



THE
PSALMS
AFLAME

— 25 DEVOTIONALS —

WITH THOUGHTS FROM C.S. LEWIS' *REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS*

BY BRIAN FLEWELLING

A serene landscape photograph of a river or stream. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and a large, leafy tree on the right bank. The scene is misty, with a soft, hazy atmosphere. The lighting is natural, suggesting early morning or late afternoon. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

These twenty-five devotionals first appeared as a single volume in the publication, *The Journey*, by Bible Reading Fellowship in January of 2017 under the title *Reflection on the Psalms*. No changes have been made from their first publication.

I pray that they strengthen your love and appreciation for God and enable you to express that love more deeply.

PASSIONATE POETRY

Read Psalm 18:1-50

This is the beginning of a 25-day series based on the Psalms and C. S. Lewis' work, *Reflections on the Psalms*. Lewis' counsel is worth leaning into for the usual reasons: his thorough and clear headed logic, his insight into our human condition, his comprehensive understanding of language and literature, and his buttressing of the Christian beliefs and tenants.

Lewis writes, *"The Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung: not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons...Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry."* If the prophets are thought of as God expressing himself downwards to man, the Psalms are often quite the opposite, man expressing himself upwards to God.

There is no better example of this than Psalm 18. Here is the expression of a thankful young man, David, who had been delivered multiple times from his enemies. His praises of the Lord are thick in the beginning, middle, and end. He toggles back and forth between his perilous plight, and dramatizing how the Lord chivalrously intervened on his behalf. The author's mood is ebullient, practically floating off the page. *"The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies"* (v.46-48).

The Psalms have for a very long time been used as a call to worship and meditation. They are an expression of the heart, and teach us how to bring our deepest pains and greatest joys in worship to our king. I encourage you to do the same.

Apply

Which emotions are the most difficult for you to express to God?

Pray

Lord help me to bring my whole heart to you in worship.

DAVID'S SHADOW

Read Psalm 2:1-12

Every few hundred years a person rises head and shoulders above the crowd of history. David is such a man. At a moment when cultic sacrifices, blood, and carcasses were the gratuitous ways to appease gods, David demonstrated through his radical heart and musical acumen a thoroughly modern way to express the soul-cry and glory that God is worthy of. Such are the Psalms; the collaboration of a community of worshippers and poets set into motion by this one man's monumental energy and spiritual earnest.

At a moment when Israel's political lusts were diverting them from God, David also arose as a king, chosen and empowered by God, and singularly devoted to him. Within his kingliness was the foreshadow of God's future plans. God would establish a ruler to come, a Messianic agent in Jerusalem who would spread God's word, fame, and judicial oversight to the nations of the earth.

In Psalm 2 we see the following Messianic elements converging. The kings of the earth are under Messiah's rulership and taxation. In verse 3 they rebel. In verses 4-6 we view God's allegiance to this supreme Messiah king. Zion-Jerusalem, is the center of worship to the Lord, and the capital city of that king's authority. There is the promise of triumph over all nations of the earth. And there is the warning not to defy Messiah's Lordship.

How about you? Ruler of your personal kingdom. How do you square with that king? Are you under his dominion, or have you rebelled? There is blessing for those who refuge in him. But if we stand hard hearted in our independence, falsehood, and injustice we will be destroyed.

Apply

Which part of your life is hardest to give up rulership?

Pray

Let my life be the spoils of your costly victory and of your great glory.

TWINS

Read Psalm 37:1-40

To fully understand the Psalms we should know a detail or two about their unspoken formalities and structures. In English poetry the author builds upon rhyme and rhythmic meter. For Hebrew poetry parallelism is a frequently used technique. Lewis defines parallelism; *“the practice of saying the same thing twice in different words.”* Lewis keenly observes, *“fortunately (parallelism) survives translation.”* Other techniques like rhyme are undetectable after translation.

An example of parallelism comes from Psalms 37:6. *“He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”* God’s righteousness and his justice are a pair. The two statements are like twins, like scissor sheers cutting together toward a common truth. They operate in tandem. In verse 19 he says, *“In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.”* Notice again the commonality: Disaster-famine; Not wither-plenty. Jesus himself uses this same technique in Matthew 7:2; *“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* Two statements. One thought.

Now let’s look one last time at Psalm 37 and close with a delicious little truth. This psalm is designed to encourage the faithful. Everything in the Psalm hinges on the contrast between the lifestyle of the wicked and that of the righteous. The wicked may look like they are flourishing now, but they are like *“grass that soon withers, like green plants they will soon die away.”* However, when the righteous *“commit”* their plans to the Lord, are *“still”*, and *“wait for the Lord”*, then the Lord will *“uphold the righteous.”* So take courage, the reward of your labors and your inheritance, *“will endure forever.”*

Apply

When are you most prone to comparing yourself to the success of others?

Pray

Help me to wait patiently for the fruit of my labors and the justice of your cause.

CHAMPION OF JUSTICE

Read Psalm 96

God's judgments are so often a subject of Christian seriousness. Lewis notes that centuries of Christian art and literature *"have depicted its terrors"; "that day of wrath, that dreadful day."* Our perspective is that we stand as a criminal on trial. And we know too well, by the horror of the cross, just how costly our sin is, and just how devastated our condition is before a holy judge. But Lewis observes, with great surprise, how *"the psalmists talk about the judgements of God."*

And how do they talk? *"Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth"* (96:12-13). In Psalm 96 the judgment of God produces giddy joy compelling eleven verses of worship. Sing. Praise. Declare. Ascribe. Worship. Testify. Rejoice.

What could catalyze this jubilation? Lewis explains. In the ancient world the psalmist pictured himself not as the criminal on trial, but as the oppressed plaintiff in a civil case hoping for relief from oppression. After all, it was difficult for the small man to get his case heard. With no power, or privilege, his rights were easily neglected or subverted. And this is why we too can celebrate: God will "judge" the people rightly; *"defend the cause of the widows"* (Psalms 68:5); *"defend the poor"* (Psalm 72:2); *"help all the meek upon earth"* (Psalm 76:9); all the *"helpless people whose wrongs have never been righted yet"* (Lewis p.12). *"The Divine Judge is the defender, the rescuer"* (Lewis). Let us also give praise to this champion of justice.

Apply

Who has God placed on your heart to cry out for justice for?

Pray

Let justice roll like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

THE CRUELTY OF POVERTY

Read Psalm 10

Poverty is cruelty. And the callousness of men to exploit the poor is pure wickedness. God is the defender of the poor. As Lewis depicts God the Judge, he makes a special note of God's defense of the poor, *"God will 'minister true judgement' (Psalm 9:8), and that is because He 'forgetteth not the complaint of the poor'" (Psalm 9:12).*

In Psalm 10 we see the appeal of the helpless. The helpless sees the boasts, cravings, cruelty, and curses of the wicked man. And the helpless man makes his appeal to his defender, *"Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless" (v.12).* And on what basis does he make his appeal? The compassionate character, and resolute justice of God; *"You are the helper of the fatherless" (v.14).* Psalm 68:5 says, *"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows...God sets the lonely in families."* This is a theme repeated in the law of Moses, the prophets, the wisdom literature, and the New Testament. Deuteronomy 10:18 states, *"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing."*

What good father doesn't strive with all his energy to provide for his children? Poverty and lack are an attack on God's children. Darkness is lack of light. Folly is lack of wisdom. Death is lack of life. Hunger is lack of food. Bondage is lack of freedom. Weariness is the lack of strength and joy. Lack is a thief that steals the children's bread. But who is our Father? He is the Lord of life. And He has said, *"I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).*

Apply

Do I understand God's desire to bless His children, including myself?

Pray

Lord give us life and life abundantly.

RAW AND UNEDITED

Read Psalm 42

One reason the Psalms are so deeply cherished by so many people is their transparency. They are refreshingly honest. The disheveled heart is dumped out like a junk draw with its keepsakes and trash all mixed up. Stinging emotions, next to beautiful praise. Doubts next to trusting faith. The *“bad parts...may be entwined with the most exquisite things,”* Lewis observes. Even praise can be butted up to the blackest anger, *“The hatred is there festering, gloating, undisguised.”*

What a great mixture we find in Psalm 42. It is an eruption from the depths of human emotion. We hear the panting of the soul that's hungry for God (v.1-2). We hear the withering mockery of the godless, *“where is your God”* (v.3). We hear the nostalgic reminiscing of a man with loss (v.4). We hear the self-talk of one crippled by depression (v.5-11). And there glittering in the midst of those final six verses of tar and mire is a beautiful gem of perfect comfort, *“by day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me”* (v.8).

The Psalms are undomesticated and impassioned. They burst through the cheap veneer of religious culture. Their honest prayers can be heard as quickly on the lips of prostitutes as on churchmen in pews. The dysfunction can be jarring, sometimes painful to listen to. But they resemble mankind exactly as he is, and not as he should be. And God has never been afraid to meet us where we are. Let us bring our raw and unedited hearts before him. And let him help us sort through the jagged pieces of our lives. For he wants nothing more than to be our counselor, shepherd and companion.

Apply

What parts of your heart and emotions do you try to hide from the Lord?

Pray

Lord, here is all of me. I offer up myself, imperfect but wholly yours.

THE BITTER VOICE

Read Psalm 109

We must learn to bring our raw and unedited hearts before the Lord. There is no sense hiding emotions where they are sure to spoil like rotten cabbage. Yet there is a danger in thinking that because the Lord embraces our honesty He also overlooks our penchant for resentment. How wrong this is. The message of forgiveness, and the ethic of love saturates both Old and New Testament.

So what do we do with scriptures like Psalm 109 when men open their vile of curses before the Lord and ask him to pour them upon their enemies? What use has that to our spiritual growth? Lewis instructs us here, *“Though hideously distorted by the human instrument, something of the Divine voice can (still) be heard in these passages.”*

Where does he find the divine in this Psalm of cursing? In this. The Jews possessed the law, and the knowledge of justice. They understood the difference between right and wrong. Thus, their affliction by wicked men birthed a legitimate sense of injustice. *“The Jews sinned in this matter (in cursing their enemies) worse than the Pagans not because they were further from God but because they were nearer to him...(God) has for the sin of those enemies just the implacable hostility which the poets express...not to the sinner but to the sin. It will not be tolerated nor condoned.”*

Lewis observes, *“If the Jews cursed more bitterly than the Pagans this was, I think...because they took right and wrong more seriously.”* Let us take upon ourselves all of the charity of the Lord as it relates to man, and all of the hatred of the Lord as it relates to sin and injustice.

Apply

What personal sins have you had a tendency to tolerate?

Pray

May I love the people God loves, and hate the sins God hates.

AFTER DEATH

Read Psalm 49

The idea of life after death is largely undeveloped throughout the Old Testament, including the Psalms. In Psalm 89:46 we see the futility of man's existence, and the supreme power of *sheol*—the grave. Wise and foolish people alike are destined for the grave (49:10.) Once dead, a person no longer worships God (30:9). No one remembers God from the grave (6:5). Death is a land where all things are forgotten (88:12). After death men will never see the light of life again (49:19).

Here in Psalm 49 we see a rare Old Testament bridge extending from the grave into eternal life; *"God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself"* (49:15). Lewis investigates why the idea of eternal life remains mostly unpacked. *"It may seem astonishing that God, having revealed so much of Himself to that (Jewish) people, should not have taught them this."* Does eternal reward create a religion where *"God is not the center,"* where devotion is shrewdly used to secure a ticket into paradise, he wonders?

Lewis therefore concludes, God centers his earliest revelations upon himself *"to show them that He and nothing else is their true goal and the satisfaction of their needs."* Thus we see in the Psalms the deepest longings for God ripened apart from the reward of eternal life. Only after men have *"learned to desire and adore God, to pant after Him"* do they learn to *"not only enjoy Him"* but *"to enjoy Him forever."* Let us also investigate our hearts. Do we long for God or for eternal comfort? Let us not just enjoy the gifts of eternity, but let us grow to enjoy God, and use eternity to enjoy Him fully.

Apply

Is your hope in eternal life centered on God, or on His benefits?

Pray

Lord, teach me to enjoy you, so that I might enjoy you forever.

BREATHLESS BY HIS BEAUTY

Read Psalm 84

David's primary quest was to *"gaze upon the beauty of the Lord"* (Psalm 27:4). And what happens as we, like David, meditate upon the Lord? We are *"transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory"* (2 Corinthians 3:18). Let us be careful what we meditate upon. For we will begin to desire after it and to resemble it. Whose image do you wish to reflect? Squabbling and selfish men? Or the *"splendor of the Holy One?"*

Appropriately then, God always makes room for us in His dwelling place (v.3). We can bring our full appetite to him (v.2). And once we have feasted upon his goodness we can say, *"Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere"* (v.10).

Lewis reveals his indebtedness to the earnest writers of the Psalms. *"I think we need more; the joy and delight in God which meet us in the Psalms...These poets knew far less reason than we for loving God. They did not know that He offered them eternal joy; still less that He would die to win it for them. Yet they express a longing for Him...I find an experience fully God-centered, asking of God no gift more urgently than His presence, the gift of Himself, joyous to the highest degree, and unmistakably real. What I see in the faces of these old poets tells me more about the God whom they and we adore."*

The Jewish philosopher Maimonides once said *"man generally turns his face towards the thing he desires."* Let us then be more careful what we give our attention to, and let us gaze fully at the *"beauty of the Lord."* His dwelling place will leave you breathless (v.1).

Apply

What distractions keep you from meditating upon the Lord?

Pray

Lord I ask one thing, to be captured by your beauty.

WORSHIP IS A VERB

Read Psalm 100

“Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth.” Where can one climb mount jubilation any higher than here? And who do we find at the top? The Lord!--Who is good and whose loving faithfulness endures forever!

We often reserve our shout for the stadiums, or for athletes, or for anger. But the shout belongs to the Lord. As Balaam said; *“the shout of the King is among them”* (Numbers 23:21). Our bodies belong to the Lord as well, created for His purposes in worship. Let’s make a list of the commands loaded in Psalm 100. Shout. Worship. Come before him. Know. Enter with thanksgiving. Praise his name.

Worship is a verb. It is an outward expression of an inward adoration. The Torah teaches us to love God with our whole heart, breath, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4), not just in quiet mental reflection. The Psalms depict that kind of full-bodied worship. As Lewis points out, these old poets are accustomed to a vigorous and hearty worship. None of the aloof and intellectual snobbery we are inclined to today. *“I find an experience fully God-centered...joyous to the highest degree, and unmistakably real.”*

There are several types of Psalms that especially call believers to express their worship. Thanksgiving Song. The Song of Praise. And the Entrance Liturgies. As we’ve seen in Psalm 100, some are constant in their barrage of verbs. Even the word worship means “to bow down”. As we study the Psalms to cultivate a closer walk with God, let us not forget the obvious, to implement the behavior modeled for us. Shout. Meditate. Leap. Clap. Sing. Dance. And make music. You will be surprised how the body can teach the heart how it should feel.

Apply

Where can I practice worshipping with my whole body?

Pray

Lord help me to move my body in worship to you.

THE LITURGY AND WORSHIP

Read Psalm 50

Lewis, cunningly untangles the outward adornments of worship from the inward soul of worship. The liturgy, the routines, the music, the sounds and smells, the cadence of prayers, the sacrifice of animals at the temple, or the ringing of Easter bells in modern churches—these are outward tapestries of worship. But worship itself is the act of the heart, soul, and mind yielding to the glory of God.

Lewis diagnoses a new danger, *“no sooner is it possible to distinguish the rite from the vision of God than there is a danger of the rite becoming a substitute for, and a rival to, God Himself. Once it can be thought of separately, it will; and it may then take on a rebellious, cancerous life of its own.”*

Indeed we call it religion when mankind adheres to the ornaments of worship and adores the garments and liturgy those ornaments hang upon. But that is very different from worship. Going through the motions of a church services is quite different from encountering Jesus and bowing down to his Lordship. Isaiah said, *“These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me”* (Isaiah 29:13). Joel said *“rend your heart and not your garments”* (Joel 2:13). Jeremiah, *“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts”* (Jeremiah 31:33).

In Psalm 50 the Lord is seeking hearts filled with thanksgiving, not the carcasses of sacrificed animals. He wants the trusting allegiance of His people, not religious form. It is the same for us today. Let us move past the rituals we have made for ourselves and bring to God our sincerest worship: a heart, soul, and mind in total loving allegiance to him.

Apply

When I worship God, am I just going through the routine, or am I intentionally offering my body, my mind, my emotions, my life?

Pray

Lord teach me to kindle the daily flame of passionate pursuit of you.

SWEETER THAN HONEY

Read Psalm 19

The believer in Jesus may find themselves as mystified as Lewis at the extent of Hebrew affection for God's law written in the Psalms and Old Testament. *"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth"* (119:103)! David calls the ordinances of the Lord *"more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb"* (19:10). The person who becomes as healthy and steadfast as a flourishing tree is one who *"delights in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night"* (1:2-3).

Lewis observes sarcastically, *"'thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery'...It is very hard to find how they could be, so to speak, delicious, how they exhilarate."* He concludes that the flavorful taste of the law must derive from the clean conscience of fulfilling it, or more selfishly, from spiritual pride.

Yet, the apostle Paul—a law abiding Jew, understood that *"the law is good if one uses it properly"* (1 Timothy 1:8). The law is the instruction of the Lord. The law helps us to know God, know what is valuable to God. It is part of how God reveals his heart and mind to us. His law is not separate from his loving character. It was put in place to lead us to Christ. And in it we see God's faithfulness expressed to those *"who love me and keep my commands"* (Exodus 20:6).

God's commands are a beautiful expression of his compassion for us. They steer us away from sin and unrighteousness. Certainly, they will not rescue us from death. How could they? But keeping them may work into us the character and image of our savior.

Apply

Do I have a negative or positive view of God's laws? Why?

Pray

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (Psalm 119:18)

SPIRITUAL PRIDE

Read Psalm 119

As soon as we learn to love the laws God has given us, and appreciate His blessings, those very blessings may become dangerous to us. We may grow so fond of the object that we detach them from the giver. So then, the law, detached from God, becomes something we pride in, and feel ourselves superior to the “outsiders who don’t share it”. So it may develop “a cancerous life of its own” Lewis warns.

“Proud and clever men may come to think that the outsiders who don’t know it are not merely inferior to them in skill but lower in God’s eyes; as the priests said (John 7:49), “All that rabble who are not experts in the Torah are accursed.” The complexity of the law may increase while the weightier matters of the law get lost in the overgrowth. So is the Leviathan of religious structure and pride. But this doesn’t have to be so.

What may God’s Law do for us? First it exposes us. Then it guides us. The psalmist doesn’t hide his incompetence in keeping the commands, *“If only my ways were committed to keeping your statutes”* (v.5). He fervently begs God’s help, *“do not let me stray from your commands”* (v.10).

Then he lets the law lead him. *“Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path”* (v.105). *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word”* (v.9). God’s word is like the north star to a sailor’s sky, faithfully pointing us to our destination. The star is not the destination, only a light for the journey. How may we avoid spiritual pride? By using God’s word to lead us to Him.

Apply

Is God’s word a source of guidance and strength in your life?

Pray

Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your laws. (Psalm 119:29)

COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

Read Psalm 1

In its content this psalm reminds us more of a proverb than of a psalm. There are blessings for obedience to Torah. Curses for negligence. There is a strong distaste even for the very company of ungodly people. *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked"* (v.1). Let's consider another psalm, *"Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them. I count them my enemies"* (139.21-22). Again, *"I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked"* (26:4-5).

In contrast we see the assembly of the righteous, sinners cannot stand among them (vs.5). The righteous man gives *"thanks in the great assembly"* (35:18).

The modern man may find this exclusivity hard to reconcile with Jesus' lifestyle of generosity with the vain and profane. And Lewis, for his part, agrees that there may be a great deal of snobbery and judgment taking place by the psalmists. Yet there is something sound and solid in their truth, *"a core of very good sense"* Lewis concedes.

The influence of certain people may push us beyond our limits of good intentions and purity. *"It is therefore not self-righteousness but mere prudence to avoid (contact) when we can."* Here we see the power of the communal culture. The righteousness and sins of man are multiplied in the company of similar minds. In God's mercies he has given us his family, brothers and sisters who build each other up in love (Ephesians 4:16). Let us not stop meeting together, where the Spirit of Christ is honored.

Apply

Who do I need to spend less time with? More time with?

Pray

Fill my life with those men and women who are shields of the faith for me.

THE TONGUE

Read Psalm 5

The unbridled tongue sets forest fires ablaze. Friends and foes may be consumed in the careless inferno it creates. Lewis observes the prevalence of evil in the tongue. *"The Psalmists mention hardly any kind of evil more often than this one... Their throat is an open sepulcher, they flatter"* (5:10). *"Under his tongue is ungodliness and vanity"* (10:7), *"deceitful lips"* (12:3), the *"whispering"* of evil men (41:7), *cruel lies that "cut like a razor"* (52:3), talk that sounds *"smooths as oil"* and will wound like a sword (55:22), pitiless jeering (102:8). *"Not a word from (the wicked) can be trusted. Their heart is filled with malice. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies"* (5:9).

But the godly man harnesses his tongue. He reigns it in. He uses his tongue for righteousness, to lay requests before the Lord expectantly (5:3), to cry out to God (5:1). Jesus said, *"the mouth speaks what the heart is full of"* (Matthew 12:34). The tongue is just the bucket that draws out water from the heart. Using a different analogy, James gives the tongue more power. The tongue is the rudder, he says. A little rudder can steer a mighty ship (James 3:4).

So what direction do you want that ship to go? *"Life and death is in the power of the tongue"* (Proverbs 18:21). Grab that rudder and point it to life. Banish deceit from your lips; flattery, judgments, pessimism, needless talking of other's weaknesses. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up"* (4:29). So let us speak life. Praise. Hope. Laughter. Song. Let us speak Jesus. Yes, let his good news be on our lips.

Apply

When was the last time I intentionally praised a family member or coworker?

Pray

Let the life of Jesus flow from my lips.

THE LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH

Read Psalm 65

The Hebrews are an ancient people, closely tied to the land, unseparated by the age of steel, railways, industry, and domestication. The earth is not a secondary thought to living. They are still at the mercy of the earth's intervals, and weather's caprice.

Their callous hands kept the soil,
and vigilant eyes their vineyards toiled,
and livestock combed the ready hills.

There is not in the modern sense a romantic appreciation for a terrain that we have been dislocated from and long to return to. Art hasn't been distilled yet, and beauty not winnowed from the wares that give it shape. The carpenter-craftsman is still making a living from the hewn wood and stone that his brother mined from the earth. Nature is as much a utility and necessity before it is a tapestry of artistry.

Here we see the Hebrew life so similar, and Hebrew thought so different from the ancient world. *"Nature and God were distinct; the One had made the other; the One ruled and the other obeyed,"* notes Lewis. This distinct separation was unique among the pagans, yet still maintained the tender attachment of dependency modern man has lost.

See how the Lord responds to the earth. You care for the land and water it; enrich it abundantly (v.9), drench it's furrows (v.10), bless it's crops (v.10), crown the year with your bounty (v.11), the valleys mantled with grain (v.13).

In our age of sophistication, let us not forget that our trust is not in the earth, or it's pleasures, or in the metal yokes we've made to harness it's economy. Yahweh is Lord of heaven and earth. And we are only it's superintendents, still at the mercy's of the Lord's favor and purposes.

Apply

How have you learned to trust God more and more?

Pray

I will trust you with all of my heart and lean not on my own understanding.

CREATION SHOUTS HIS PRAISE

Read Psalm 148

"To say that God created Nature, while it brings God and Nature into relation, also separates them. What makes and what is made must be two, not one. Thus the doctrine of Creation in one sense empties Nature of divinity...but in another sense the same doctrine which empties Nature of her divinity also makes her an index, a symbol, a manifestation of the Divine."

And so Lewis uncovers that great usefulness of creation beyond it's utility to man. Creation is a language of God; God's object lesson and metaphor to communicate his messages to humanity. *"Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies...Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains...Your justice is like the great deep"* (36:5-6). God's voice is like thunder over the water (29:3). His fierceness is like fire (97:3). His glory is like lightening (97:4). His law is as penetrating as the sun (19:4-9).

Nature is also the craft of God's glory. The product and passion of an artist. It's contours and creativity shout back to God what a genius He is. All of creation is shouting. In Psalm 148 we see this chorus of praise. God's angels praise him. The sun and moon praise him. The highest heavens praise him. The mountains and hills. Lightening and hail. Snow and clouds. Fruit trees and cedars. Wild animals and cattle. Small creatures. Flying creatures. Men. Women. Old. Young. Rulers. Lowly. All praise Him!

What response is left for the Psalmist and for us. Let us join in the shouting! *"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord"* (150:6). Let us stand in awe of all He has made, but in even greater wonder at the One who has made it all.

Apply

When in your schedule can you fit your next personal praise session to God?

Pray

Lord help me to see your glory in everything you have made!

THE SPLENDOR OF THE LORD

Read Psalm 33

From their beginning, the Psalms have been used by God's people to help worship and praise Him. In Psalm 33 we hear the call to worship, *"Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous"* (v.1). But we especially hear the reason for worship. The Lord is faithful in all he does (v.4). The earth is full of his unfailing love (v.5) He is righteous and just (v.5) He is powerful and creative (v.6-9) The Lord watches over those who fear him, and he protects them (v.18-19).

It is the worthiness of God which compelled Lewis to praise. *"(God) is that Object to admire which is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world; not to appreciate which is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all."* Lewis compares being without God to a deaf person unable to appreciate music. Life goes on, but without the fullness and richness of philharmonic sound.

Do our worship services reflect the electricity and astonishment of a deaf person hearing for the first time? Could we say that it is the praise and adoration of God which has raised us out of our stupor? Are we amazed by the color and life that springs from the splendor of His majesty? Could it be that the One who created the eyes to behold beauty is Himself the spire of perfect exquisiteness? Can the One who created the heart for pleasure be the very cataract that fills it with delight and joy? Look no further than to Him. His beauty astounds the nations. He is of surpassing worth. The jewel of heaven and the diadem of earth.

Apply

Do I truly stand amazed in the presence His holy splendor?

Pray

Open my eyes to see the riches of your splendor, and my mouth to give you praise.

HIS GOOD PLEASURES

Read Psalm 103

God doesn't need our worship. He is not, as Lewis remarks, like some vain woman wanting compliments. He is not even like the clouds which must gather the waters from the earth before they can rain down nourishment. Why then is the Biblical command repeated over and over, "Praise the Lord!" Why do we need to be chided into the activity like a school child?

Lewis observes that it is in worshipping God that we experience Him—His good pleasures. But let's listen to Lewis' own words, *"It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men...the fair beauty of the Lord is revealed chiefly or only while (we) worship Him."* If the Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is to *"glorify God and enjoy Him forever,"* Lewis states, *"we shall then know that these are the same things. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him."*

So worship becomes the revolving door between our praise and God's presence. It is not a one-way street. It has two directions. As soon as our focus and praise go up, a curious thing happens. God's focus and presence comes down. As soon as we give to Him the devotion of our company, He gives us the devotion of His.

In the eternal heavens *"men and angels complete their joy perpetually praising God."* Lewis observes how drastically our church services fail at this. What then should it look like to be in perfect love with God? *"Drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable...bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression."*

Apply

Have you ever been drunk with God's presence as He responded to your worship?

Pray

Lord, catch me up in the worship of you, that I may be the recipient of your good pleasures.

SHARING THE FRAGRANCE OF PRAISE

Read Psalm 63

Yesterday we learned that as we praise God his presence and glory condescend, and we experience him. Today we learn that our enjoyment of Him is incomplete without an expression of praise. When we praise, we take the perfume out of the bottle so that all others can enjoy it's fragrance.

Lewis compares, "Lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed...Men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it. The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about...The praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment."

It is not unlike a child watching fireworks. She is bursting into aaawwwes and gasps, exclaiming loudly, "Mommy did you see that?! Did you see that?! That was awesome!" Men share the praise of all kinds of good things: their favorite restaurants, sports teams, movies, wines, places to walk, countries they've visited. Praise is sharing the fragrant aroma of joy that your heart can no longer contain.

Listen to the expression of praise to God in Psalm 65, "Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf" (v.5); "Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me" (v.16). Or consider Psalm 63, "I have seen you in your sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you" (v.2-3). These are men who have already tasted of God's good pleasures. They want to share that joyful overflow with others.

Apply

Who can you share your joyful praise of God with?

Pray

Thank you God, for all you are, and all you've done. I am overwhelmed!

THE RIGHTEOUS SERVANT VINDICATED

Read Psalm 22

Psalm 22 was written by King David roughly one thousand years before Jesus lived. Yet its detailed picture of a righteous suffering servant is joltingly similar to Jesus' death on a Roman cross. There is perhaps no greater Psalm that foreshadows the suffering nature of the Messiah. Jesus himself quotes from Psalm 22 as he is hanging on the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"* (v.1).

Many have assumed by his cry that Jesus was abandoned by Father God (Matthew 27:46-47). It is more likely Jesus, even in his final hours, was practicing a commonly used Bible-reference technique. His reference to the scripture was rather an allusion to the entire passage, a reference to the greater truth it was heralding. Knowledgeable listeners would have remembered the famous passage and easily understood its broader importance.

Not only does this Psalm predict the suffering of God's servant, it climaxes with his ultimate vindication. *"For (the Lord) has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help...All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord"* (v.27).

Here Lewis believes that the author of the Psalm is tapping into a great reservoir of truth. He is tapping into a theme about suffering righteously, even if he's only thinking of his colloquial situation. He may or may not have understood just how perfect his description would be fulfilled by the ultimate righteous suffering servant-Messiah. Equal in meaning, more perfect in application.

Apply

Has God ever taught you a lesson that you've been able to apply throughout your lifetime?

Pray

How deep and how wide your wisdom is Lord, it is beyond my figuring out!

ADONAI, JUDGE OF ALL NATIONS

Read Psalm 110

Vigorous debates crackled in front of the electrified crowds as leaders from across Judaism sparred from the Torah and tradition. The Greeks loved to watch their Olympic warriors compete. But the Jews gathered to watch their fathers wrangle over their beloved religious texts and traditions. Five different questions had been leveled at Jesus now (Mark 12). They were probing the Galilean on the expanse and authenticity of his Biblical inquiry. With each question the crowds hushed to a murmur. Collectively straining in. To hear this bright young Torah scholar from the north. They gasped with every answer.

It was the Feast of Unleavened Bread—Passover. Centuries ago God had opened the sea and delivered His people from their Egyptian oppressors during Passover. Again the crowds were eager for a Moses to arise on this day. Perhaps Yeshua would be that anointed one who would lead them through the troubled waters of Roman occupation.

It was now his turn to ask a question of his own. And it was from Psalm 110 that Jesus drew his observation. *“How could Messiah be David’s son when David calls him Adonai?”* Jesus was stoking the crowd’s Messianic fervor. David had foreseen the Messiah. So had Daniel. Both saw more than a man; *“One like the son of man,”* but who would receive worship like Yahweh himself. *“His dominion is an everlasting dominion”* (Daniel 7:13-14).

With masterful incite Jesus begins unraveling the deeper meaning of the words spoken about himself. The transcendent mysteries of the Messiah figure in Psalm 110. The one who will rule his enemies from Zion. Dressed in holy majesty. Son of David. More than that. Lord over David. Priest of Melchizedek. Judge of all nations. Yes! The Judge of all peoples.

Apply

When did you first encounter Jesus as being more than a man?

Pray

Lord make me willing on your day of battle.

THE BADDEST DUDE ON THE BLOCK

Read Psalm 91

In Jesus we have Yahweh's perfect fortification, a refuge and impregnable fortress (v.2). Do you need a great rescuer (v.14)? *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

In Psalm 91:1 superior rank belongs to the name *Shadday*, meaning "**most** powerful." One lexicon defines the root verb, "to be burly, and to overpower." But the New Testament now says *"God exalted (Christ) to the highest rank and gave him the name that is above every name"* (Philippians 2:9). Jesus is the burly and overpowering God. In street terms-He da baddest dude on the block. Aint nobody can mess wit him.

The snares (v.3) of temptation, no longer entangle us. *"Live by the Spirit (of Christ) and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature"* (Galatians 5:16). The fears and terrors of the night (v.5) have been gutted. *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"* (2 Tim 1:7, KJV). The arrows of accusation and condemnation (v.5) can't touch us. *"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). The pestilential curses have evaporated before us (v.6). *"Christ redeemed us from the curse"* (Gal 3:13); *"no longer will there be any curse"* (Rev 22:3).

It's not even enough that he guards us in all our ways (v.11). He deputizes us to tread upon the lion and the cobra (v.13) ourselves. Jesus said, *"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy"* (Luke 10:19). We have complete victory in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 15:57).

Apply

What do you need victory from?

Pray

Thank you Lord Jesus for the victory that you've won for me.

THE GATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read Psalm 118

Hosanna means “Lord Save Us” (v.25)! It is the desperate howl of a world gone mad, the imploration of those who have tasted the bitter fruit of their own rebellion. The word hosanna is universally understood in every language, appropriately because of the universal need for God’s saving mercy. The crowds, understanding the psalmist’s messianic intention, threw their cloaks in front of Jesus, and heaped upon him their praise; *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”* (v.26).

Masses of people ascended the temple steps together (v.27) worshipping God during the Feast of Tabernacle and the procession of light. They had their boughs in hand; the fruit trees that they would make booths with. The Lord instructed them to dwell in succah’s (booths) for a week, a reminder of dwelling in tents while they made their exodus out of Egypt into their land of promise.

The Apostle Paul called our bodies “jars of clay.” Our bodies are temporary booths, cracked pottery, falling apart around us. And as we take pilgrimage toward our land of promise we proclaim of God’s Son *“you have become my salvation”* (v.21). *“The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation”* (v.14).

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone” (v.22). Isaiah called him “despised and rejected”. But he shouldered our guilt. Jesus, the “suffering servant” is the gate of righteousness the Lord has opened to us. Jesus, the Sheep-Gate. *“Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord”* (v.19). Receive freely him who we could not earn, and give thanks for the salvation we could not deserve.

Apply

Do you trust more in material things that are passing away, or in things you see with spiritual eyes?

Pray

Lord I trust in you, you are my daily hope and salvation.

THE EARTH TREMBLES IN THE PRESENCE

Read Psalm 29

There is power in the voice of God. The yawning universe convulsed out of his words “let there be light”. The cosmic boom of His voice is more powerful than space, mass, and energy. The Israelites trembled at Mount Sinai at the sound of His trumpet. At the sound of God’s coming wrath peoples quiver like leaves clinging to twigs. Jesus will winnow the people with the word from his mouth (Revelation 19:15).

Listen to this hymn—Psalm 29! The sons of God speak of His immense glory, strength, and power. They feel it in the thunderstorm. The desert and its animals tremble. Nations tremble in his presence (Nahum 1:5), *“for he sits enthroned, King forever”* (v.10).

John 1:1-3 says Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is that incredibly great power that spawned worlds, and that judges nations. He separates light from darkness. He divides goats from sheep. He slices down through the spirit and the soul. All that is worthy, holy, and lasting will remain. All that is self-centered will collapse away.

Let his word discipline you. *“He disciplines those he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as a son”* (Hebrews 12:4). Let him shake your barren deserts. Let him bring rain to those thirsty places in your life. He has the power to shatter those rooted habits that rise like immovable cedar trees in your life. He has the power to subdue wild waters with his powerful voice. Can you hear his voice, hushing the wind and the waves? It only took a hush to quiet them. His disciples stood stunned in the boat. And just like them he is calling us to trust him. Trust in the Word of God, the light of life.

Apply

Do you know what the word of God sounds like in your life?

Pray

Speak Lord, for your child is listening.