

Daily Inspiration in Psalms 90-106

The Psalms are songs for the journey. To paraphrase a well-known ad: 'A psalm a day helps you work, rest and pray.' Let's be nourished with the humility, the honesty, and the heartfelt faith of the psalmists, and may we find a voice to draw near to God each day.

Day 1 – Psalm 90 'A heart of wisdom'

It's not easy to read the first half of this psalm. None of us really like to be reminded of the fragility of life, especially when we have pointed reminders of it in our daily news.

And yet the enduring appeal of the psalms is precisely their raw honesty. The psalms allow us to tell it like it really is, to express what is really going on inside our hearts, sometimes even to say the unsayable – and we love them for it.

It is a great comfort to have 150 songs, poems and prayers of such depth and honesty right at the heart of our scriptures. They tell us that our God is not a tyrant whose ego cannot tolerate criticism, but a loving parent who can withstand our rants and tears as well as our successes and cries of praise. They earth our doctrines in lived experiences. They make faith *real*.

Personally, give me honesty over platitudes any day. I imagine most of us feel the same. So in this series, we'll take a walk through a section of the psalms – and my hope and prayer is that in them we will find a voice which echoes our innermost thoughts and feelings, and grounds them in God's love and goodness.

What we also notice is that, in the worldview of the psalmist, God is always the main actor – at the centre of the stage. Things happen because God wills it. And whilst that sometimes makes for uncomfortable reading, on balance it is a healthy counterpoint to the modern view (even among Christians) which often relegates God to the sidelines of the drama. At its root, there's an infectious humility which we all need in our daily lives.

So, how does the writer of Psalm 90 respond to their reflections on the fragility of life and the challenges of suffering? They ask God for several things: to accept their mortality (v12), which they describe as the 'heart of wisdom'; to be satisfied with the sufficiency of God's unfailing love (v14); to find joy again after a season of sorrow (v15); and for their work to bear fruit, according to God's blessing (v17).

It's not a bad perspective to face any season of our lives, is it? It strikes me that verse 12 onwards is a great prayer to pray – and I invite you to join me, that we might all gain the humble trust of the psalmist:

Lord, teach me to number my days rightly, that I might gain a heart of wisdom.

Lord, so often I do not allow myself to be satisfied with the assurance of your love – so today, I pray, satisfy me with that glorious truth and plant it in my heart.

As your love dwells in me, make me glad and grant me the gifts of gratitude and unexpected joy in this season of sorrow.

And may your favour rest upon me, that all I do might bear fruit for you. Amen.

Day 2 – Psalm 91 ‘Under his wings’

This psalm has long been a favourite of many people, but since the global pandemic began in 2020 it has taken on an added poignancy. Verses 3-6 seem to capture the prayer that most of us want to pray at present – we do fear a ‘deadly pestilence’ and it’s natural to pray for protection from it.

I myself have often returned to this psalm over the years, and prayed it for key seasons of my life. The imagery of divine protection is profound and beautiful: ‘resting in the shadow of the Almighty’, ‘finding refuge under his wings’, ‘no disaster will come near your tent’ (a phrase beloved of campers everywhere!), ‘lifted up in angels’ hands...’

I remember hearing of one lady who memorised this psalm, to use as she went into an MRI scanner which diagnosed a brain tumour. It’s that kind of psalm, and in recent times Psalm 91 has gone to the top of many Christians’ most used scriptures.

Yet we need to sound a note of caution. Fundamentally, it is good and right to pray for protection in anxious times – and this psalm gives us the words for that. But we must beware using this psalm as some kind of magic charm. To pray it is not to guarantee that we’ll never catch Covid-19, or something equally nasty. There must have been people who’ve been severely affected by the virus, or even died from it, who read and prayed this psalm.

Above all, we must avoid the conclusion that somehow we have to pray this psalm to be protected. It is sobering to remember that the devil quoted – or rather misquoted – this psalm when tempting Jesus to put God to the test (Matthew 4:5-7).

In matters of sickness and healing, there is a mystery to these things. In many ways, this psalm is a natural partner to the previous psalm (90), which equally recognised our fragility in the face of bigger forces at work. What such threats and dangers do is to cast us back upon God’s mercy and protection: we recognise that our illusion of control is exactly that, and we seek with fresh urgency God’s love and favour, his divine sustenance instead.

Treated in that way, this remains a glorious psalm, one which practises true humility in the face of all kinds of dangers, be they viral (v3,6), physical (v5,7,10), emotional (v5) or spiritual (v2). Let’s pray the beginning and the end of this psalm, and may it be the air that we breathe today:

Lord, grant me grace to shelter under your wings. Be my refuge and fortress today. Answer me in trouble, rescue and protect me, and show me your salvation. For you are my God, in whom I trust. Amen.

Day 3 – Psalm 92 ‘Good to praise’

‘Dear Optimist and Pessimist, while you were arguing about whether the glass was half full or half empty, I drank it. Yours sincerely, The Pragmatist.’

This great little note was written on the door of the staff room at the cafe for the homeless in Bristol where our church used to take teams regularly. It always put a smile on my face before we opened the doors, and at the end of the evening when I came to get my coat.

I wonder how you would describe yourself: are you naturally a glass half-full or half-empty sort of person? It’s not a moral judgement to answer either way, the world needs both. Half-empty people are more naturally inclined to effect change, even if those changes are more likely to be appreciated by half-full people!

But when it comes to approaching God, it’s quite helpful to be a bit of both. ‘It is good to praise....’ begins our psalm for today. It was a song specially written for Sabbath worship, but its application is universal. It is a healthy attribute of faith and life to praise God – from first thing in the morning to last thing at night (v2).

There’s no caveat to this declaration: it’s not just for the good times. It might be said that praise is especially important in the not-so-good times. In that sense, it’s good to be half-full people – we can praise God’s character (v2) and what God has already done (vv4-5). Things that don’t change, things that form the bedrock of our lives.

We need to praise. Praise lifts our hearts and our spirits. Praise restores a sense of gratitude and wonder. Praise renews our faith, and gives us courage to believe that God is still God, that he still loves us and will remain faithful, and that, one way or another, things will be OK.

Far from being an escape from reality, *praise anchors us in reality*, and balances our perspective again. What is interesting in this psalm is how open the psalmist is about having enemies, and being surrounded by wickedness (vv6-11). These sections of the psalms are never easy to read to our modern sensibilities, not least because these enemies are usually described as particular people – but it’s possible to generalise the idea of enemies as being all the bad things that we face in the world, and especially those things which drag us away from God.

Whilst we may not wish to visualise particular people, we can all imagine other challenges of situations where we can declare God’s victory and find hope and inspiration once again. That’s why I still read the whole psalm, rather than the edited highlights!

In that sense, this type of praise in all situations is for the half-empty people too, those of us who are naturally wired to notice difficulties and problems. The pattern of the psalmist reminds us that we can take these honestly to God and declare his victory. We live our faith in the valley as well as the mountaintop.

Praise ultimately is what helps us to flourish (v12-13). It gives us a healthy perspective: celebrating the good, finding faith to face the bad. May God inspire us to praise this day: why not pray through this psalm for a few moments, declaring God’s praises, that we too might flourish ‘in the courts of our God’ today.

Day 4 – Psalm 93 ‘Robed in majesty’

Not many people have robes nowadays – at least, I don’t think they do! It’s a garment associated with authority or magnificence, isn’t it? The Queen even has her own Mistress of the Robes, a post which dates back to the 16th century, albeit now it’s more ceremonial than literal.

And this is the language of today’s psalm, which begins: ‘The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty.’ Whilst God is Spirit, many psalms and other scriptures like to imagine God as a physical monarch, with suitable imagery for authority and magnificence. ‘Robed in majesty’ is a wonderful, evocative phrase, but it’s no mere window dressing (pardon the pun). In this short psalm, we’re invited to sample the evidence for God’s majesty.

First, there’s our earth. A stable planet, which even the ancients knew to be ‘firm and secure’. I love playing records, and am always surprised to discover how many of my collection are older than I am. I can take out a piece of black plastic that’s still in pristine condition aged 60 – if only that would be true of me in time to come!

But these silly human comparisons pale when compared to the age of the earth. People often quote modern understandings of the age of the earth – approx 4 billion years – as being an argument against God. But here the psalmist – 3,000 years ago, remember – uses it as an argument *in favour of God*. He made something that can last 4 billion years. Puts every empire, every construction, every piece of human ingenuity into the shade, doesn’t it?

Then there’s his throne, which is likewise established ‘long ago’. Whilst we can’t point to a literal throne, we know that God’s authority has been seen in his dealings with our world for thousands of years – God has been God for as long as humans have existed. God is, as the psalm says, ‘from all eternity.’

Next, there are the seas – which in ancient thought symbolised all the forces of chaos and darkness. But in this marvellous poetic image, *even the seas* ‘have lifted up their voice’, because God is mightier than even the greatest waves. In other words, even the strongest force in nature is as nothing compared to the greatness of God.

Finally, there are God’s ‘statutes’ – that is, his laws and promises. These, too, stand firm. There is an air of permanence about everything God does, and his character (his ‘holiness’) does not change.

In our shifting times, our uncertain world, how good it is to reflect on the unchanging majesty, might and authority of God. It is *this* God into whose loving hands we place ourselves today. And may that thought give us the confidence of hope, the strength of joy and the peace that passes understanding today.

Father thank you that you are robed in majesty. I lift my voice to you, even as the great waves do. Help me to stand firm and secure upon the rock of your promises. Abide with me today. Amen.

Day 5 – Psalm 94 ‘Founded on righteousness’

I must confess that I’m too young to remember the classic 1960s TV series The Avengers. On the other hand, I’m also too old to have watched all of the recent Marvel film series, also called Avengers. So I’m at a bit of a disadvantage in terms of cultural reference points in this whole area! What is true, though, is that while many of us watch or read stories about people who avenge on behalf of others, in this day and age we feel uncomfortable ascribing this kind of behaviour to God.

Today’s psalm is one of those that doesn’t get read much nowadays. Psalm 91, 95, 96, 97 and 98 – the ones all around it, in other words – are very popular, and often read or quoted. Psalm 94.... not so much. The reason is there in the first line: ‘The Lord is a God who avenges’. It’s ironic in some ways because we don’t have a problem with the idea generally, as the popularity of ‘avenger’ motifs in culture makes clear. And avenging is different to revenging, which is a critical distinction to make. Revenge is something we do personally to someone else in the face of something we have suffered. Avenging is more objective: it is justice meted out usually on behalf of someone else – i.e. not as a result of our own injury. So we do need avengers – those who enact justice on behalf of others.

What’s important about these ‘avenging’ psalms – and there are plenty of them – is that by asking *God* to act, we are removing our own right to do so. When faced with injustice, we take it to God, rather than take the law into our own hands. This is the value of these psalms – *they provide an outlet for our cries for justice*, and take those cries to the one true source of justice and righteousness: the Lord God Almighty.

I’m sure it will have been hard for many of us to read the words of this psalm – which particularly addresses the issue of bad governance – and not find ourselves thinking of particular countries or situations in the world at present. It is not for me to comment on any of those directly: but what this psalm does is provide us with a blueprint for how to face issues of corruption (v20), injustice (v5,v7, v21), hubris (v4) and violence (v6) in our world and turn them back to God in prayer.

Ultimately we go back to the ‘Rock that is higher than I’ – *we ask God to intervene*. Psalm 94 gives us permission to name injustices and pray for God’s will to be done. We seek God’s justice, mercy and righteousness.

And as we do that, we find ourselves able to claim two wonderful promises hidden in this psalm: we find consolation in our anxiety (v19), and refuge in a time of trial (v22). How many of us need that today!

One day, ‘judgement will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it’ (v15). But until then, let’s be thankful for these psalms, which give us words to approach God with the very real problems of our world; and remind us that God cares enough about his world to intervene.

Lord, in our fractured world, we ask you to bring your justice and mercy to wherever it is needed. Protect the vulnerable, frustrate the wicked, promote justice and grant us your consolation and refuge today. Support us, O Lord, with your unfailing love, and bring us joy. Amen.

Day 6 – Psalm 95 ‘Above all gods’

As many of you know, I’ve always loved my football. I played (not very well) till I was 40, and Match of the Day remains a staple of my viewing habits. I’m too old now to stay up till midnight on Saturday watching it ‘live’, it’s a with-breakfast pilgrimage on Sunday and Monday mornings for me!

My favourite part of the show has long been ‘Goal of the Month’. The show picks 6 or 8 of the best goals of the previous few weeks and then the winner is chosen at the end of the show. It used to be by the presenters themselves, though now you can vote online. The winning goal gets shown again and also goes into the draw for ‘Goal of the Season’.

Many people think about matters of faith a bit like Goal of the Month. In the end, all ‘gods’ are like these good goals – fundamentally the same, you just pick whichever one you like the best, or that your team scored. It doesn’t really matter which, because a goal is a goal, isn’t it?

Today’s psalm reminds us that, when it comes to ‘things eternal’, this way of thinking isn’t really an option. There is only one God – the Lord, ‘Yahweh’ (v1,v3) – and this God is ‘above all gods’.

The psalm also reminds us that there are good reasons for ascribing ultimate authority to this one God. He made the whole world (v4), even the powerful seas (v5) – and, crucially, he forms a loving relationship with his people (v7). Unlike the other capricious deities of the time, this God wasn’t unpredictable or tyrannical. Nor does this God just wind the clock up and let it run: he engages with his world, he takes pastoral care of us.

Shepherds in ancient Israel lived and travelled with their sheep, protected them from danger (no paddocks or fenced fields in those days), fought off wild animals, walked miles to find water and pasture – in other words, gave everything for their wellbeing, because their flock was precious.

This is the God we worship! And it’s helpful sometimes to reflect on whether we’ve unconsciously allowed other things to divert our gaze from adoring this God. We might not have ‘idols’ or shrines as such, but a ‘god’ can be anything that takes our attention away from our Creator. Money, popularity, an all-consuming hobby, an addiction – you name it.

Today, we can declare with confidence, that *God is above all these gods*. This God –our God – is the true and only ruler of the earth. ‘If only we would hear his voice’ (v7) – and of course, when we read this psalm, we do! And this voice tells us that God is our Rock, our salvation, our shepherd, and that we are precious to him.

May these glorious truths inspire us to thanksgiving and worship today.

O Lord my Rock, you are the great God, above all others. I gladly put you first, and worship you with thanks and praise. Truly I am in your care – be my shepherd today. Amen.

Day 7 – Psalm 96 ‘A new song’

A couple of years ago we took out a subscription to Amazon Prime’s ‘Music Unlimited’. Generally the Trendalls are always late to any technological party – I still mourn the demise of beacons on hillsides as the primary means of communicating news. Admittedly, many of my peers have been users of a music subscription channel for 5 or 10 years. But by our standards, this was a revolution. Suddenly almost every song that had ever been published – 50 million or so pieces of music – was available for us to listen to: anytime, anywhere.

Today’s psalm begins by inviting us to ‘Sing to the Lord a new song.’ In today’s world, this could be considered straightforward when you’ve got 50 million songs to choose from – but how do we lift our hearts in faith to sing a new song every day? Surely words are limited? Feelings are finite? What does a ‘new song’ really mean?

Over the years, I’ve been fortunate to minister to some wonderful old saints – people who inspired me far more than I ever did them. And what’s noticeable about such amazing people is that, no matter their age, their faith is *young* – it is childlike, enthusiastic. They wake up with God every morning as if they found faith just yesterday, and it still causes them wonder. They speak of God with the joy of the newly-in-love. They remember answers to prayer with excitement and thanksgiving, as if this was something that had just started to happen to them.

I think this is what the psalmist means by a new song. God does not change. His character is steadfast, constant – always loving, faithful and good. He remains the same, yesterday, today and forever. But whilst this is true, one of the keys to faith is that we receive these truths as ‘new every morning’. They remain fresh, exciting, awe-inspiring. They put praise on our lips, peace in our hearts and joy in our spirits. They cause us to ‘proclaim his salvation day-after-day’ (v2), and ‘declare his glory among the nations’ (v3).

It’s easy to get tired and stale – in faith as in life. Which is why the infectious joy of the psalmist is so valuable. I need a bit of whatever he or she is having! Maybe you do too.

So today, can I encourage you to pray this psalm, and offer your praises to God. And may God renew our hearts as we do, so that we would, this day and every day, sing a new song to the Lord. Amen!

Day 8 – Psalm 96 (ii) ‘The splendour of holiness’

Holy people have this thing about them, don't they? To come into the presence of someone who really walks closely with God – it's a strangely affecting experience. I knew a person like that in London. He had a huge impact on my spiritual life: I must confess when I first met him I found him a bit scary – but I also felt drawn to him. There was just something magnetic – you might say splendid – about this person.

Others have testified to similar experiences when meeting other, more celebrated holy people. Great humility or love has something of awe about it. It was even said that the birds used to flock to St Francis of Assisi just to land on him! Who knows if that's true – but it's a lovely image, nonetheless.

Today, in this second reflection on Psalm 96, we are invited to 'worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness' (v9). I've always found this phrase interesting, because in modern thinking, being holy is not thought of in that way at all. We tend to think of it negatively: being a killjoy, or disapproving, or self-righteous. Not a very splendid thing.

Of course, such parodies are way off the mark. And today's psalm invites us to recapture the real essence of what it means to be holy – i.e. 'set apart'. God's perfection is magnificent. To be holy as God is holy means to be perfect in love, in wisdom, in joy, in patience, in gentleness, as well as in authority and justice. It is, quite literally, awe-some. It carries with it the weight of glory.

When we meet truly holy people today, we see something of that reflected light. It's why saints in old paintings are always pictured with haloes – auras of light around their being. They reflect the glory of the One who is truly holy: God Almighty – perfect in power, in love and purity, as the old hymn would have it.

Amazingly, this is our calling too. Most of us feel that we haven't got very far with that – and yet, because Christ dwells with us, in our hearts, so we too are being slowly transformed into his likeness 'with ever-increasing glory'.

So today, let's delight in the splendour of God's holiness. Let's pray for eyes to see its glory and magnificence, to bask in its reflected light. And, by God's grace, may some of that light rub off on us too.

Loving and mighty Lord, you reign. You reign over the earth. You reign in my heart. You have all glory and strength, and I delight in your magnificent holiness. I offer you myself today, the only worthy offering I can make. Fill my heart anew with the light of your presence. Amen.

Day 9 – Psalm 97 ‘Good foundations’

A few years ago we tried to buy a house in Manchester. My sister lives there and the idea was that once we'd bought it, she would have the security of long-term tenancy and (reasonably) nice landlords. However, when we had the survey done we discovered huge problems with subsidence. It was a Victorian end-of-terrace at the bottom of the slope and over the last century had been very gradually sinking. We sadly had to withdraw. Thankfully my sister is well housed elsewhere!

It was a harsh lesson in the importance of good foundations. Every good edifice rests on them. And in today's psalm, we learn that God's throne has vital foundations, too: they are 'righteousness and justice' (v2).

It's easy to see these words as being 'cold' or abstract, but that would fall short of their original meaning. Biblical scholars have emphasised the *relational* meaning of both of these words. Here's how one described each: 'righteous action is action which conforms to the requirements of the relationship and in a more general sense promotes the peace and wellbeing of the community'; justice [is] the strongly ethical notion of action which is to be legally upheld because it is productive of communal wellbeing.'

That might sound like a mouthful, but it's a valuable insight because it earths these foundational words in *God's relationship with us*. When God is righteous, he is righteous for the good of his creation – including us; when God is just, he is just towards *us*.

Although we might instinctively have preferred something a bit cuddlier like 'love and peace' as the foundation of God's throne, in fact what we get is something even better. God's righteousness assures us that his love is perfectly directed. God's justice is what secures our peace. As the old liberation slogan reminds us: 'No peace without justice.' Wonderfully, in knowing God we get *both*.

So we can be thankful for these words! God's throne is founded on two pillars which ultimately secure our wellbeing, too – righteousness and justice. The heavens proclaim it (v6); and we are called to model it too (vv10-12). We are called to live just and righteous lives because we are made in God's image and therefore reflect our Maker's intentions.

In our shifting world, God's throne is secure. And we too can rest secure in these same unchanging qualities. May those qualities shine on us today (v11), producing joy and praise in our hearts and on our lips.

Just and righteous Lord, thank you that your foundations are secure. Help us to rest firm on those same foundations. Guard our lives today, and deliver us from evil. Shine on us, we pray, and in all the dark places of our community. Amen.

Day 10 – Psalm 98 ‘The work of salvation’

‘Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing: power and majesty, praise to the King. Mountains bow down and the seas will roar at the sound of your name. I sing for joy at the work of your hands.’

Some of you will recognise those words as the chorus of one of the most popular worship songs of the last thirty years: ‘My Jesus, my Saviour.’ They’re taken directly from the verses of this psalm (v4, then vv7-8, then v1). And yet, these words were written hundreds of years before Jesus – which begs a useful question: what is ‘the work of God’s hands’ being referred to here? What ‘salvation is being made known’?

The psalm itself doesn’t tell us, but by and large whenever the Old Testament writers – especially the psalmists and prophets – refer to a saving act which God has *already* done, they’re usually referring to the miraculous rescue from Egypt, especially the two saving acts of Passover and the Crossing of the Red Sea. These were acts of literal salvation which decisively showed the Israelites that this God was their God, and they were his people.

The annual Passover celebration instituted from that moment reminded every generation of what God had done, and instructed the people to ‘make that salvation known’ (v2) afresh. They are called to remember, even as God remembers his love (v3).

But God’s saving work didn’t end at a point in history. God continued to rescue his people: in the time of Gideon, or David, or Hezekiah, and even after exile through the courage of Esther. God always remembers his love for his people.

And so we fast forward several centuries to a new Passover, a new Crossing from certain death to promised life – this time seen on a cross and then in an empty tomb. A new marvellous work of God, whose holy arm works salvation. Our God is the same: yesterday, today and forever. He continues to save, and Jesus is the true and greatest fulfilment of this psalm of praise. What was enacted for a particular people at the Red Sea was enacted *for all people for all time* at Calvary. There Jesus revealed God’s righteousness to the nations, so that all the ends of the earth might see the salvation of our God.

So it is quite right for that famous song to put Jesus at the heart of this psalm. And perhaps, if we know it, we too can sing the song in response. Let us sing a new song today, and be inspired to make his salvation known wherever God grants us the chance.

Loving Lord, I sing for joy at the work of your hands. Thank you that you always remember your love for me. Help me to abide in that love, and know your continuing saving work in my life. Amen.

Day 11 – Psalm 99 ‘Between the cherubim’

When I was a student one of the pictures I had on my wall was part of a famous painting by Raphael (The Sistine Madonna) depicting two small angels looking up at Mary. You’ll probably recognise the image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raphael,_Putti.jpg . I studied Raphael, and always found the nonchalance of these two cherubs charming, and perhaps slightly subversive.

But there’s a problem with this kind of image. Take the word ‘cherub’ and this is usually the kind of image we think of: lovable, childlike, dare I say it ‘cute’. So when we read in today’s passage that God sits ‘enthroned between the cherubim’ (v1) – plural of cherub – we might imagine a scene which pictures God as a Sunday School teacher on a plastic chair surrounded by lots of adoring (or bored) young children on a mat. A vision which seems to jar with the first line of the verse, too: that this God, surrounded by all his cherubs, is so majestic that the nations ought to tremble. We don’t tend to employ Sunday School teachers like that anymore – though maybe we did once!

The underlying issue here is that we’ve got our image of cherubs rather wrong. Although there is a long-held Jewish tradition that depicts cherubs with children’s faces, the rest of them is not so, well, cherubic. Cherubs are magnificent, awe-inspiring creatures. They appear as divine guards in Genesis 3:24 when Adam and Eve have been banished from the Garden of Eden.

Their ‘guarding’ role is also at the heart of God’s relationship with his people: in the Most Holy Place a pair of cherubim flanks the ark of the covenant: one each side, each 15 feet high with a 15-foot wingspan, touching in the middle. And between them, the ark of the covenant: holding the tablets with the Ten Commandments, and with the atonement cover on top, where, once a year, the High Priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood which atoned for the sins of the people.

So the description that God sits ‘enthroned between the cherubim’ is one of *majesty and mercy*. It reminds us of God’s awesome holiness – so holy that, under the Law, only one person once a year could enter his presence, and even then only when the room was filled with the smoke of incense.

But also merciful: the place ‘between the cherubim’ became known as The Mercy Seat – the place where this majestic, holy God lovingly forgave our sin and restored us to his presence.

The place between the cherubim is *the place where God met with the world on earth*, in majesty and mercy. No wonder, then, that this is one of the ‘awe-some’ psalms, where our response to this glorious God is reverence and praise. It also explains why most of the rest of the psalm talks about God’s justice, and also the famous priests who ministered on God’s behalf.

The wonderful good news of Christ is that he was the perfect sacrifice at the mercy seat – for all people, for all time. We can *all* now have the freedom and confidence to approach the Most Holy Place of God’s presence (Hebrews 10:19). It’s easy to forget what a privilege this is: let’s claim that freedom again today, in Jesus’ name, and bring our lives and our prayers to God, the One who graciously answers (v6,v8).

Mighty God, who reigns forever, thank you that we have access to your glorious presence. We worship at your footstool today. Hear our prayers, especially..... Thank you that you answer. Help us to hold onto you. Amen.

Day 12 – Psalm 100 ‘Through all generations’

We live in a culture which focuses largely on the now. ‘The past is a foreign country,’ and the future is a crystal ball. Only the present matters.

Whilst we inevitably have to live in the here and now, we also lose so much if we get caught up with this attitude. And not just in practical terms: ‘those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them,’ as the old saying goes. It is a spiritual problem too. One of the great strengths of Jewish culture – and many others too – is the sense of ancestry, of a spiritual past. Time and again, God’s people are encouraged to remember the past, what God has done throughout history.

This sense of collective remembrance has a spiritual purpose. It reminded them – and us – of who God is. The actions defined the character. How do we *know* that God is loving, or good, or faithful? Look at what He’s *done*. Creation, covenant, and then miraculous rescue, time and again. And this is before we even get to Jesus! As we honour the past, so we see God’s faithfulness writ large.

It applies at a small scale too. We will have personal stories that form part of our past, as well as the famous stories of the heroes of the faith. Never forget them. Take time occasionally to remember them, to declare them. Perhaps today might be a moment to do so for a few minutes.

As we reflect on this short but wonderful psalm, it feels like its ending is really the beginning. *This* is our bedrock, as it was for God’s people thousands of years ago when this psalm was written: ‘The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.’ (v5)

This is why we can be encouraged to ‘shout for joy’ (v1), to relate to God as our Good Shepherd (v3), to spend time in his presence (v4).

God has been faithful. He is faithful. He will be faithful. May that make us glad today. Amen.

Day 13 – Psalm 101 ‘Eyes on the faithful’

‘I’ve got my eye on you!’ That’s what my old vicar said to me a year or so after I’d joined the church. I was in my late 20s and had started helping out in various ways. I didn’t think much about what he said at the time, though looking back maybe he saw something about my future which I didn’t pursue actively for some years yet. I’m pretty sure he wasn’t worried about his job!

But the idea of ‘keeping an eye on’ something is a familiar phrase to us. We use it in lots of ways – it can denote positive interest or (negative) suspicion. What do you keep an eye on? Breaking news, the weather, some shares you own, your neighbour’s frisky dog, the hairline crack in your wall?

The truth is we keep our eyes on lots of things. Today, though, King David encourages us to keep our eyes on something – or someone – else. ‘My eyes,’ he says, ‘will be on the faithful in the land.’ (v6)

This is a less well-known psalm, and unusually focuses much more on the lifestyle of the psalmist than the greatness of God – though there is praise as well, and to a large degree the two are linked in this psalm. David’s desire is to lead a holy life, and to promote holiness within his people too. So he wants nothing to do with wickedness (vv3-4) but rather to lead a blameless life, which welcomes the presence of God (v2).

As part of this ‘holy culture’ he also directs his attention to those who, like him, want to do God’s will. Those are the people he not only wants to hang out with, but who will themselves ‘minister to him’ (v6).

It’s a useful reminder that we walk this journey of faith together. As we long to grow in our relationship with God, so we find encouragement and strength from doing so with others who want the same. As I write this during lockdown caused by the global pandemic, it has been difficult to meet together as we normally would: but today, let’s receive the words of this psalm as an encouragement to turn our eyes towards our faithful brothers and sisters, finding creative ways to ‘dwell’ with them and minister to each other.

That might be a phone call, or a time spent in prayer for particular people, or perhaps both. But, however we do it, let’s rejoice that we walk *together*, under God. Let’s keep our eyes on those who are part of our family of faith, that God, too, might come to us.

Thank you Lord, for the family of the church. Thank you for all those who long to walk in step with you. Help us to keep our eyes on each other, that we might minister your love, and dwell as your people wherever you have put us. Amen.

Day 14 – Psalm 102 ‘But you, Lord...’

(Written during lockdown 2021) This is a season of lament. Everywhere I go (which isn't far at the moment, obviously), everyone I talk to, the sense is the same: a profound sadness and weariness. For some, it's the acute grief of loss of someone close to them. For others, it's other forms of loss: loss of contact, of pleasurable activities, of variety in life, of hope that things will get better anytime soon. But, with rare exceptions, for pretty much all of us: it is a season of loss. And therefore a season of lament.

In good times, we avoid psalms like today's one. Too gloomy, too melodramatic: 'my bones burn... reduced to skin and bones... like an owl among the ruins... thrown aside.'

But these are not psalms for the good times. We need language for the bad times too. For seasons like this. The great Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann once said that his image of the psalmist was of 'a little old Jewish man shaking his fist at God.' And the fact that we *can* shake our fist, that we *can* pour out our cry, that we *can* describe our sadness and our grief and maybe even our anger at God, is a great comfort. God is not insecure. *God can take it* – like a parent who holds their distraught child even as the child beats their fists against the parent's chest.

And like all outpourings of grief, eventually the tears dry up and we are emptied. It's what comes next that is significant. Sadly for some people, there is nowhere else to turn, hope is limited entirely by human factors. But for the psalmist, verse 11 is followed by the great affirmation of verse 12: 'But you, Lord, sit enthroned for ever.'

The world lets us down – repeatedly. But God isn't going anywhere. God is still on his throne. And God's character doesn't change: 'You will arise and have compassion.' (v13) That's a promise for us, too, and not just the people of the psalmist's day.

It's not a magic wand. But it helps us *both to look down and to look up*. To look down at the sure foundation beneath our feet. To look up to God's throne, and know that there is something – Someone – greater than ourselves, in whose shadow we can find rest.

So if you resonate with this psalm today, don't be afraid to pour out your lament to God. And then read v12 and 13, and ask God to fix your gaze where you might find hope: in the Lord of heaven and earth. Amen.

Day 15 – Psalm 102 (ii) ‘The Lord will rebuild’

(Written during lockdown 2021) How will we recover from this current season? Our papers are full of this question most days: the progress of the vaccine; the relaxation of restrictions; the financial safeguards to alleviate poverty; the stimulus packages to create jobs and promote growth. And that’s all very well: it is the job of the secular government to do these things.

But it’s only part of the answer. There are deeper questions to ask: about wellbeing, about pain, about loss, about the disruption to relationships; and also (positively) about the increased hunger for God, for community, for meaning. Who will rebuild these?

This Psalm is worth a second look, for all kinds of reasons. Its honest lament is probably one we could offer most days at present, and that would be enough in itself, although you might feel a bit short-changed if my reflection for today was: ‘read yesterday’s!’

Instead, let’s direct our attention to this important question which the psalm addresses: who will rebuild our spiritual and emotional wellbeing? Who will bind up our wounds? Who will bless the growth of the kingdom and community? The answer is clear: ‘the Lord will rebuild’ (v16).

Zion is biblical shorthand for the visible kingdom of God on earth. When everything seems hopeless or broken, *God is still at work*: God rebuilds; God responds (v17); God releases (v20); God remains (v27). God, and only God, can do this deeper work of rebuilding.

The journey of secular recovery is long and uncertain. There will be failures and frustrations. Kingdom work, too, is costly. *But the difference is the architect*. Our confidence is that the Lord will rebuild. And our Lord calls us to partner with him in this work – in prayer, and, in time, through action. Governments come and go: but the Lord remains the same. (v27)

Today, let’s call on our eternal God to do this work of rebuilding: in our lives; our churches; our communities; our nation; our world. It will be challenging: but we worship a great big God.

Lord of all the earth, life is hard. But you are good. Do your work of rebuilding, I pray: in me... in those around me... and in my community.... Appear in your glory in our fractured world, that, in time, all might assemble to worship you. Amen.

Day 16 – Psalm 103 ‘All my inmost being’

‘Bless the Lord, my soul!’ This joyful beginning to one of the most famous psalms is both much loved and also sometimes causes a little head scratching: surely God blesses us, and not the other way round? The fact that most modern translations render the word as ‘praise’ is a sure sign that this idea troubles people. So let’s begin with a short explanation as to why we can bless God as well as rejoice that God blesses us: ‘When the Lord blesses us, he reviews our needs and responds to them; when we bless the Lord, we review his excellencies and respond to them.’ (J.A. Motyer)

In other words, it is not an equivalent action: to bless is to bestow God’s goodness on someone or something: so when we do that to God, we are not bestowing anything he doesn’t already have! So in that sense it is fair to translate it as ‘praise’: however, it’s worth keeping the original meaning as it reminds us that *we are to be people of blessing*. This goes to the heart of God’s promise to Abraham way back in Genesis 12: whenever we ‘bless’ God (and others) we fulfil that wonderful promise.

So let’s bless! And let’s also observe today the true source of this blessing on our part: ‘all my inmost being’ (v1). This throwaway phrase takes on profound importance as the bible develops, culminating in Jesus’ own teaching. In essence: to praise God with our lips and our lives requires us to start with our hearts and minds. It is the inner life which fuels the outward action.

So here King David feeds his mind by reminding himself in verses 3-5 of all the reasons he has to praise God: a God who forgives and heals, of love and compassion, who satisfies and renews.

This list is both uplifting and unsettling. Many will ask: why does David say that God heals all of our diseases when he patently does not? There is much debate over how to explain this: some try and change the meaning of ‘all’ to ‘all kinds of’ or to spiritualise the word ‘disease’ so that it might mean something other than its plain meaning. Both explanations are inadequate.

Instead, let’s observe first that these psalms are poems and songs written in a culture which likes to emphasise things through hyperbole. When Katrina sings that she’s walking on sunshine, we don’t assume that she has literally levitated on a warm day. It’s a powerful phrase which conveys an inner truth.

That’s a good place to start; but then, let’s go further and rely on the vital principle that we let scripture interpret itself. So when we see a set of declarations here, what *else* does the bible about these things? In this case, Scripture consistently affirms that in Christ God forgives every sin; that God does satisfy every godly desire, though not always as we expect; and certainly that God is love in the core of his being. So we can accept these wonderful phrases of David literally. Healing is more complicated: but what we *can* affirm is that in the new creation everything (and everyone) will be healed. So this phrase is equally true, but its meaning is only realised at a later point.

As we close, let’s call to mind those we love who have died ‘in the faith’, and let’s take comfort and hope that this word is gloriously true for them: that now they are fully healed and with our Lord in glory. And may God stir our hearts, that with ‘all our inmost being’ we too can bless God’s holy name. Amen.

Day 17 – Psalm 103 (ii) ‘Crowns you with love’

‘Heavy is the head that wears the crown.’ This quote (or rather slight misquote!) from Shakespeare’s Henry IV is a great observation about the challenges of leadership and responsibility. Such things weigh upon us. Indeed, a literal crown for most monarchs is usually a heavy object: the King Edward Crown of Queen Elizabeth II weighs nearly 5lbs! Try wearing that for a long ceremonial occasion. The Queen might well have neck muscles like those on a Formula 1 racing driver.

But there is a crown which does not weigh heavy. It is the crown mentioned here in verse 4: *the crown of God’s love and compassion*. What a beautiful phrase this is! God does not just offer us, or give us, these things: he *crowns* us with them.

The image suggests that these things are of great value – both to the giver but also to the wearer. To wear a crown is to be bestowed with great worth. And so we are to God: the Lord thinks the world of us. He made no-one else like us. We bear his image. We are of infinite worth to him. So yes, we can rightly describe God’s love and compassion as a crown – just let that thought sink in for a moment, and warm your heart.

But let us also remember that to give us this crown, God also wore one while on earth. The only crown God ever wore was one of thorns: the ultimate act of self-giving love. A crown which weighed little in grams but weighed everything in cost. When God crowns us, let us never forget what crown God kept for himself.

We may never get to wear a physical crown. But today, let us rejoice that we wear a spiritual one. One given to us at such a cost: the crown of God’s love and compassion. And may that crown be worn not just in our heads, but also in our hearts.

Gracious God, thank you that I am worth everything to you. I gladly receive your crown of love. Fill me with your compassion, too, that I might also pass that on to others. Bless the Lord, my soul. Amen.

Day 18 – Psalm 103 (iii) ‘Not as we deserve’

In January 2021, one of outgoing President Trump’s last acts was to grant presidential pardons to 143 people. The list makes interesting reading. Whilst some are clearly politically motivated, others take into account evidence of life-change or subsequent good works. A number have raised significant amounts for charity, or re-trained in prison.

Whatever we think of this particular president, there is still something powerful about the act of forgiveness enacted through a pardon. All these individuals had received, or were about to receive, the punishment their sins deserved – and then were shown mercy.

This goes to the heart of our text for today, and reminds us of a deep but glorious biblical truth about our relationship with God. All of us have fallen short of the life we were designed to have. All of us deserve the consequences for that. But God, in his great love and mercy, ‘does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities’ (v10).

In fact, the psalmist goes further – declaring in one of the great texts of the Old Testament: ‘For as high as the heavens are above the earth, *so great is his love* for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.’ (v11-12)

It is as if, the psalmist says, God has picked up our sins, flown across the Atlantic and buried the whole lot of them in the Nevada Desert. *That’s* how far God has taken our sin away.

God compassion is rooted in both our status as his children (v13) and our fragility as mortal beings (v14-16). God forgives because he is our perfect, eternal Father. We don’t need to earn it: we just have to receive it.

So today, as God’s beloved children, let’s remember what we have been forgiven. Let’s receive the gift of God’s new life, slowly transforming us from the inside out. And may these glorious truths cause praise to rise on our lips, as it does for psalmist at the end of this psalm:

Praise the Lord, all his works, everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Day 19 – Psalm 104:1-9 ‘Clothed with splendour’

The lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, for all their challenges, also birthed plenty of new gifts. Many of us used the confines of the season to learn a new skill. For my daughter Amelie, that meant making her own clothes. She began with simple tops; then progressed to creating her own school shirts, stitching together two different fabrics – and pleased to reuse some of my old work shirts which no longer see the light of day! – and finally graduated to making dresses. She is also discovering her own style, which I think is admirable. When social events began again, she was certainly splendidly clothed!

The first part of today’s psalm takes the clothing analogy and applies it to God. How do we describe the greatness of the Lord? Often words fail us, and therefore very often the writers of the psalms – as we have noted before – use human images to help us picture the awesome majesty of the Almighty. So, here in verse 1: ‘Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.’

Whilst God has glory within himself, it can be helpful to picture God’s attributes as things we can see or touch. Verses 2-9 describe two types of clothing, two facets of the glory of God. First, light: ‘The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment.’ (v2)

As days lengthen through spring each year, we are blessed with the joy of ever greater amounts of light. For many of us, this lifts our spirits – and for the psalmist... **As I write, the snow is falling, which means the sky is bathed in this beautiful light, as the thick white clouds reflect the white surface of the world, and vice-versa. Whilst it’s unlikely that the psalmist saw much snow,** they let a similar idea – that of heavenly light – point them back to God. The heavens are stretched out like a tent (v2), as God makes the clouds his chariot (v3). The glorious light of the sky points us towards an even more glorious God.

Similarly, water is the other form of clothing we see in this psalm, only this time it is a garment for God’s world. ‘You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment.’ (v6) Whilst the image is perhaps more unsettling, it reminds us that the powerful fundamental forces of nature are in God’s hands. To imagine God wrapped in light, as the earth is wrapped in water, is a picture of majesty and magnificence. We gaze in awe at the power and greatness of God.

Global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic make many of us feel small. But sometimes it’s not a bad thing to feel small if we know where to look for the One who is huge. That would be God. The world always faces major challenges. But *we worship an even bigger God* – a great, big God, in the words of the famous children’s song. A God wrapped in light: light enough for the darkness of the world, even the darkness within our own lives.

Lord my God, you are very great. Help me to find comfort in your greatness. I feel small in the face of all that life throws at me at present. But you are glorious, and I pray for your light to shine into my life again today. Amen.

Day 20 – Psalm 104:10-18 ‘The land is satisfied’

(Written during winter) I hope some of you were able to enjoy the snow! In many ways we had just the right amount in Milton Keynes – enough to make everything look beautiful, but not so much to cause serious disruption. Other areas were less fortunate in that regard. But our land is certainly well-watered again – as it seems to have been for much of the last few weeks.

After the deluge of water referred to in yesterday’s verses, today’s verses show the benefits of water in our world: springs which ‘flow between the mountains’ (v10), watering the fields (v11), quenching the thirst of the animals (v11), and cultivating crops for animals and people (v14).

I’m conscious as I write this that flooding has recently affected a number of areas, and sadly, several hundred homes in various parts of the country. For these people today, it would be very hard to read such verses extolling the benefits of rainfall. Certainly we should hold all those affected in our thoughts and prayers.

Yet it’s worth reminding ourselves that much of Israel faced a yearly battle to get enough water – as indeed do many parts of our world. There is a wonderful African song which is called: ‘Rain, rain, beautiful rain.’ It’s hard for many of us Brits to understand why anyone would write such a song. But it’s in this context that the psalmist is so excited about God’s provision of enough water. Without water, we simply cannot live.

It’s no surprise, then, that water is presented as one of the greatest of God’s gifts, one which blesses all of his creation. It is through water that ‘the land is satisfied’ and teems with life. Through it, humans are blessed with other essentials, too: bread, oil and (dare I say it) wine which ‘gladdens our hearts’ (v15).

So today, let’s focus on water – and perhaps allow it to inform our prayers in various ways: first, to renew our thankfulness for the ease of access we have to it – much of the world would love to live somewhere with the amount of rainfall we have throughout the year; second to pray for those negatively affected by too much water or too little, especially those victims of flooding and drought; third, to pray for health and renewal of all creation which relies on water. This psalm describes so many glories of the natural world, and we humans remain those primarily tasked by God with looking after it.

And as we do this, may the Lord also fill our hearts with his living water, ‘a spring welling up to eternal life.’

Day 21 – Psalm 104:19-35 ‘All creatures look to you’

Very few of us like wasps. In fact, most people hate them – and certainly fear them. Wasps like are like the evil twins of bees – where bees create and bring life (through pollination), wasps just cause pain and destruction.

Or do they?

Watching a nature programme recently, I was amazed to hear the BBC presenter Chris Packham extolling the virtues of wasps. In particular he showed us the nest of a certain African wasp. This wasp looked even scarier than the ones we have here – about twice the size of our native wasps, with a long red tail. It also eats (and feeds its young) by dissolving caterpillar larvae with a particularly foul chemical which it injects into its prey. Just be glad we don't have them here.

But, as Packham described, we have only recently come to understand their value. These wasps eat caterpillar larvae, which mean that the savannah is not overrun with hungry caterpillar grubs in the rainy season, which means that the foliage is not all eaten by these insects, which allows other animals to graze and to live. In other words, as Packham looked out on herds of wildebeest, and magnificent giraffes, zebras, deer and antelopes – these in part *owe their existence to the wasps* that eat the caterpillars who in turn don't eat all the food they need to live on. And that also means that the great predators – lion, leopards, hyenas – can likewise survive because their prey do. So the iconic East African habitat works, in part, thanks to those horrible red-tailed wasps.

Our world is amazingly finely tuned. Every creature plays its part in creating a balanced ecosystem. Even wasps – which also pollinate by the way, it's not all bees and butterflies. (Wasps get a rough deal, I think.)

Who do we thank for this extraordinary abundance? Modern science has done wonders in showing us *how* our world works. Species are interdependent, and the more we understand, the more we marvel. But sometimes science forgets that it is not a closed system – there is One who set it up in the first place, and continues to watch over it. The psalmists knew this, and time and again we are invited to marvel at the wonders of the natural world, and to praise their Creator.

The second half of Psalm 104 is a fabulous hymn of praise to God our Creator: 'How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.' And *all* creatures are invited to praise the Creator. It is God who sustains them: 'All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time' (v27) – whether it's the birds (v17), the goats (v18) or the predators (v21-22). God's Spirit is at work in *all of Creation*: 'When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.' (v30)

So today, let's offer our thanks and praise too to our Creator. We also look to Him – and may this great and glorious God meet all of our needs today. Amen.

Day 22 – Psalm 105:1-7 ‘Seek his face always’

Here in the Trendall household we are big fans of University Challenge. Never mind that we only manage a few correct answers every time, while what appear to be gangly teenagers seem to know everything about everything! (How? I always find myself asking.) It’s a lot of fun pitting our wits against the brightest and the best.

Recently we had a particular treat. Having caught up with all the latest episodes, we watched an old one that we hadn’t seen from Children in Need, where a team from the BBC lined up against ITV. Needless to say, the questions were a lot easier; but the treat for us was seeing the face of the chap who announces all the names of the participants when they press their buzzers. For 23 years Roger Tilling has been doing this, week in and week out – and I’ve never seen his face.

But now I have. There’s something important about faces, isn’t there? ‘I just want to see her (or his) face’ has been a heart-rending cry of recent seasons of lockdown, as relatives are denied contact with those in hospitals or care homes. Conversely, one of the great benefits of technology during this crisis has been precisely that – unlike previous generations – we can speak to loved ones and see their face: whether via Zoom or Facetime or Whatsapp, or whatever.

Although our whole bodies are unique, *it’s faces which most identify us*, from a physical point of view. You can’t really describe someone, or say that you know them, unless you’ve seen their face. I speak to lots of people in my line of work, but it’s always good to meet and to ‘put a face to a name’.

It’s like that with God, too. Today’s Psalm encourages us to ‘seek God’s face always’ (v4). It’s an image of both hunger and intimacy. Literally, of course, God doesn’t have a face – but we can still long to put a ‘face’ to God’s name. To be face-to-face with someone is likewise a place of intimacy: it’s where we get to know them as they are.

There’s a difference between knowing about God, and knowing God directly. This image invites us to move from place to the other. God becomes more than beliefs and ‘truths’ – God becomes a friend, a companion, a loving Lord. *God wants us to seek his face because he wants to be known by us* – deeply, intimately, personally.

A wise old Christian once advised me to ‘seek God’s face before you seek his hand’. It’s good counsel. Our temptation will always be to ask God for stuff – and that’s good and right. But let’s resolve again today to seek God’s face first. To worship him, to love him, to ‘tell of all his wonderful acts’ (v2), to ‘glory in his holy name’ (v3).

And as we do that, then our requests will flow naturally from our hearts to his.

Loving Lord, I praise you today. You are great, and glorious, and I thank you for your constant love. Help me to seek your face always, that I might know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, this day and every day. Amen.

Day 23 – Psalm 105:8-44 ‘His covenant for ever’

In the area of Streatham where we used to live (in south London), there were no pubs. The reason is that, back in the 17th century, the land was owned by a Quaker family and they had attached a covenant to the land, which forbade it. As a covenant, it was permanent – it lasted forever: even 300 years later it could not be changed. If you wanted a beer, you had to walk a bit further!

The word covenant is little used now, but of immense importance. It means a solemn and unconditional promise. It denotes something permanent and – when formed between two parties – represents something mutual, founded on love. It is how God deals with his people – and also how we are designed to relate to each other in our closest relationships.

Thankfully we still have the word in a Christian marriage service, and this is the biggest difference between a Christian and a civil wedding. In a civil ceremony you have what are called the ‘contracting words’ – this is when the wedding becomes binding, but note the use of language. A Christian marriage, on the other hand, is a covenant – an *unconditional* vow: ‘That which God has joined together, let no-one put asunder.’

Of course, not all marriages last for life: but the principle of the covenant remains its great strength. And, in biblical terms, marriage is a picture of God’s relationship with us – permanent, faithful, unconditional, mutually loving and giving. Because a covenant can’t be broken, the psalmists and prophets return to this theme repeatedly. For all that we humans let God down, God ‘remembers his covenant for ever’ (v8) – even one made hundreds (or, by this time, thousands) of years ago with Abraham. And this is cause for praise and rejoicing.

God’s covenant is likewise good news for us! God remains faithful, God watches over his people, God keeps giving us second chances and fresh starts. And in Jesus, God cements the covenant once and for all. Jesus fulfils all God’s promises to Abraham, and in Christ (and filled with God’s Spirit) we become the covenant people God always designed for us to be.

If the second half of the psalm makes for more challenging reading, behind it lies one simple point: God honours his promises. He promised his people a land: and then delivered one. He promised to bless them: and did so, at every turn – even feeding them miraculously when occasion required it (v40-41).

God remembered them – and he remembers us, too. We are part of God’s covenant people now. Which means that you are not forgotten. God too gives us his presence (v39) and meets our needs. How we need that each day – so today, spend a few moments delighting in the fact of God’s covenant to you. Claim his promises. And renew your determination to live in that covenant this day, and always.

Day 24 – Psalm 106 ‘History lessons’

I’ll admit it – I’m biased. I studied history for my university degree – I love it. I find it fascinating, and will happily read books on most historical subjects now.

I also know that not everyone enjoyed history at school. Memories of rote-learning monarchs, or obsessing over outdated parliamentary laws, or perhaps the very grim subjects of the 20th century – trench warfare, the Holocaust – have put a lot of people off. Much better to live in the present, many have concluded.

But today’s psalm – and yesterday’s – give us a different perspective. If I can put aside my own enthusiasm for a moment, there is still great value in learning the lessons of history. As we observed earlier in our series: ‘Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them,’ was once wisely observed by Churchill, paraphrasing the philosopher George Santayana.

But we need history for more than just education. We need it for faith, too. Israel is constantly being given history lessons to remind themselves of who God is: how much he loves them, what he’s done for them, what it means to be the people of God: known, called, loved.

History matters. So here in Psalm 106, as elsewhere, Israel gets its own, very personal, history lesson: God’s faithfulness, their disobedience, but also God’s forgiveness and restoration. ‘Remember who God is – and remember who you are,’ is the repeated reminder.

We, too, can benefit from this advice. The Church, too, has a history. Sadly, we tend to think nowadays only of the shameful seasons of that history. But that is not the whole story – there are also many wonderful seasons and myriad stories of the power of God at work. Maybe now is a time for some of us to read (or re-read) a good Christian biography, or a story of renewal led by the people of God which has been forgotten.

Whenever we celebrate a family birthday, we often spend some of the day sharing memories, digging out old photos. We spend time remembering, because *remembering builds relationship*. Let’s learn that history lesson with God too – in the end, we need history because it helps us to affirm with the psalmist: ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.’

Loving Lord, who can proclaim your mighty acts, or fully declare your praise? You are amazing. Help me to remember all you’ve done for me today. Thank you for your faithfulness and love, for your goodness and mercy. I give you my heartfelt thanks. Amen.