times of great need.

Thirdly, David was humble in prayer. One of my favorite verses that summarizes this well is Psalm 86:1 which states, “Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me; For I am poor and needy.” Prayer, in and of itself, is an exercise of humility. When you come to God in prayer, you are acknowledging that you do not possess the wisdom, strength, solutions, and courage that you need. Prayer, in part, is an admission to God of my desperate need for Him. It is good, however, to go ahead and tell God this as you enter into His presence.

### *Prayers for Every Occasion*

Prayer has no boundaries. You are not limited to pray about certain issues, but about every issue. When life is good, we pray with joyful celebration. When life is hard, we pray with grievous lamentation. When sickness comes, we pray with hopeful expectation. When relationships fail, we pray with needed restoration. When provision is given, we pray with grateful adoration. When sin overtakes, we pray with repentant confession. We agree with Paul that “in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, (we are to) let (our) requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

One of the intricate beauties of the Psalms is the variety of circumstances and, subsequently, prayers that you find. The Psalms provide a textbook for the classroom of prayer. In the Psalms you will find prayers of praise and adoration (Psalm 103). In the Psalms you will find simple prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude (Psalm 100). In the Psalms you will find prayers of repentance (Psalm 51). In the Psalms you will find intercessory prayers. In the Psalms you will find imprecatory prayers (Psalm 69). In the Psalms you will find lament prayers (Psalm 42, 43). In the Psalms you will find prayers of commitment and dedication (Psalm 116).

The list above is just a small sampling. There are many other Psalms that represent each type of prayer listed. Whatever your need may be as you are reading, stop right now and read the Psalm that is appropriate to your circumstance and learn how to pray with David as your guide. You are certain to find your prayer life enriched as you leave the struggle of an unguided prayer life in exchange for a Word-directed prayer life.

### **Reason #3 - Because I Need to Know How to Struggle**

Church father Athanasius said, “The other Scriptures speak to us, but the Psalms speak for us.” The Psalms open up our hearts to the intense struggle of the human experience. These experiences cause us to swing between trust and doubt as we are suspended between calm and chaos. Here we learn that the earthly pilgrimage of life is a struggle and the struggle is ok. The Psalm writers faced innumerable enemies (Psalm 3:6), distress (Psalm 4:1), failure (Psalm 6:1), deep sorrow (Psalm 6:6), hopelessness and depression (Psalm 42:5), and personal betrayal (Psalm 55:13). Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list. The point is that the struggle was real with David and the struggle will be real with you.



The struggles that we go through take us on an emotional rollercoaster. The Psalm writers share the scope of human emotions. Here, in the dark caves of Engedi, you will listen to David cry out to God in great fear. Here, in the valley of the shadow of death, you will experience David's steadfast trust in God. Here, while embracing broken-hearted Bathsheba, you will feel the very weight of sin bearing down upon your heart. You need to feel this weight. The good news about the Psalms is that they allow us to take our emotions to God and find peace with our emotions through God. Your emotions are part of your existence. But, they do not have to rule your existence. There is only one person who has the proper authority to rule you and it's not you.

The struggle that believers experience is not evidence that we are doing something wrong. In fact, I would argue that the absence of struggle indicates the presence of a problem. Believers have a war within themselves (Galatians 5:16-17). A lack of struggle in the Christian experience could likely only mean one of two things. First, it could mean that the individual is not a genuine believer. Secondly, it could mean that the individual has given up. So, embrace the struggle. Struggle on. Struggle hard. Struggle forward. But, whatever you do, don't interpret the struggle as abnormal.

#### **Reason #4 - Because I Need to Know How to Suffer**

The Psalms exegete suffering. David suffered mightily. His heart was broken on many occasions for many reasons. These heart-rending seasons brought about some of the most beautiful biblical literature! Suffering is part of the Christian experience (James 1:2). Suffering identifies us with Jesus (Philippians 3:10). Suffering grows our faith (James 1:3-4). Suffering

produces tried and true Christian experience (I Peter 1:7). Suffering causes us to know the power and glory of Jesus like nothing else will (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). So, we really need to learn to suffer well.

Suffering is often greatly misunderstood by the believer. On one occasion, Jesus encountered a man who had been blind from his birth (John 9:1). Then, perhaps one of the most ridiculous questions that ever left a human mouth was asked. “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2) Really? What did the boy do that caused him to be born blind? Just let that one sink in. The struggle of needing to label a cause for human suffering is as old as Job, and the need to connect every personal human calamity with a specific sin is a gigantic mistake.

The scary part about this story and question is where the question originated. You might expect this question to come from a Pharisee, but unfortunately, it came from His disciples. These were genuine followers of Jesus, but they were misinformed on suffering. At this point, they represent at least two types of immature believers. They represent shallow Christians who believe that God exists to make their lives comfortably filled with health and wealth. They also represent pharisaical believers who mistakenly think that they live on a merit system with God. Both are serious failures in thinking.

Jesus answers the question once and for all. “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: ***but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.***” This is the key to Christian suffering. We look to what God is doing FOR us and THROUGH us rather than what God is doing TO us. God’s work in us through trials is one of the great demonstrations of His grace in our lives.

This brings us back to Psalms and suffering. There is an entire section of Psalms that are labeled “Lament Psalms.” For a wonderful treatment of this subject, I want to recommend [\*Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy\*](#) by Mark Vroegrop. But, for now, let me just quote Mark to show you how lament can be helpful. “Lament gives you permission to vocalize your pain as it moves you toward God-centered worship and trust. Lament is how you live between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God’s sovereignty.”<sup>3</sup> In my darkest ministry season, lament became my friend. Lament produced this book. Lament covers at least half of the content of the Psalms. You need lament.

In short, Psalms of lament show us that crying out to God is a good thing. Lament shows us that asking God questions and wrestling with paradox is acceptable and even good. Lament shows me how to throw my dependence upon God when I am hurting. Lament points me to the character of God as my refuge from harsh storms. Lament is good because lament is from God. The Psalms will greatly aid you in HOW to suffer WHEN you suffer.

### **All to the Praise of His Glory**

Learning how to know God, to struggle, to pray, and to suffer faithfully will lead us to a life of praise. This life of praise will ultimately bring glory to God. Utilizing the Psalms to grow this way will bring your life into alignment with His will. Isn’t this the end of all things in the Christian experience? All of the experiences of life should resound to the praise of God for the glory of God. This is why Paul said, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31). The Psalms are God’s instrument to bring our

---

<sup>3</sup> Vroegrop, Mark, *Dark Clouds Deep Mercy* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2019), 20.

lives into continual praise. After all, this is what the Psalms actually are. The word *psalm* means “a song” or particularly, “a song of praise.”

The remainder of this book is an examination of three specific Psalms that God has used as balm for my hurting heart. As you walk through these with me, I pray that your spiritual eyes will see the value of Psalms in your everyday life. I pray this will launch you into a daily, meaningful, rich, and exciting journey of Psalm-focused meditation.

### Chapter 3: Track #1 – Psalm 3

Don't you just love music? I love all kinds of music and all kinds of music are used in different ways in my life. There is music for studying, exercising, relaxing, entertaining, and soul-feeding (just to name a few). When I study, I have to listen to instrumental music of which I do not know the lyrics. I guess I am just easily distracted. My personal favorite is Celtic Irish Instrumental. Don't ask me why. I'm not from Ireland. I don't know anyone from Ireland. I didn't even grow up listening to Irish music. It's just true. The folksy, string-based sound just puts me in the mood to study and grade papers!

Angie and I have a "Poolside Jams" playlist. We listen to this list when we are relaxing by the pool with our family and friends. It's a mixture of fun songs ranging from Christian to Hawaiian to Easy Listening. Our favorite song on the list is "Knee Deep in the Water Somewhere." It's a great hymn of the faith . . . oh . . . wait . . . nevermind. But, it is a great song! We love the beach. We love to get away together. It's our song that makes us dream of our next vacation.

Obviously, I love worship music. I love to hear great hymns and worship songs that endear my heart to Christ and the Gospel. I have always loved choir music as well. The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir and the Prestonwood Baptist Choir have always been two of my favorites. I don't think I will ever forget hearing the song, "But Thou, O Lord" for the very first time. It is a choir song based on Psalm 3. There is a bridge near the end of the song that has multiple key changes. It is hard to hear that song without feeling that my heart is going to explode with joyful praise. Or, as my country friend would say, "When I hear that song, I feel like I'm gonna rapture right outta here!" It is so true. What a glorious song!

I must admit, however, that this Psalm did not have deep meaning to me until the summer of 2019. I identified with the psalmist as he said, “Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me.” This statement made the Bible burst alive with relevance and meaning for me in my moment of trouble. This is why I have added this Psalm to my playlist. From the very first statement, this Psalm has become one rich with meaning for me. God’s grace has comforted my heart in untold ways through Psalm 3.

It is obvious that David was experiencing this Psalm at a time when his enemies were rising up against him. It is without a doubt a reference to the season of his life when either King Saul (I Samuel 21-23) or his son, Absalom (II Samuel 16-17), chased after him. Their mobs hunted down David like he was an animal. The attacks forced him into wilderness retreat. It is here in the wilderness that David would feel as if the world was caving in around him. The trouble found its source in people that he loved. This was a hard and painful season filled with betrayal and broken relationships. It is here that David found his hope in God.

### **READ PSALM 3**

Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!  
Many are they who rise up against me.  
Many are they who say of me,  
“There is no help for him in God.”  
Selah  
But You, O Lord, are a shield for me,  
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.  
I cried to the Lord with my voice,  
And He heard me from His holy hill.  
Selah  
I lay down and slept;  
I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.  
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people  
Who have set themselves against me all around.  
Arise, O Lord;  
Save me, O my God!  
For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone;  
You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.  
Salvation belongs to the Lord.  
Your blessing is upon Your people.  
Selah

## REPHRASE PSALM 3

**Psalm 3:1** - The attacks of these people have come upon me like a mob. This group has intensified with time and with purpose. They are “many.” One enemy is one too many. However, David confesses to have multiple enemies who are united in their purpose to cause David trouble. They rise up like a storm over the Sea of Galilee. There is no warning of such storms. They just appear as a sudden, violent, and frightening storm. And, it was personal. They rise up against “me.” When it’s personal, it is more painful.

**Psalm 3:2** – The attack was directly upon David’s relationship with God. They are saying essentially, “This guy is not going to make it. He is hopeless. God is not with him and he is surely going to collapse.” Enemies definitely know how to hit you where it hurts. David was known to be a man after God’s heart (I Samuel 13:14). Here, David identifies with Christ who had the same questions hurled at Him as He hung on the cross. “If you are really the Son of God, come down! If God is with you, why doesn’t He deliver you from this crucifixion?”

**Psalm 3:3** – God is the direction of his focus and, therefore, his trust. All the support and encouragement that a man needs is in God. In particular, he says that God was a “shield” for him. God is that one that David stood behind. David trusted in God to protect him from the harm that was coming at him. David was covered by God’s protective shield. Also, when David’s head was hanging low with discouragement, God lifted up his head. David’s circumstances did not change, but his perspective did change. He did not need to look to others for acceptance and validation.

**Psalm 3:4** – David’s prayer here is described as a cry. A cry is an emotion-filled plea of desperation. The pain was real and caused great emotional trauma in David’s life. David understood PTSD before it was ever diagnosed. This cry was audible. He cried to the Lord with his “voice.” When a believer combines his heart and his voice in prayer, he should expect that God will hear and answer. Although God’s dwelling place is described as “His holy hill,” prayer unites believers to God in the place from which they reach to Him.

**Psalm 3:5** – Here we begin to see the effects of this prayer upon David’s heart. Life is going to continue to go on. David will lie down, sleep, and wake just like he always has. Now he will experience the added blessing of lying down and sleeping with peace. What a difference from verse one to verse five! David lays his troubles down in prayer and walks out in total peace. This is the experience of life that we all get to choose. God is going to sustain His people. It is a promise, and therefore, it is certain. The choice we have is clear. We can wrestle and stress and worry about the trouble we are facing, or we can give it to God and rest.

**Psalm 3:6** – His dependence on God not only brought peace, but it also brought about great confidence. Sometimes the opposition can be innumerable. David says “ten thousands of people” were against him. There was no official count here. This is David’s way of saying that it was an enormous group of people. The opposition was also strategic. They positioned themselves all around David attempting to get every angle and inflict pain anywhere they could. Even yet, he will not be afraid. When the believer’s heart is fixed upon the Lord, there is nothing to fear. God is bigger than any crowd and He has every angle covered.



**Psalm 3:7** – This meditation by David upon God has created within him a desire to pray. This prayer is bold, passionate, and personal. It is a request for God to come to his rescue.

Remember, If someone attacks a child of God, they attack the God of that child. Now, the picture of God defending his child is indeed a graphic picture. God is going to strike the enemies on the cheek and break their teeth. One person you do not want to get hit by is God. You can be sure that when you get hit by Him it will be necessary, direct, and debilitating. When God's enemies stand against God's people, they will be broken and destroyed. There is no greater picture of this than the cross and the resurrection.

**Psalm 3:8** - Ultimately, God is the one who rescues us. God's blessing is resting upon those who are His. These statements are always true. Regardless of what we are experiencing in this life, God is our Savior and we are always objects of His blessing.

### **RECITE PSALM 3**

Lord, this is a season of immeasurable hurts from people. It seems that people have gathered in droves to bring about my demise. It troubles me. I feel the pain inside my soul. Their words have been like arrows. They have questioned my relationship with you. Lord, you know me. I feel like Peter who said, "Lord, you know that I love you."

Today, I look to you. You are not like them. You are my shield. Thank you that you have me covered no matter what accusations and attacks are hurled at me. You are my protection. I am your child and you will allow no weapon to prosper which has been formed against me. I am thankful that in this time, my relationship with you has brought encouragement

to my heart. You have lifted my hanging head. My circumstances don't need to change when I have you. You are always the source of my joy.

Now, I ask you to rise to the occasion and remove my enemies. Disrupt their plans. Stop their mouths. Intervene for me. There are too many enemies for me to count, but You are greater than all of them. So, I thank you that my enemies are defeated because my Captain is greater than all. You are my salvation. I claim the blessing of sonship today and hide in you.

- Amen

### **RECORD PSALM 3**

Now, it's your turn. Take Psalm 3, your journal, and your pen to a quiet place. Reflect on each verse. Think of every word. How does it speak to your heart? Write down your thoughts and prayers. Keep it somewhere where you can return to it for further reflection. My record on Psalm 3 occurred on July 16-18, 2019. Each journal entry was early in the morning. There, God ministered the medicine of His word to the hurts of my heart. I have returned to these entries many times. I pray your journaling will do the same for you.

## Chapter 4: Track #2 – Psalm 27

Have you ever stopped and really considered what makes you afraid? For me, that list is not particularly long (at least I don't think it is). My list does not include psychological fears that are trauma induced. My list does not include the fear of public speaking (which I hear people fear more than dying). My list doesn't even include death because, thanks to Jesus, the sting of death has been forever removed from me. And, thankfully, my list is absent of the fear of water (I love to swim and fish!), the fear of crowds (the gathered church is my favorite place), or the fear of food (yes, there is such a thing!).

No, most of my fears revolve around animals. Although I love the outdoors, I am absolutely terrified of certain animals, including horses (I have never been on one), dogs (that is - dogs that are on the loose. I have been attacked more than once.), and ALL REPTILES . That may sound odd to you, but it's true. I will freeze in fear over a snake. Manly, right? I worked at a summer youth camp for six summers. During training week the staff had to study a manual which included a section on "camp critters" to be familiar with. On the page with snakes, we were taught how to know if a snake is poisonous, in part, by looking at the shape of its eyes. Are you kidding me? So, if I see a snake, I am supposed to take a good look at the eyes and determine if it's poisonous? No. I'm running!

I would imagine that if every believer wrote out their five favorite Psalms, it is likely that Psalm 27 would be significantly represented. It is just good. It helps the believer navigate his fears and crush them in the presence of God. Here is a reality. You have fears. I have fears. Our fears may have different objects, but we all know how crippling fear can be. So does God. This is why He addresses our fears so often in the Word. There are significant amounts of admonitions in Scripture to not fear. Some have even suggested that when you add up the

various ways that this admonition is stated in the Bible, there are three hundred sixty-five (one admonition for every day of the year). Be that as it may, fear is real and God's Word is the answer.

## **Read Psalm 27**

The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the strength of my life;  
Of whom shall I be afraid?  
When the wicked came against me  
To eat up my flesh,  
My enemies and foes,  
They stumbled and fell.  
Though an army may encamp against me,  
My heart shall not fear;  
Though war may rise against me,  
In this I will be confident.  
One thing I have desired of the Lord,  
That will I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
All the days of my life,  
To behold the beauty of the Lord,  
And to inquire in His temple.  
For in the time of trouble  
He shall hide me in His pavilion;  
In the secret place of His tabernacle  
He shall hide me;  
He shall set me high upon a rock.  
And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me;  
Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;  
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.  
Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice!  
Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.  
When You said, "Seek My face,"  
My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."  
Do not hide Your face from me;  
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;  
You have been my help;  
Do not leave me nor forsake me,  
O God of my salvation.  
When my father and my mother forsake me,  
Then the Lord will take care of me.  
Teach me Your way, O Lord,  
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.  
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;  
For false witnesses have risen against me,

And such as breathe out violence.  
I would have lost heart, unless I had believed  
That I would see the goodness of the Lord  
In the land of the living.  
Wait on the Lord;  
Be of good courage,  
And He shall strengthen your heart;  
Wait, I say, on the Lord!

## REPHRASE PSALM 27

**Psalm 27:1** - Because the Lord is My Light and My Salvation, I will not be afraid of people.

God, you are my *Light* – You pierce darkness. You give perspective and clarity. You make paths clear. You protect me from falling, tripping, or running into things that I cannot see. You help me see and find something that I am looking for. You show me where not to go and where to go.

God, you are my *Salvation* – You are my deliverance, my forgiveness, my rescue, my hope, my new life, my cancelled sin debt, and my future. You take care of my past sins, my present sins, and my future sins so that I will never face condemnation. This truth assures me of your love. It assures me that I matter and that I belong.

God, you are the *Strength* of my life – Your strength helps me to walk and to work. Your strength undergirds my heavy load. Your strength supernaturally provides what I could never get on my own. Your strength carries me, infuses me, emboldens me, fills me, and helps me.

*Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid* - Here, David is not afraid of something, but of someone. People are often the source of fear. What do they think about me? Will they accept me? Will they always be there for me? Will they forsake me or be loyal? Are they

plotting my hurt or demise? God's strength can help me not to fear people. God will allow me to love and serve the people you entrust to me and completely forget about the rest.

**Psalm 27:2** - Wicked people have wicked intentions and are even willing to inflict pain on those they hate. They are enemies and foes, not friends. Generally, believers could deal with fewer enemies in their lives. David is asking God to cause them to stumble and fall. They come against me "*to eat up my flesh.*" That is, they want to harm and hurt me. How sad and personally painful it is to know that someone actually wants to do you harm!

**Psalm 27:3** - Surely an entire army of people coming against you would be frightening. You are outnumbered, intimidated, endangered, and threatened. They are deliberate and vindictive. Only God could put you in the position where your heart would not be afraid. My faith secures me when my heart slips. Then, when the war rages and the battle is hot, David's confidence returns to these truths about God. God is what He says He is, even when your circumstances shout something different.

**Psalm 27:4** - Your heart should really only desire one thing in all of your trouble. It should desire to dwell deeply in the house of the Lord. Your "dwelling" is in the house of the Lord. This is where you live. This is where you are at home. This is where your heart is. This is where your family is. This is where you can be yourself. This is where you are reminded of what is real and what is true. Oh, how much the heart of the believer should crave the house of God!

One commitment that you must make in all of your sorrow is that you will dwell in God's house "**forever.**" This is a lifetime relationship. This is what God would have you to focus on. This is where your affections lie, because here is where you get to gaze upon God. It is here that you get to have your affections stirred as you meditate on how delightful and good God is. It is here that I get to "**inquire.**" When you come to the house of God, you get to bring your questions and return with eternal answers.

**Psalm 27:5** – Why does the believer go to the house of God in times of great difficulty? This verse provides the answer. Notice the first word, *for*. This word expresses the "why" of going to the house of God. We go to the house of God because God is there for you just in the time of trouble. When you can't handle it, God can. God takes you and protects you in His "**pavilion.**"

In our backyard, we put up a pavilion so that we can sit under it in the summer to protect us from the heat and the sun. The shade brings comfort and lowers the dangerous exposure of extended time in the sun. This is what God does for you. He gives you relief when you need it. Pavilions and tabernacles were temporary structures. The encouragement here is that the trouble is temporary and not permanent. If it were to be permanent, God would have put a permanent structure in place.

He will also lift you "**high upon a rock.**" He will put you in a place where you cannot be touched or reached. The rocks spoken of here are like cliffs that tower high above where most people dwell. The rock is higher than you. The rock is safe. The rock is secure. The rock gives perspective. The rock is where God puts you when you need it most. Psalm 62:1, "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

**Psalm 27:6** - When God is hiding you high upon His rock, you will have a new perspective. Sometimes in the middle of the attacks and the wars, it is hard to have the right perspective. But knowing that God loves you, knows you, and is willing to do anything to protect you, is assurance enough.

**“He will lift up my head.”** The head hanging down is a sign of discouragement. In this text, God will “lift your head.” God is showing a sign of approval and honor in the presence of enemies who are trying to tear you down.

Now, new commitments are going to be made. There are three **“I will”** statements in this verse. David is going to turn his complaint into praise and commitment. The moment of deliverance is a great moment to refresh your commitment to the Lord.

**Psalm 27:7** - Joy came first, but then prayer. Everyone who has been through any trouble at all in their lives will find that their prayer lives will be significantly enhanced in these times. When you are pressed in and troubled by circumstances, doesn't it make you reach out to God in prayer? No doubt, these times will be uncomfortable, but if they produce in you an intimacy with God and a desire for God then you should consider them a good thing. Any challenge, regardless of how difficult, that brings you closer to God and makes you a better believer, is your friend.

**Psalm 27:8** - God's desire is that you **“seek His face.”** This speaks of an up-close and personal walk with the Lord. Do you have an intimate connection with God? Are you close to God? Like Moses, who spoke to God face-to-face, you can enjoy fellowship with God like with your



best friend (Exodus 33:11). When God compels you to seek His face, the response should always be positive and always come from the heart.

**Psalm 27:9-** David here requests that God would not *“hide your face from me.”* This is an expression that is used by David when he needs an answer and it doesn't appear that the answer is anywhere to be found. In two other verses, it adds the phrase *“answer me speedily”* (Psalm 69:17, Psalm 102:2).

He now appeals to former times of help. *“You have been my help.”* God has been the source of help and salvation in the past, and you can expect that He will be the same for you now. He is the one who will rescue you from perilous situations and problematic people just as He always does.

**Psalm 27:10 -** David experienced times when even the best and closest of relationships would forsake him. Sometimes your closest relationships in all the world will become disrupted through a problem or a sin. What a painful experience to endure! There may be nothing as hurtful as a broken relationship. In these times, God would be the One who fills the void that your broken relationships leave. God cares for the forsaken. He takes in the orphan, the widow, the fatherless, and the oppressed in order to make them His very own.

**Psalm 27:11 -** In these challenging times, you need to be taught. You need God to be your teacher. In troubling times, you should be asking the question, “God, what are you teaching me?” You need to have God's direction. God's *“way”* and God's leadership into that way are essential. Sometimes, you will go through a challenging season because God intends it to be a

pivotal season for you. A pivotal season is a season when something turns or changes. This is when a course of action was altered.

You need a clear, smooth, and level path to move forward (See Proverbs 3:5-6). David is praying that things would be clear and obvious. There are enough challenges with the enemies ahead. You do not need the dangers, toils, and snares associated with a rugged path to make life more complicated.

**Psalm 27:12** – David is going to end this Psalm with a prayer request and a statement of faith and commitment. David’s prayer here is that the agenda of the enemy will not come to fruition in his life. This is the amazing thing about enemies. They have an agenda. They have a desired outcome. They want to see you destroyed. They want to see you removed. Their hateful intentions are so deep and evil that they are willing to become **“false witnesses”** to accomplish their devious plan. They are even violent in words, intentions, and deeds.

**Psalm 27:13** – Your heart should really resonate with this verse. **“I would lose heart”** - this is the very definition of discouragement. When you lose heart, this can be a gigantic struggle. Losing heart means that you are losing the desire to continue and keep personal vision progressing. Discouragement will continue to settle in and take root in your heart **“unless”** you **“believe that you are going to see God’s goodness.”** This is not about “hanging on” until you get to heaven. This is a belief that you are going to see God’s goodness here and now **“in the land of the living.”** This is a statement of assurance. You can choose to look to the goodness of God whether you are seeing it today or you are choosing by faith to see it.

**Psalm 27:14** – *“Wait on the Lord”* is the summary of the passage. All that David has discussed has culminated with this. You need to be patient and let the Lord work. You need to have faith in Him. You need to trust His process as you lean on Him. It is easy to be discouraged when you are in the valley of waiting. God says we should *“be of good courage.”* You need courage to continue and courage to pray. This is all attached to a promise of God. He’s going to strengthen your heart. So, wait on the Lord!

### **Recite Psalm 27**

Dear Heavenly Father, today I choose to look to you to eliminate my fears. Because you are my light, my salvation, and my strength, I actually have nothing to fear at all. God, help me not to fear people especially. Help me to love and serve and give of myself to people without the residual fear that often haunts me. Today, I choose to seek your face. I choose the intimacy that you provide. God, I want to thank you for all that you have taught me in the Word as I have gone to Your house. I am thankful for the answers you bring and the goodness you have shown to me. God, my prayer is that you would stop my enemies in their tracks. Put to rest their intentions and turn their false accusations into folly. I am praying that I will learn every lesson that You desire for me to learn and that you will mold my heart to follow however you lead. As I wait for You, I will take courage. You have promised to strengthen my heart. I know this will only be a season. If I don’t “see your goodness” right now, I believe by faith I will.

## **Record Psalm 27**

Now, it's your turn. Take Psalm 27, your journal, and your pen to a quiet place. Reflect on each verse. Think of every word. How does it speak to your heart? Write down your thoughts and prayers. Keep it where you can return to it for further reflection. My record on Psalm 3 occurred on June 6-29, 2019. Each journal entry was early in the morning. It was there that God ministered the medicine of His word to the hurts of my heart. I have returned to these entries many times. I pray your journaling will do the same for you.

## Chapter 5 – Track #3 – Psalm 86

Along the difficult and arduous ministry experience of 2019, I was encouraged regularly by three of my closest ministry friends. Their phone calls, text messages, and acts of kindness during this season were particularly helpful to pull me through. One of them even insisted that Angie and I take a week off, fly to a different city, and rest. He actually covered the bill . . . all of it. The flights, hotel, transportation while there, and all the meals were totally covered. What an immensely gracious act of friendship. I will never forget the kindness of my true friends. They represented the Scripture that says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

Of the many different ways they encouraged me, the most impactful way was sharing Scripture with me. Novel, right? I’m not talking about throwing the ever-misinterpreted Romans 8:28 out there (Don’t get me wrong, I love Romans 8:28). I am talking about Scriptures that were relevant to the situation that I was going through. Scriptures that would prove to become my anchors for months during my darkest times. Admittedly, I considered leaving. I even shared that with these friends. Thankfully, they could see right through my fears and used Scripture to wrestle me back into reality.

“Bryan, you need Psalm 86.” This wise and experienced pastor friend gave me the Psalm that I am going to walk you through next. We sat in my car on a Sunday night just outside of his hotel. It was June 30<sup>th</sup>. He had been scheduled to preach that day for months. It was literally right in the middle of the crisis. I even tried to cancel the meeting, citing the ugly reality that our church finances had taken a massive hit and I couldn’t afford to bring in any guest speakers. He insisted on keeping the meeting and refused to accept travel reimbursement or even an

honorarium. My pride almost forced me to ignore his kindness and cancel. I'm glad I didn't. The timing could not have been worse, and the timing could not have been better.

I told him that I would make Psalm 86 my prayer and meditation for the following week, and that is exactly what I did. In fact, the next morning Angie and I began our week of rest provided by another pastor friend. Shaded by an umbrella from the scorching, summer sun in Tucson, Arizona, I meditated on Psalm 86 all week. That meditation spilled over for another week. Thank you, Brent, for the week of rest. Your kindness will never be forgotten. Thank you, Jim, for loving me, coming to my church at your cost, and especially for the nudge to explore Psalm 86.

### **Read Psalm 86**

Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me;  
For I am poor and needy.  
Preserve my life, for I am holy;  
You are my God;  
Save Your servant who trusts in You!  
Be merciful to me, O Lord,  
For I cry to You all day long.  
Rejoice the soul of Your servant,  
For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,  
And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.  
Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;  
And attend to the voice of my supplications.  
In the day of my trouble I will call upon You,  
For You will answer me.  
Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord;  
Nor are there any works like Your works.  
All nations whom You have made  
Shall come and worship before You, O Lord,  
And shall glorify Your name.  
For You are great, and do wondrous things;  
You alone are God.  
Teach me Your way, O Lord;  
I will walk in Your truth;  
Unite my heart to fear Your name.  
I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,  
And I will glorify Your name forevermore.  
For great is Your mercy toward me,  
And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.  
O God, the proud have risen against me,  
And a mob of violent men have sought my life,

And have not set You before them.  
But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious,  
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.  
Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me!  
Give Your strength to Your servant,  
And save the son of Your maidservant.  
Show me a sign for good,  
That those who hate me may see it and be ashamed,  
Because You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

## Rephrase Psalm 86

**Psalm 86:1** - This is an acknowledgement of God's lofty position and an acknowledgement of your lowly position. For God to even hear you, He must "*bow down His ear.*" "*Poor and needy*" is an accurate assessment of where you are today. This is the best you have to offer God. Spiritually, you are poor. Literally, you are spiritually bankrupt with nothing valuable to offer God or others. In fact, you do not even possess the resources to meet your own needs. You are needy and must look to God. He is everything you need, and He has everything you need.

**Psalm 86:2** – "Preserve" and "save" are the two prayer requests represented in this verse. Preservation is God keeping you in the midst of your trouble. Salvation is God rescuing you from the midst of your trouble. David is appealing to God on the basis of these three realities. It was assumed that for these reasons God would work on his behalf. These reasons are just as good today:

1. You are separated unto God ("*holy*"). You are His special treasure. You are the object of His special attention.
2. You "*trust*" in God. There has never been one person who has been disappointed by trusting God.

3. You are “*His servant.*” The servant is totally dependent upon his master. In your case, this is great news because you have a great master.

**Psalm 86:3** - This burden was carried constantly because David was crying “*all the day long.*”

There are seasons that you will feel as if the struggle never leaves and always occupies your mind. The pressure and the emotion for David must have been high. The request for mercy in this case would be the release of the immediate pressure that was constantly weighing on the mind.

**Psalm 86:4** – “Rejoice the soul of your servant.” Circumstances can surely rob us of the joy of our salvation. Sorrow and trouble can quickly replace joy and peace. Only God is the source of real and lasting joy in the middle of trouble. Look to your circumstances and be troubled. Look to Jesus and be filled with joy. Here we find David praying from the “*soul.*” When you pray, you are not just lifting up words, but you are lifting up your soul. God understands and responds to “heart-felt” prayers from His people.

**Psalm 86:5** – God is good. God forgives. God is merciful. This threefold knowledge of God is just what the hurting heart needs to hear. God is, at His very core, “*good.*” He is benevolent and kind. His plans for you are good. Everything He allows into your life is good. All things are being worked together for good.

God is “*ready to forgive.*” He is not reluctant and negligent. He is not waiting for you to say and do the right things to evaluate whether or not you are worthy to be forgiven. He already knows that you are not worthy to be forgiven. But, for Christ’s sake, He is ready to forgive you.



He is ready to remove your sins and refuses to hold you hostage to or accountable for them for all of eternity.

God is ***“abundant in mercy.”*** Think of it! He has mercy in abundance. There is no risk that mercy’s well will ever run dry. There will never be a famine of God’s mercy in the land. God’s mercy account never runs low on resources. God never turns you away when you call upon Him, because His resources are never depleted.

**Psalm 86:6** - ***“Give ear”*** to me and ***“attend”*** to my prayer. David is requesting that God would listen to him. This is almost like saying, “Are you hearing me?” No one wants to pray without the accompanying assurance that God is listening. Thankfully, you are not praying to a god who cannot listen, talk, or intervene. You can come to God with the full assurance that His throne of grace is there for your time of need.

**Psalm 86:7** – ***“You will answer me.”*** These are sweet words of absolute assurance. There could be no more compelling reason for us to pray than the certain knowledge that God will answer our prayers.

**Psalm 86:8** – Verses eight through ten provide a praise song from David to God. It is noteworthy that this praise is blended into the requests for help and the obvious struggles he is facing. The end of this battle had not come. However, he is declaring his confidence in God as he wrestles with God. The first area that he declares about God is that God is the only true God. The word *gods* here has no capital letter for good reason. People have gods, but they are no gods at all. David declares God to be God alone.

**Psalm 86:9** - God is the Creator of all, even if some people do not acknowledge His claim. He is the One to whom all are accountable. They will one day stand before Him as the Creator and Sovereign of all things and all people. Also, there is a hint of evangelism here. There will be people from all nations who will come and worship God. What a beautiful scene in heaven when we gather there one day! This will ultimately be a testimony of His sovereign power and His saving grace.

**Psalm 86:10** - The third source of David's trust and praise was that God was great and did great things. The great things that God does come from the great God that He is. He alone has the place and the title of God. There are many who want God's position, but they fall miserably short. God has no rivals. God had no predecessors and will have no successors.

**Psalm 86:11** - This is a good prayer for anyone going through a tough time. There is a desire to learn more about God. There is also a desire to know the ways of God. The "ways" here specifically speak of the revealed ways in which God works, or the way He desires for His children to go. What a great question: "What is YOUR way, God?" Too often, the question seems to be, "What am I supposed to do?" The better question is "What is God's way in this situation?" Then, the prayer is to "*unite my heart.*" Every believer should have singleness of heart with God. Your prayer should be to have one focus: His focus.

**Psalm 86:12** – "*I will praise you.*" This is a glorious resolve. Notice the intensity of this resolve. You should praise God with your "*whole heart.*" You have probably done something

“half-heartedly.” Half-hearted was not in David’s vocabulary. David was a man who gave all of his heart to God. He was passionate about praise. Notice the longevity of this resolve. He is going to do this forevermore. Just like the nature of God transcends all circumstances, our praise of Him should transcend all circumstances.

**Psalm 86:13** – This verse proclaims the specific object of the previous verse’s robust praise. This passionate praise was the direct result of God’s wonderful mercy. In verse sixteen, David appeals to God’s mercy as a prayer request, but first he extols mercy as a virtue worthy of praise. When you enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise, not only are you blessing Him, but you are reminding yourself of how great God is. This inspires boldness and directness in prayer.

**Psalm 86:14** - He connects the actions of the ungodly men with their lack of regard for God. It is good to not take the attacks of evil men personally. The attacks of ungodly men are essentially all directed at God. While it may be difficult to separate the two, it will be a comfort to you to do this.

**Psalm 86:15** - God is the opposite of this angry mob. He is full of compassion and mercy. He is full of these things and has them in abundance.

## The Flowing Well – Whitewater, WI

A number of years ago, while preaching at a summer camp in Whitewater, Wisconsin, I was told of a natural water spring that was located a couple miles from the camp. The four-mile round trip would have been perfect for my jogging stamina at that time (I have since lost all jogging stamina). So, I decided to run to the spring. The camp director mapped out directions for me and off I went. The spring was unassumingly located in this little rural area off a low-traveled road. I arrived and took a drink from the makeshift water fountain that had been created to accommodate the spring. I remember it to have been the coolest and freshest water I had ever tasted. During my ten-minute visit to the spring, multiple people stopped by and even filled up water jugs to take home with them.

And, here is the amazing thing: the well provides an unlimited source of water. The well is called the “Flowing Well” and was hand dug by Andrew Channing in 1895. This artesian well flows from aquifers where water at a higher elevation puts pressure on the water below it causing it to flow out readily when given an outlet. This outlet was given in 1895 and has unceasingly flowed ever since.

This verse is a flowing well for the believer. Those resources are sometimes trapped beneath the surface of our circumstances and pressurized in our waiting. The outlet is prayer.

**Psalm 86:16** – *“Oh turn to me.”* There may be no worse feeling in the world than the feeling that God has turned His back on you. When you are going through the fire, you are tempted to believe that God has turned against you. David is requesting God to return His presence to David in order to facilitate His strength and deliverance on behalf of David.

**Psalm 86:17** - This is a prayer that you should pray multiple times and you will see God answer it. He will give you “*signs.*” This is not some miracle or supernatural occurrence. This is just a gentle reminder that God is present, and God is working. The prayer of the remaining portion of this verse is that your enemies would be ashamed of themselves when they realize that the blessing and favor of God is upon you.

### **Recite Psalm 86**

God, today I am coming to you as a poor and needy child. I am asking you to bow down your ear and hear me. I am asking you to preserve me, save me, and protect me from the harmful words and actions of people who have risen up against me. Today, I am looking to you for my soul’s joy. You alone provide forgiveness, mercy, and goodness in my life. You are an overflowing wellspring of blessing for me. Right now, I am coming to you and looking to you to sustain, restore, and bless me. In this heavy season, I have had trouble seeing all that you are doing. So, as this day proceeds from your hand, I am asking that you would manifest yourself in some way, even a small way, to assure me that you are with me and that you are working. I pray that my enemies would see Your hand upon me and flee in shame as they abandon their vain attempts to take me down.

## **Record Psalm 86**

Now, it's your turn. Take Psalm 86, your journal, and your pen to a quiet place. Reflect on each verse. Think of every word. How does it speak to your heart? Write down your thoughts and prayers. Keep it somewhere where you can return to it for further reflection. My record on Psalm 3 occurred on June 30-July 8, 2019. Each journal entry was early in the morning. There, God ministered the medicine of His word to the hurts of my heart. I have returned to these entries many times. I pray your journaling will do the same for you.

## Conclusion

Every year brings an entire new host of “favorite songs.” Since the experience of 2019, my heart has been drawn to new worship songs. “Christ Our Hope in Life and Death” by Keith and Kristyn Getty is one of my favorites. And, probably, “Is He Worthy?” by Andrew Peterson has become my new all-time (for now) favorite. God brings music into our playlists seasonally. I have a playlist called “Favorites for 2019” and “Favorites for 2020.” This is why we love music. There is a song for every occasion and every season.

The Psalms are exactly the same. The three Psalms that I have used in this book were my three Psalms for my specific season. As I sit and write this morning, my favorite Psalms are the Psalms of Ascent. These Psalms are all grouped together spanning Psalm 120 to Psalm 134. What is a Psalm of Ascent? While there is some discrepancy in interpretation, my conclusion is that the Psalms of Ascent comprised the song book of Israel as they returned to Jerusalem to celebrate the major religious festivals (for instance Pentecost as seen in Acts 2). These Psalms would have been sung by families as they ascended to the city of Jerusalem to worship.

Of all of these Psalms and all of the verses in these Psalms, my absolute “favorite” right now is Psalm 122:1. David says, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord.’” I have spent several mornings in meditation on this Psalm recently (end of April 2020). You may be wondering why that verse has been so special to me lately. Well, Sunday, April 26, was the seventh Sunday in a row that I have not been able to assemble with my church. Like almost every other church in the world, we have been ordered to not assemble publicly due to the coronavirus. As a pastor and a committed believer, I am intimately involved in a local church. When I cannot be at church, my heart longs and craves to be there.

So, just like an Israelite who has not been to Jerusalem in months, I can identify with a longing and a craving to get back to the house of God. I have already planned my first sermon for the first Sunday that we can regather. It will be a sermon on Psalm 122 labeled, “I Want to Go to Church.” Oh, I can’t wait! The outline is ready. My heart is ready. When the state officials lift the ban on public gatherings, I will be running to the house of God!

You see, this Psalm is seasonal for me right now. I do not normally experience lengthy isolation from church. But, right now I do. I do not normally feel the negative emotions of social distancing from my church family. But, right now I do. I do not normally miss the smiles of children, the hugs of widows, the corporate prayers of the saints, or the warm presence of the Spirit in public singing. But, right now I do. And, right now I am thankful for a word from God in the book of Psalms to meet my “right now” need.

I pray your Psalm journey will be the same. I pray you will find the “grace to help in time of need” provided to you by the biblical songwriter. I pray that you will take your burdens to God just like David, Solomon, Moses, and Asaph. I pray you will sing songs in the night. I pray that God’s character will be the rock upon which you stand. I pray that you will know that still small voice of God as He whispers to you in the pavilion.