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CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART

CHALLENGE



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40

The reading plan 'Create in Me a Clean Heart' invites readers to explore Psalms in a specific way. Based on Psalm 51, six themes emerge during the 40 days of reading. 40 different authors contemplate how to glorify the greatness of God, recognize human frailty, yearn for a pure clean heart, experience the joy of salvation, be immersed in the wisdom of God, and offer God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

You can find additional materials and a PDF version of this booklet on the website bczagreb.hr/en/challenge40

I. Glorify the Greatness of God

Psalms have always been an important part of worship, and they were mostly sung. Even today, many contemporary Christian authors turn to the Psalms as a source of inspiration. The book of Psalms is full of extraordinary songs that vividly speak of God's greatness. And everything we learn about God encourages us to praise. For the next six days, we will reflect on what our God is like and what that means for our daily life. No one is equal to God, at his word the heavens were created. God rules over all - he is greater than all gods. God's understanding is beyond measure, he is our refuge and strength.

1

Longing for a Pure, Clean Heart

Psalm 51

In moments when we are speechless before God, when we do not know how or what to pray, we can find in the Book of Psalms examples of how to approach God - openly, honestly and without hesitation. Created in real life circumstances, written as prayers and songs, the Psalms reflect the real emotions of real people, - imperfect people like us. That is why the Psalms are so relatable and understandable to us.

Many of the Psalms were written by King David, a man whose life was full of ups and downs, but a man who kept returning to God. David was capable of such obvious and terrible sin, but he also knew how to deeply and sincerely repent by confessing his sin. He knew how to ask for God's mercy, to beg desperately for forgiveness, to cry out for purification and justification. David never gave up on staying close to God no matter what, believing that God could create a pure, clean heart in him. David sincerely longed for God and his wisdom that would strengthen him in his daily life and that would turn him away from the wrong paths. David knew how to enthusiastically praise God and to steadfastly thank him.

However, many people run away from God and hide from him precisely in those moments when they need him the most. Shame, due to one's own sinfulness and inability to change much with one's own efforts, distances a person from God. It is not easy to admit your weakness and your sin. It's not easy to ask for forgiveness, it's not easy to ask for mercy, and it's even harder when you have to do it over and over again. The problem is even bigger because we humans assign ourselves

the main role in the process of change, while God has a completely different plan. God is the one who forgives and restores, and through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God opens for us the surest way to real change and the way to a pure, clean heart.

At the beginning of that journey, a person must recognize God's greatness in relation to their own unworthiness. It is necessary to admit one's sin and one's weaknesses, it is important to repent and to pray for forgiveness. But it is also important to humbly accept the forgiveness which is offered, and then to joyfully experience the healing redemption and deliverance. It is important to immerse yourself in the wisdom of God, which alone brings stability to human life. Finally, it is important to persist in glorifying God and giving thanks for all that He has done.

We invite you to spend the next forty days with us in the book of *Psalms*, which opens up these very topics, encourages reflection, prayer, and song, and above all, fuels the longing for God, the creator and giver of a pure, clean heart.

***“Create in me a clean heart, Oh God,
and renew a right spirit within me.***

***Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.***

***Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.”***

Psalms 51:10-12 (ESV)

2

No One Is Equal to God

Psalm 89

What do you think is more beautiful - the view looking up towards the top, above which there is nothing more, or the view from the top of the world where all the whiteness of the Himalayas is under our feet and the view is to the edge of the horizon!?

Such a perspective, a picture of God, is offered to us by the author of Psalm 89. Reading the psalm from end to beginning, it seems as if we are ascending to the top of the world. And from there is a view like the one described in the first 19 verses.

From the top of the world, man's admiration evokes the "love" of the one whose name must not even be spoken. "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness." This love has no time limit and its foundation is at the very top, "in the heavens". The flag flying at the very top is the flag of the "Covenant". A covenant between God and man. A promise given to David, his servant, that he would keep his descendants forever.

A person's life, more often than not, is marked by views from the foot of the mountains looking upwards, towards the sky "from where our help comes". Our present situation and the inevitable presence of difficulties and troubles cloud our view. We feel as if God has 'forgotten' us, 'forsaken us' or 'left us in the hands of the enemy'.

What to do then? You have to make your way to the very top again. Our lamentations, such as this *Psalm 89*, don't disappear. But from the top of the mountain, from God's perspective, it looks different. More complete, clearer, and further. Above everything and everyone stands "Yahweh-Sabaoth, The Lord of hosts". Only He deserves to be praised and cheered with the words of a holy song that can be heard to the ends of His earth!!!

3

At God's Word the Heavens Were Created

Psalm 33

How deep and wonderful the psalms are!!! So much wisdom is packed into them.

Wisdom and truths about the nature and sublime beauty of our God.

Here are some instructions from *Psalm 33*:

- Praising God befits the upright.
- Play and sing to him, use your gift.
- Don't keep recounting the past, don't keep repeating things, let the new grace give birth to a **new song!**
- Do it in **harmony** with God's people and **joyfully because**:
 - God's word is **true**.
 - He loves righteousness and justice.
 - He fills the earth with **steadfast love**.
 - He created heaven and earth with His Word and His **breath**.
 - He has arranged the universe so that it is continually being built, and he gave decrees so that everything would take place harmoniously.
 - His directive is **irrevocable**, and his command is **creation**.
 - He oversees and **knows everything** about nations, rulers and military leaders.
 - He knows plans and ideas and is the only one who has the power to start and cancel things if he wants to.
 - Blessed are those who are chosen, and who live in His love!
 - **God saves, God decides battles**.
 - **His salvation is invincible, he is a faithful help and shield to his worshippers, those who trust in his holy name**.

4

God's Kingdom Rules over All

Psalm 103

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. Take a moment to reflect on the meaning of that phrase this Easter season. In this season we can remember how the Lord, in his mercy, has not dealt with us according to what we have deserved. Instead, the Lord has been slow to anger, merciful, and gracious. He has not repaid us according to our immoral behavior, but instead He has given us His son, Jesus, to die on the cross. As Jesus was on the cross, his arms were stretched wide, one towards the west and the other towards the east, giving us a sign of how far he has removed our transgressions from us - giving us not only hope on this earth, but life in Jesus. So yes, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

5

God Is Greater than All Gods

Psalm 135

God is greater than all gods and it is not impossible to prove it because we can find enough Bible verses that speak about it. For Christians it is very clear, at least in theory. This is something we all know, and we are expected to also believe it. But in practice, our everyday life doesn't always match up. How do we see and recognize God in our lives? We may say that we have come to know God because he is our Savior. But are we truly aware that there is no one greater than him? If we know and believe that God is greater than all gods, how is it that after reading a psalm like this or after listening to a sermon that emphasizes this, we continue to live as if nothing is expected of us?! Doesn't it matter to us? Or maybe we don't understand?

Do we believe in God's sovereignty when we look at the reality of the world we live in?! Wars and conflicts, pandemics and diseases, weather disasters... it seems as if everything is completely out of control. But do we believe it? Let's stop for a moment. Let's take a deep breath. Let us remember, like the psalmist, all that God has already done for us (Psalm 135, 4-14). This isn't just raising awareness, or our morale, it's an encouragement for our soul to glorify, and our whole body to turn, and worship God - who is the only and the greatest.

6

God's Understanding Is Beyond Measure

Psalm 147

The psalm we are reading shows in a wonderful way how comprehensive God is in the life of mankind. It reminds us that God is the one who creates everything that surrounds us, cares, heals, and manages everything. It reminds us that our Lord is great and almighty - there is no measure to his wisdom and understanding. This truth can be so liberating in our lives when we choose to embrace it with our hearts and minds.

Through this psalm, the psalmist invites us to thank God, to sing a song of gratitude, to praise him for all the truths that describe him.

We can apply these truths to our lives, which are filled with good, but also challenging times - obstacles and situations in which we have to make decisions that are often not easy.

These are the moments when the truth of God's wisdom becomes a reality that we can rely on. God wants to be a part of our challenges, he wants to help us jump over obstacles and make decisions in his wisdom. He invites us to surrender to Him with trust, and rely on His wisdom and understanding, not on our own reasoning. He reminds us, as it is written in the psalm, that he rules over all creation, takes care of all our needs, protects us, and puts our life on the right foundation.

With that thought, let's remember all those moments when God, in his wisdom and understanding, has been our support, light and strength. Let's thank and glorify God for all the good he has done in our lives. And let us pray that we can seek and see his wisdom in everything.

7

God Is Our Refuge and Strength

Psalm 46

Everything around us is falling. Even the smallest inconvenience causes a wave of emotions that swallow us whole. Faith that was supposed to move mountains is shaken, and our heart is sinking to the depths of the sea. The pace of life makes it so easy to get lost in that chaos. We focus on working on our own plans, and we get upset when we can't.

When things do not go the way that we thought they would, we get mad at God, and we complain. Forgetting that he is “an ever-present help in trouble”, forgetting that He is our refuge when we struggle. We run away from God when we need Him most. He says “Be still, and know that I am God.” Finding time to be still and be with God when our city is under attack seems counter intuitive. The world expects us to react, to do things. And yet people in the fortress are expected to survive in stillness, they have the river of living water coursing through their city, providing all that they need while they are sitting still in the fortress. Our perspective only shows us the waters roaring and foaming, mountains trembling and shaking, but God is with us. Our fortress will not fall.

II. Recognize Human Frailty

Amazed by God's greatness, which we have been thinking about for the past few days, let us stand in awe before the Creator of the universe and face our own humanity. Let's spend the next few days reflecting on our own weakness, inadequacy and frailty. Let's realize again that as humans we are fleeting like a breath of air, and so impatient and full of questions. Let's admit that as humans we have strayed from God and that we are too proud to seek him. Let's admit that we often live with pain in our souls, and that we sincerely seek God only in times of trouble.

8

Man Is Like a Breath

Psalm 144: 1-7

“*Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.*”
If I read these words personally, they read:

“I am like a breath, my days are like a passing shadow.”

There are more than 8 billion people like me in the world at this moment alone. I imagine a person who lived in this same spot, where I am now, 200 years ago. What did he do? What worried him? What was he hoping for? What did he achieve in his life? Who knows and who cares anyway? He lived on earth for a while. From the perspective of eternity it was a breath, a passing shadow.

Compared to the vastness of the universe and the limitlessness of eternity, I am so small and short-lived. *God, what am I that you should care about me? Who am I that you should think about me?*

It sounds incredible that the creator of all that exists cares for one breath or shadow. And yet, God cares about each and every one of us. He invites us to lean on him like a *rock*, to accept that he personally *trains and prepares* us for everything that lies ahead. He wants to be our *fortress, stronghold and deliverer*.

God, forgive me when, as small and fleeting as I am, I am so preoccupied with myself and the things around me that I neglect you. Thank you for the salvation you have given me, your presence, and all the blessings in my life.

9

Man Is Impatient and Full of Questions

Psalm 39

I was mute and silent; I held my peace to no avail, and my distress grew worse... David's words.

And somehow they are mine, probably yours too. The experience is timeless. When we are distressed by disappointment, fear, injustice, loss, uncertainty, - by life itself, we often isolate ourselves, and we analyze, unravel, solve - and often we cry. Questions float through the mind, and we want answers, now, as soon as possible. But it's noisy. Silence is loud. Restlessness. Wrong thoughts. *Oh Lord, make me know my end... for what do I wait?* David wonders. Slowly he recognizes his unworthiness, his sinfulness, his frailty, his impotence. He knows that man is like a breath. And he turns to God, the Lord. He feels relief, an end to his wandering, when he realizes that everything around him is fleeting and empty. *My hope is in you*, he finally concludes, refreshed. I agree.

I love the psalms. I love how they touch my everyday life. I love when, like David, tears can wash my vision and my soul. In a world of unrest, insecurity, and anxiety, the real refuge for a troubled heart is God, of whom David talks in his psalms. The God who protects, gives security and eternal love in the very same way today. When I am thus unburdened, in His presence, I just stand still and listen. I am overwhelmed with serenity, security and gratitude. In the unquestionable perishability of everything that surrounds us, it is an indescribable, imperishable blessing. *I was mute and silent; I held my peace...* because You are all of my hope.

10

All People Have Turned Aside

Psalm 14

Psalm 14 resonates with our modern hearts, reflecting our human journey which is often marked by deviation from righteousness. It speaks profoundly, reminding us of our universal straying from God's intended path. However, it offers not despair, but hope and invitation. It calls us to stand in awe at our Creator's majesty, who, despite crafting the universe, looks upon us with unfailing love and mercy. The Psalm whispers to us to face life - not with fear but with courage, rooted in God's deep love.

Despite our imperfections, God's unchanging love and grace remain constant. He is our steadfast guide - offering strength when we are lost or overwhelmed. Psalm 14 encourages us to return to our Heavenly Father's embrace, finding joy and peace in walking in His righteous path.

This message, an invitation to embrace our limitations and grow, assures us that we're not alone. In realizing we have strayed, we should remember God's open arms, ready to welcome, heal, and guide us.

Reflecting on this Psalm brings inspiration and comfort. It reminds us that throughout life's journey, we're never beyond God's love. Let us stand in awe of our Creator and face our humanity with faith-filled hearts, knowing that in His presence, we find our truest selves and greatest hope.

11

In His Pride the Wicked Man Does Not Seek Him

Psalm 10

Are we troubled by the direction this world is going?

Listening to the news these days is a painful experience.

Watching how people of all ages, genders, and races are being oppressed... it's enough for all of us to sit down together and say: "God, where are you?"

How to live with joy when all this is happening right before our eyes - and it's happening more and more?

David also asked himself in *Psalm 10*: "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" In his prayer, he lists five signs of the wicked: they are proud (verses 2-4,6), their mouths are full of malice and slander (verses 3,7), they are greedy (verses 3,9), they are violent (verses 8-10), and they are ungodly (verses 4,11). There is a battle within them about the existence of God, and a suppression of the truth. In their heart and mind they have to constantly tell themselves that God does not exist.

Let's do what David did - come to God in prayer.

It is hard to pray when the wicked prosper, it is hard to pray when God seems far away, but we live by faith, not by feelings.

God was with David when he wrote this psalm, and God is with us right now, not far away.

Jesus sees everything. He endured the cross, and triumphed over evil."

And so, if we are disturbed by the direction in which this world is going, let us realize - this world is not our home. We're just passing through!

Let's strengthen our hearts. Let's be brave!

12

People Live With Pain in Their Souls

Psalm 13

Looking at nature, we see that after dark clouds, no matter how long they have been in the sky, the sun always comes out. It is the same in life, which often seems to us like a continuous alternation of joy and sadness, good and bad days.

Life often brings pain, both physical and mental, and none of us is immune to pain.

The psalmist David in Psalm 13 feels sadness in his heart and pain in his soul and wonders how long God is going to forget about him. I believe we can easily identify with him. We ourselves probably sometimes have the feeling that the pain is lasting too long, that there is no end to the pain. Then we stumble, and feel as if everyone has left us, both God and people.

Illness, loss of a loved one, loneliness... All of this can create such pain, and it is not easy to live with.

But we have a choice - we can live with pain in our soul in such a way that we feel sorry for ourselves and despair, or we can call on the Lord, whom we know for his faithfulness and goodness, reminding ourselves of all the good things he has given us throughout life.

If we choose to trust in God's goodness like the psalmist, perhaps the pain will not disappear, but it will be easier for us to live with it because the Lord himself promises: "I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish." (Jer 31:25)

Do we need more than that?

13

Man Seeks God in Times of Trouble

Psalm 22

What a painful, bitter experience. Trouble that no one in the world wants to experience. Abandoned, despised, mocked. That cry and call for help while his heart melts like wax: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Could it be any harder?

And while the crowd mocks him, thinking that God has abandoned him, the memory of the times when God delivered his people restores his hope and faith in deliverance. From the moment he trusted Him at his mother's breast, he has relied on Him.

How can the trouble described by the psalmist help and comfort us? The psalm gives us such assurance that we are **NOT ALONE** in trouble! With us is Jesus Christ who, as a man, endured the kind of suffering, pain and trouble that we cannot even imagine. That's why he understands all our suffering and pain. That is why He delivers us from every trouble when we pour out the cry of our heart before Him. Because of Him, we can sing praises to God who hears us! That is why we can bear witness to future generations about the righteous God who saves. Let's call on Him in our trouble, let's seek Him with all our hearts! Then joy and happiness will flood our lives.

III.

Long for a Pure, Clean Heart

As we continue to read the psalms and the accompanying encouraging reflections, let us reflect on our own life journey. Let's ask ourselves today: "Am I really longing for a pure, clean heart?!" In the days ahead, let us continue to confess to God our weaknesses, our rebelliousness and our guilt. Let's ask him for forgiveness, and then be ready to receive it. Let us continue to long for God and focus our hearts on him, asking him to remove from us every desire for evil.

14

Confess Your Weakness

Psalm 6

Without hope and without God, it would seem easy to realize how powerless we are, right? But what about those of us who know God? When everything is good, when the sun is shining, we walk through life with God and often imagine that we are powerful and that we have things “under control”. Then God isn’t as necessary to us as the air we breathe. But, then, when *deserts and storms* follow, we remember how powerless we are, how nothing is under our control. And just like David, we say: “Be gracious to me O Lord, for I am languishing” (Psalm 6:2)

Why are tears and pain necessary? Why do sunny days repeatedly give us the illusion of power and strength? And, perhaps the most difficult question, why do we freak out and resist *deserts and storms* when they are, apparently, the most effective way to return to God? Perhaps the answer is very simple - because of something human in us. As people, we often cherish the idea that we can (and should!) do it ourselves, but Jesus calls us to admit our weakness, and understand that He is the source of our strength, power and refreshment. Those don’t come from us, but from Him! When, like David, we find ourselves in anxious situations, this truth gives us comfort and hope.

But let’s not forget that we are equally in need of God, regardless of what our days look like - those behind us or those ahead of us. Acknowledging this necessity does not mean being defeated, but quite the opposite, it means that we have won, together with Him.

15

Confess Your Rebelliousness

Psalm 25

I was converted 12 years ago, and the first thing the Holy Spirit said to me was - HUMILITY! I knew that word, but what does it mean?!...

It took me a while to realize, at the age of 45, how much my life had been poisoned by bad habits, attitudes, thoughts and behavior. I had grown up in a family that was mostly unbelieving, in a patriarchal family environment with distorted values which can easily breed rebelliousness in a young person. It's born, grows, becomes fat, mutates into various forms, and makes the owner happy, much to the sorrow and grief of those surrounding him.

Christ told his disciples two millennia ago: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation!" and here, fortunately, some of those disciples are still walking around... and they came across me... to this day, how that news reached me is still not clear to me, but I am happy that it did. The verse from *Psalm 25* "Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways," is my prayer of repentance, repentance accompanied by a river of tears during my conversion. The tears have not stopped flowing, and always appear at the mention of God's greatness, goodness, love, mercy, truth, faithfulness, compassion... The tears are because of my sins and evil deeds that they cannot wash away. And because of the humility that still struggles with my rebelliousness. It's a nasty war!

"Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins... Guard my life and rescue me!" (Psalm 25:18,20)

16

Confess Your Guilt

Psalm 38

“I’m Not Guilty” is the name of a former prison band founded in the penitentiary in Glina (Croatia). But it’s also the first reaction of each of us when we are faced with our own failures, mistakes, and poor treatment of ourselves and others. What’s more, if we are prone to the “infallibility” syndrome, then that is a real description of our personality. I’m never guilty and I’ve done nothing wrong - it’s just others’ accusations against “perfect me”.

In *Psalm 38*, it is as if we are reading an abbreviated biography of another biblical sufferer, Job. But unlike Job, this man’s condition is connected to sin. What happens to him is the result of sin that brings restlessness, physical pain, abandonment and misunderstanding. It shows us the connection between our inner and our physical lives. Sometimes certain emotional, psychological, and even spiritual problems can manifest in physical health. In his torment, this sufferer is looking for a way out and a solution, and he finds it in the confession of his guilt, trust in God, and hope that God will deliver him.

Let’s stop and take stock of our spiritual state. Let’s really face our life, and bring it before God. The result will be “I am guilty, I am sinful”, but by faith in Christ Jesus, the guilt is erased and the sin is forgiven. Confessing guilt is a step towards forgiveness and healing. *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”* (Romans 8:1-2).

17

Receive Forgiveness

Psalm 32

At the beginning of *Psalm 32*, David, instead of confessing, tries to hide his sin from God. Such a hidden sin can do enormous damage to a person's soul. If we hide our sin, we do not have access to God's forgiveness that we so desperately need. Without God's forgiveness, we will, like David, become more and more miserable, weaker and weaker. Even worse, if we do not admit that we are sinful, we will become self-righteous and try to justify ourselves before God. And that is impossible. However, if we confess our sin, we can be sure that God will forgive us. It is part of God's character to forgive - that is who He is. God is the "Father of mercies" (*2 Corinthians 1:3*). It is in our human nature to expect, even when we forgive someone, that that person will somehow make it up to us in some way. But God is not like that. God forgives us completely and without any conditions. There's no way our deeds can deserve God's forgiveness. The only thing we can do is come to him with a humble heart and admit our helplessness. And that is all that God asks of us - to come with all our burdens and sins, and He is the one who will forgive us and restore us to communion with Him.

18

Long for God

Psalm 42

As the source is the beginning of any river, so Jesus is the beginning of my life. I remember my first internal struggles between doubt and faith, despair and desire for God's presence. Unexpectedly, I found myself in a vortex, questioning true conversion. Everything I loved and did had become meaningless. I became strange to my friends, and I felt as if the enemy was saying to me through them, "Where is your God?!" Although my soul was grieving, I decided to read John's Gospel at night. In the depths of an abyss, I hoped for freedom from the slavery of insecurity. Liberation came, and I immersed myself in the water of baptism, sure that I had found the source of living water.

The writer of Psalm 42 was a Levite, a man dedicated to God, who took care of worship, sacrifices and offerings in the temple. That was his identity. The temple where he served had been destroyed, and he himself was in captivity. I think about the pain and agony he was going through. At the same time, I am fascinated by the freedom with which he leaves the religious framework, and by fully opening his heart he admits that he is shaken by the circumstances in which he finds himself. He was thirsty for God and an encounter with him. In that storm of feelings, his faith prevailed. I do not know if this Levite was among those who experienced the rebuilding of the temple, but he himself was certainly rebuilt. What a grace it is to feel a true longing for God. When we feel demolished like the temple, when we are devastated by life's circumstances, like this Levite, we can hold fast to God's promises. We know who our enemy is, but we also know who our savior is!

19

Ask God to Remove Every Desire for Evil

Psalm 141

The Amish are known for their simple living, plain clothing, pacifism, and slowness to adapt to modern technology. They believe that evil is everywhere, and to counter this problem, they created their own community to not compromise their faith and belief. But no matter what they do, evil continues to exist. There is no way of escaping it, even within their community.

In Psalm 141, we see David write a prayerful Psalm because he knows evil is all around. There is no way to escape it. The psalm begins with a plea to the Lord to hear his prayer. We see his earnest desire to flee from evil. As the Psalm continues, we see phrases like 'set a guard', 'keep watch', 'do not allow'- words that connote defense. As David comes face to face with evil, he is aware of the potency of evil. That leads him to prepare his heart for the possibilities of what evil could do, and to entrust them to the Holy One. In verses 5-7, the prayer then turns to the situations that he was facing. But at the end of the psalm, David resigns himself to the fact that he cannot escape evil, and he turns to the One in whom He can trust. He fixes his eyes on the One who can deliver him from evil. In the same way, may we spend today in prayer, in recognition of the presence of evil. May we humble ourselves - and entrust our days to the One who can deliver us from our desires that are evil.

20

Focus Your Heart on God

Psalm 57

After escaping from Saul's men, David sought refuge in a cave - crying out to God, his only hope to deliver him from his current situation. Faith and a steadfast heart, even in a life-threatening situation, lead to an incredible shift - from cries of despair, to giving sincere praise and glory to God.

Under the pressure of life, we fear the outcome of our difficult situations. Often this fear leads us to despair. And when we have exhausted all our strength, we come to the only hope - God.

Each of our difficult situations represents an opportunity, instead of lamenting, to have confidence in God's willingness and power to protect us. We do this by directing our hearts toward Him. Focusing the heart means choosing not to give in to circumstances and to your emotional states. What's more, it means redirecting your heart, even when it wants to wander!

While crying out to God, we must be aware that this is not a stage we want to stay in. We want more to come, like David, to praise and glorify God regardless of our circumstances.

When we go down into our caves, we cry out to God in our sorrow, pain and trouble. Then we can climb out again with faith - worshiping, rejoicing and giving thanks to God. And then we realize that true joy comes from what is happening in our hearts, not from what surrounds us. Our hearts dictate our joy.

Although the psalm begins with a troubled heart, it ends in triumphant praise. In all circumstances, and in every cave, we can find comfort, joy and celebration in the risen Christ. Anchored in God, our whole being can turn difficult situations into opportunities for lasting joy. It is a great privilege!

IV. Experience the Joy of Salvation

After the recognition of weakness and sin, after a renewed awareness of God's great forgiveness, a time of joy is ahead of us. Calendar-wise, we are still far from Easter, but our heart knows that the victory has already been won. God does not withhold his love from those who seek him, he lifts us from the pit of destruction, he is a refuge and fortress. God turns mourning into joy, and those who have experienced it cannot remain silent about it. Those who have been redeemed by God have reason for thanksgiving and songs of praise again and again.

21

God Turns Mourning into Joy

Psalm 30

God has turned mourning into joy in my life as well. Some of those moments were spectacular and completely beyond my expectations!

Various feelings flooded my being then.

Pain, fear, worry, uncertainty, sadness, pain.

Relief, happiness, contentment, gratitude, inspiration and fulfillment. That feeling of being fully loved, and fully belonging.

Those were moments of searching for God. They were my leaps in faith and in surrendering to God's guidance and action. Like David, I also felt the verse, "that my heart may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!"

Praise and worship is a decision. We can always worship - in favorable and unfavorable circumstances. By praising and worshiping, we thank God for his works, and we glorify and exalt his name. Let's leave our reality for a moment and focus only on Jesus. Let's honor and praise him for what he is.

By praising and worshiping, we get closer to God and he gets closer to us.

Decide today to praise the Lord with a song. No matter how you feel, come! Sing your favorite song out loud. Or to yourself, if you can't be alone. Think about the words of the song. Call on the name of Jesus until you feel his presence.

22

God Can Draw Us up from the Pit of Destruction

Psalm 40

When we are in deep pain and trial, patience and endurance can indicate a deep expression of our faith. We read about David, who found himself in a deep, slimy pit of troubles and was sinking deeper and deeper - but he decided to wait on the Lord. In all the difficult moments, he hoped that God would really intervene. Many times we too find ourselves in difficult times, and waiting on the Lord is something that shows an active hope that is firmly grounded in God's promises and His faithfulness. No matter how deep we are in trouble, we believe that God's grace is above all.

God not only heard David's cries for help, He rescued and delivered him. David expresses his gratitude for God's intervention and admits that only through the Lord's deliverance can he stand on firm ground again. He admits that God has always been faithful to his promises and that we can trust him to fulfill them. This message should resonate strongly among Christians who believe in the steadfast character of God.

This psalm offers us incentive and encouragement to continue to rely on the Lord, even when circumstances seem hopeless and unsolvable. In all the difficult and uncertain times, and in times of waiting, we can trust in God's faithfulness, knowing that He will help as He has done throughout history. It also reminds us that it is important to share our testimonies with others and tell of God's faithfulness. This way many will hear how God works, how great and powerful He is, and how we can trust in Him.

23

God Does Not Withhold His Love

Psalm 66

Psalm 66 is one of the many psalms that glorify God and magnify His power.

The psalmist celebrates and highlights the “awesome” deeds that God did to save the Israelites. At the same time, he invites all nations to join in the celebration because God is always present, both then and today. As we read the psalm, we are introduced in parts - to praising God, God’s help in trials, the joy of salvation, and then thanksgiving and the spread of God’s glory and praise.

And this isn’t an invitation on a collective level only, but it also refers to oneself personally, individually. The psalmist praises and gives thanks, because God has helped him in his hour of need and attended to the voice of his prayer. And who among us has not experienced such moments?! Moments when it seemed to us that God did not hear or see, that there was no way out. But that is a deception, because God never gives up on us and does not break his promise: I will never leave you, nor forsake you. (Heb 13:5) Doesn’t he also say: I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jer 31:3) The term everlasting does not mean today yes, tomorrow no - or if you are good yes, and if you have made a mistake no. Man, in his weak nature, often reacts exactly like that, but God never does. His eternal love is a permanent condition regardless of what we are like; He does not withhold His steadfast love from us. Psalm 66 invites us to turn to Him in moments of trouble, sickness and temptation. He hears, He sees, He delivers.

Maybe life’s circumstances are not always easy, but we believers have a reason for lasting joy because God, through Jesus Christ, saves us from the “greatest trouble”, eternal destruction.

24

God Is a Refuge and Fortress

Psalm 91

After the earthquake (in Zagreb) and Covid-19 in 2020, words like protection, refuge, fortress, and safety took on new meaning. An invisible disease and a natural disaster were beyond our control. Psalm 91 talks about being safe from exactly these kinds of attacks and claims that nothing will harm the one who lives in the shelter of the Most High.

So is this really true? Will we never see harm? No, I think this deals with the location or position of our safety. Like the parable of the house built on the rock, the storms and floods did come, but because of the foundation, the house stood firm. Our safety and security is more connected to its source than the actual circumstances around us. I remember when my children were afraid, they would hold up their hands to be held. I could not really protect them, but the position of being held was enough for them to sleep in peace. They had put themselves in the safest place they knew and they trusted I would not let them go. When we are afraid, how will we face those fears and seek to protect ourselves? The image of this psalm is that we can position ourselves in the arms of our Father, and trust that He is a secure foundation - a refuge and fortress who will never let us go.

25

Give Thanks to the Lord for He Is Good - Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So

Psalm 107

“For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” Psalm 107:9

The goodness of Yahweh is wonderful! Despite my weaknesses, despite my failures, it persistently seeks me, it blesses me in my helplessness!

With no strength to go on, I cried out to the Lord 30 years ago and He freed me - a burden of anxiety fell away from my soul, and joy entered my heart. I had wanted to change my loved ones. I had been writhing in pain from the traumas experienced in my childhood, and darkness had entered my soul with each new injustice, the rudeness I experienced at the workplace, with each of my thoughtless and stupid reactions...

And then the Lord encouraged me to take my child to the Baptist church at Radićeva 30 for religious education. It took a few months for my heart to soften, for it to open, for my pride to melt, for the fortresses to collapse and for me to thirstily begin to drink the Words of life and enjoy the fellowship of the faithful. “Forever I am changed by Your love” says one song that fills me with joy and gratitude (“*Majesty*” - the Croatian version is “*Divan si*”). I know that my sin is forgiven and that Christ has saved me from judgment with his mercy. And how then will I not shout to the Lord with a grateful heart like the psalmist:

“Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!” Psalm 107:31

26

Shouts of Joy and Victory Resound in the Tents of the Righteous

Psalm 118:5-18

Can you remember that feeling when you realized that because of what Jesus has done for us, we look righteous in God's eyes? Do you know the joy of the Lord's victory? Do you experience it every day?

Despite David being known as one who was after God's heart, he still sinned - and he tried to cover it up. Although God punished David with the death of his son, He did not leave him, and this is the promise for all of His people. God does not forsake His people but He does judge them, and justly so.

In life, we have things that are constantly demanding our attention, like our phone, the TV, and social media. We who are saved will see that the devil is constantly around us too, demanding our attention, demanding that we forget about the victory that our Lord has. Will we use scripture, just like Jesus did, to make the devil flee from us? Or do we welcome him, feed him, give him something to drink and make him feel so comfortable that he will want to keep coming back to us?

The Lord does have the ultimate victory. Let us be joyful today, and be motivated to be obedient to Him and not to fall for the deceptions of the evil one.

V. Immerse Yourself in the Wisdom of God

Human life is full of ups and downs. A Christian's life is full of ups and downs. After confessing sin, after receiving forgiveness, and surrendering to the joy of salvation, there is a great danger of starting a new cycle of falling into sin. That is why God offers people access to his wisdom, which is founded on the fear of the Lord. Through his Word, God gives us clear instructions on how to live blamelessly and with understanding, how to resist sin, and how to avoid the counsel of the wicked. God directs people to the grace and sweetness of life in communion with God, but also in harmony with one another. A wise man will obey God and surrender to God's omniscience.

The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom

Psalms 111

We all know some people that live in their own world. In fact, we like to note that they are so preoccupied with their own ideas, views, experiences, tendencies, habits, actions, achievements, failures and plans that nothing, that is not the subject of their interest or immediate needs, even reaches them.

They are into themselves, for themselves, by themselves, apparently on their own and, as it were, free from everything and everyone. Enterprising, focused, ambitious, energetic, immersed in the here and now. Without need, desire, curiosity, wonder, reflection, or admiration for anything outside of themselves. They are efficient, self-sacrificing, dedicated, diligent, full of knowledge and abilities. Totally interior, and totally outside of life and the world...

They cannot stop like the psalmist, look around themselves and, amazed, recognize and marvel at God's mighty, brilliant, magnificent works. They have neither the time nor the space in which to realize the constancy, faithfulness and lasting commitment of God to man. They are eluded by God's *always and forever*, which welcomes and envelops man's days with certainty. They're not able to reach out and be inspired by his gentleness, miracles, truth, righteousness and glory. They do not even recognize the covenant-guaranteed salvation from where they stand. So how could they then truly perceive their life's flicker in time, their tiny place in the universe? And how could they rise to sincere fear of the Lord?

Those who fear him act wisely.

The wisdom to fear. Fear (leading to) wisdom.

Is it time for me to step out of my world and into God's?

28

Live According to God's Instructions

Psalm 119:1-16

Many times when we think about God's commandments, we have negative connotations attached to them. After all, who can really say they like rules? We humans generally prefer to be our own boss. And we don't like it when someone dares to interfere with our plans.

But if we look at the psalmists, and their way of relating to God's rules, they have a different attitude. They don't want to run away. What's more, they fervently pray to God that their lives will be in accordance with his laws. How is it possible that these people wanted something so contrary to human nature?

The answer lies in wisdom and love. In wisdom, they were able to understand that it is only worth living according to God's rules. Let's think... When that wonderful God, who was ready to give his life for us, gave commandments to his children, how could those commands be anything but only for our good? His instructions really lead to life, and not just any life, but one filled with Jesus.

Yes, it is true that this sometimes means sacrifice, but in the shadow of eternity it is so worth it. I am sure that if we had the opportunity to look at situations from his point of view, we would unquestioningly accept every instruction that God has ever given us. Why? Because we would see that these instructions are actually a gift. A wonderful gift designed to sustain a joyful and fulfilling Christian life.

Don't Walk in the Counsel of the Wicked

Psalm 1

“You are who you hang out with.” Just one in a group of folk proverbs that talk about the influence of the environment on our lives. Although we often do not choose either people or circumstances in life, the writer of the first psalm tells us that despite all circumstances, we always have the option of choosing. He ‘speaks’ through the song about the two paths we can take - either following the wisdom of God, or following the counsel of the wicked. In the text for the wicked, he says: “They are like chaff that the wind drives away... For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Chaff refers to the small residue from grain that first serves to protect the grain from external influences, but is eventually discarded and has no use. In this text, wickedness is associated with chaff. In the beginning it is hidden, but when harvest time comes, it shows its nothingness, remains scattered on the ground, carried by the wind - and does not even benefit animals. In the same way, human wickedness ends. It entangles and interferes, and then retreats as if carried by the wind. It simply disappears, and all participants in the ‘game’ wash their hands of it.

The way of chaff is opposed to the way of righteousness. The righteous “delights in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.” The view from God’s height exposes all the false splendor of the counsels, ways and assemblies of the wicked, sinners and scoffers. Then, instead of the impermanence depicted by the chaff, man becomes “like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season.”

To not fall into the traps of fickleness, detours, and scoffers, but rather, like the ‘righteous’, to be in good company, sharing both good and bad with others - that was, and still remains a challenge for everyone!

30

Walk Blamelessly

Psalm 15

In the Bible, we often encounter God's promise that we will receive blessings in everything we do if we follow his ways. This promise works almost like a bargain - if we give to God, God will return good things to us. But we also know that in life even the most righteous people experience life's tragedies and feel as if the Lord has abandoned them. So what to conclude? Did God only half mean what he said? It also seems that the righteous life should be easy and simple, that God's people should always want to do good, act properly, and that they succeed in doing it without error.

Unfortunately - I would say more often than not - the pressures of life and our expectations make our human strength fail in this, God's perfect plan. If we look at it with human eyes, that equation *righteous life = successful and good life* really doesn't make sense. But what did God really mean? What does *Psalm 15* tell us? A righteous life brings us closer to God and enables us to be immersed in His holiness. Such a righteous life does not come from a worldly motivation, but from a heart that wants to do what is pleasing to God. Such a man will never waver because his joy is always in what pleases the Lord. May God give us the strength to persevere in this!

31

Live with Understanding

Psalm 49

Being famous, rich, beautiful and young is the ideal of many. As it is not easy to achieve everything at the same time, we often long for what we don't have. It is nice to enjoy the time of youth and imperfect beauty. We are aware of these values only when we leave that age, thus irreversibly losing the joy of the given, while striving for the remaining - fame and fortune. If by some chance we achieve fame and fortune, we then want youth and beauty with all our hearts. Psalm 49 describes a rich man who wants to ransom his life with wealth, and live forever. Accustomed to buying everything he wants, why not also buy what is written somewhere in every human being, in their DNA - the need for eternal life?

Whether rich or poor, every person has to face death equally. A rich man is not benefited by his wealth and possessions, nor is the fact that he has no property useful to a poor man. The only thing that can benefit both of them is being in Christ. "for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit."

Only the Lord of all has paid the ransom, through his son Jesus Christ, so that they would have eternal life. We cannot change the past, but we can influence what awaits us, - and how! Let's be wise in learning from our past relationships, and with understanding use what the Lord has blessed us with.

32

Live in Harmony

Psalm 133

As a mother, it saddens me when I see our children fighting, calling each other names - when selfishness overcomes generosity, and arrogance kindness. Instead of smiles, I see their frowning faces. I wonder if they have forgotten how important it is to support each other, to help, to encourage, to share, to put the needs of others before their own. And then I find myself in their role. Although, as someone older, I should have a well established understanding of “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”, often the “old” in me is stronger, and God’s heart suffers because I have hurt a brother or sister with an unconstructive impulsive monologue, and undermined a relationship.

As a mother, it makes me immensely happy when I see my children forgiving each other, helping each other, and solving problems together because they have different personalities. I am glad that they are devoted to each other, that they are ready to forgive and that they encourage each other to love and do good deeds. In the same way, our heavenly Father also enjoys when we are unified, in life and worship - because we are members of the same body.

Our unity is a blessing to all, like the “precious oil” running over the whole Body, or the dew that refreshes and nourishes. When we are as one, we can in some small part experience what it means when Jesus says that he and the Father have invited each other into that unity.

33

Surrender to God's Omniscience

Psalm 139

Psalm 139 calls us to remember that while God, being omniscient, quite literally knows everything, He also knows each of us at a deeply personal level. Although God can know our “thoughts from afar” (v. 2), this psalm also notes that wherever we find ourselves “you (God) are there” (v. 8). It makes little difference that life sometimes takes us to places where God seems to be missing—we read that “even there your hand shall lead me...” (v. 10).

We live in a world that often behaves like there is no God. That’s why Psalm 139 is a good reminder to be attentive to God’s voice and call. But, how can we do this?

First, we can affirm God’s presence in all things and let Psalm 139 remind us that God is not passively observing, but rather is actively engaged in every situation. Second, we can let this passage encourage us to personally respond to God by inviting him to “search me...and know my heart” (v.23).

God’s Spirit works in our lives to “lead us in the way everlasting” (v.24). Even in life’s dark phases, God’s Spirit can transform us into the kind of people He looks for us to be. Trust Him today, for His hand is on you!

VI. Offer God a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

At the end of this forty-day pilgrimage through the Psalms, let's spend the last seven days in thanksgiving. And let it not be a superficial thanksgiving, but let it be deeply thought out and valuable, like the sweet-smelling sacrifice that the Lord deserves. Words of gratitude have already been mentioned in other psalms, but now let it be a thanksgiving with which we will seal our Covenant with God. This is the God whom we recognized as the one who has no equal, and before whom we acknowledged our frailty and powerlessness. This is the God to whom we have confessed our sins, to whom we begged for mercy and from whom we received forgiveness once and for all. It is God who enables us to experience the joy of salvation and who offers us his wisdom for everyday life. We can offer God, daily, our sacrifice of thanksgiving.

34

Offer God a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

Psalm 116

Perhaps among your childhood memories, some of you can also remember one when your parents reminded you “What do you say?” after a relative, neighbor or someone unknown to you (and obviously important to your parents) gave you something. Such scenes like this usually ended with the child shyly muttering “Thank you”, and the parents smiling apologetically for the insufficiently high level of gratitude.

If we know the Bible well, the term “sacrifice of thanksgiving” will not be foreign to us. And yet, if we think about it, two realities seem to collide in it: a sacrifice as an indication of renunciation - a visible act, but also something potentially unpleasant that we would rather avoid - and gratitude as something that should arise spontaneously, from the inner being as a response to experienced affection or kindness.

The psalmist has no problem with this: after God has saved him from the edge of the abyss, from distress, anguish, anxiety and possible death, he feels that he has returned to the land of the living. From this position of gratitude, no sacrifice or vow is too difficult for him, and his mouth is full of God’s goodness.

If we feel like him, it will not be difficult for us to join him. If right now we don’t feel that we have a reason to be grateful, and our jaws tighten - let’s remember that a whole life consists of the little things, and start from those. Let’s find one tiny thing that comes to us from our God. And then one more...

After that, maybe the words will flow by themselves.

35

God Deserves Praise and Glory

Psalm 65

According to the dictionary, praise means the expression of respect and gratitude as an act of worship. The word glory, on the other hand, implies high renown or honor won by notable achievements. The poet David begins this psalm by stating that God deserves praise. He continues with reasons for both praise and glory.

The first few verses of Psalm 65 refer to reasons for praising God. One can see God's relationship with people. God hears our prayers, atones for our transgressions, allows us to stay near Him and enjoy His goodness, answers us and saves us. From verse 6, the focus is on the greatness of God's glory based on His mighty and wonderful works. David observes the nature around him that shouts glory to God. The mountains show God's strength, the seas and waves God's control, and the earth and its fruits God's providence for humanity.

What is our reaction to the One who hears our needs and prayers, frees us from sin and gives us hope? To whom do we give glory and recognition for creation, nature and everything that surrounds us? The eighth verse mentions people who see God's signs and shout for joy. Will we join them and give praise and glory to Him who alone deserves it?

36

Come Into His Presence with Thanksgiving

Psalm 95:1-7

The world seems out of control. Accidents, natural disasters, and wars happen. In whose hands is such a world? The world and history are not in the hands of fate, chaos, or chance.

On the contrary, God leads this world with a desire that humanity would constantly live in righteous and faithful relationships. “He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.”

We are God’s hands, and we move through everyday life with the confidence that He will not let us go. God’s word calls us to rejoice in challenges, and praise God in troubles - because it is God who calms every wind, every storm.

The words of Psalm 95 say: “come, make a joyful noise” and “come, let us worship and bow down.” It is a call to worship and to praise God for his greatness, power and care for his people. The Word of God calls us to a simple movement. Let’s come. Where to?

God wants to have fellowship with us, he wants to rejoice with us. There is only one thing left for us. Let’s come and worship him. And in these imperfections of ours, in these attempts of ours, He, our God, wants to guide us, wants to love us, wants to encourage us.

Before us is such a simple step. Let’s come, make a joyful noise, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, and thank Him. We don’t bow to our deeds, nor to some institutions, nor individuals, but to our God. Why? “For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

37

Give Thanks to God, for He Is Good

Psalm 100

When reading the Bible, we often come across the phrase “God is good”. I myself have read, heard and repeated it so many times that it has become a habit. God has always been characterized to me as merciful, good and just. Because of this, I often forget to thank God precisely for His goodness. I forget to thank Him for so many wonderful blessings that I have received, because He is just the way He is. He wants the best for me. The greatest thing of all is that because of His goodness I have the opportunity to be saved. Such a God deserves my thanks.

Psalm 100 calls us to give thanks to God. But let it not be as if we are completing a task on a checklist, but let it be a sincere and pure-hearted thank you. Let’s thank Him for the goodness because of which we are saved, and which He shows us day by day. These may be little things that don’t seem important to us at first, but we can see God’s action in even the smallest aspects of our lives. Let’s not forget that such a God does not abandon us in our problems and sufferings. Let’s learn to surrender to God, and trust His plan for our life, knowing that He wants good for us, not destruction.

“For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations.”

38

Give Thanks to God among the Peoples

Psalm 108

Every parent loves it when their child talks to them, and expresses their gratitude towards them and their efforts.

God also likes it when we turn to him with grateful hearts. Gratitude is one characteristic of a soft heart. A grateful heart can bring something good out of the worst situation. A grateful heart has a different way of looking at the world. This perspective gives us the possibility to trust and rely on the one to whom we are grateful.

When we feel loved, then the natural state of our hearts is to be grateful. They simply resonate at that frequency. But to understand that love, we need to meditate on it, absorb it. And then, *then*, something miraculous can happen to us!

When we begin to really grasp how much we are loved, then our gratitude grows, but when this realization becomes so strong, we are like little children who have a strong need to express their gratitude on the outside - they kiss, hug, and jump for joy. And then everyone can see how they are filled with joy and gratitude. When we look at everything around us and in us that the Lord has prepared for us, we cannot help but praise him. Personally, it often happens that I can't keep this gratitude to myself and I'm happy to show it outside. And this can become very contagious - the visible expression of gratitude can encourage those around us to become grateful themselves.

May the Lord help us to keep grateful hearts and may that gratitude be visible to everyone around us, so that in this way we can bring someone closer to our Savior!

39

Give Thanks to God with a Song

Psalm 147

From my childhood, I can still remember the songs we learned in Sunday school. Among others, one spoke about giving thanks: ‘Thank you for every new good morning, thank you for every fresh new day, thank you that I may cast my burdens, wholly on You...’ So simple, but so fundamentally important.

Psalm 147 invites us to give thanks. That invitation to give thanks is not optional, but rather an explicit instruction: Praise the Lord! In our everyday life, we should recognize the finger of God in our lives. Maybe it’s something quite ‘normal’ for someone: health, work, or family. For someone else it is a new morning, beauty in nature, or the joy of salvation.

Still, there is a lot of suffering, injustice and disease in our surroundings. The question often arises: “How to give thanks in all this ‘chaos?’” A partial answer lies in this Psalm.

When the circumstances are not as we wish, it is necessary to take on the ATTITUDE of a worshiper and make a DECISION that despite everything, we will praise God for what He, in His sovereignty, is.

Then SONGS can help us in giving thanks - compositions that were experienced, and written, and left for the blessing and edification of all believers. In verse 11 it says that God takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Psalms 147-150 begin and end with a clear instruction: Praise the Lord! Let us not remain silent. Let’s use songs so we can glorify Him who alone is worthy of praise.

Give Thanks Because God Will Fulfill His Promise and Purpose for You

Psalm 138

Sometimes during internet correspondence, while waiting for the other party's response, we end our letters with politely optimistic words like, "thanks in advance". Apart from this example of written courtesy, we don't find many situations in our lives where we would feel justified in thanking someone in advance, regardless of the attractiveness of the promises received. Our skepticism in this area is reflected in the adage "A promise is a comfort for a fool".

King David writes his song of thanksgiving fully aware that true joy is brought, not by the attractiveness of promises, but by the credibility of the One who promises - "for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." It is the credibility of the One whose name stands behind the heavenly promises that is the seal of security and the reason for a grateful song. The highly exalted One who turns his gaze on us below. The One who answers when we call for help, who encourages and strengthens us, preserves our life in the midst of trouble. The One who will fulfill what he has promised.

In the past 40 days, we have read, prayed, and through the psalms we've pondered together and experienced many of God's promises. We believe, we rejoice in, and with our hearts we surrender to those promises, not just because they are good, pleasant and attractive, but because we know the One who wrote his name next to those promises.

The Hebrew word "hesed", which is translated here as steadfast love, denotes the special way in which God loves. Not with fleeting feelings, wobbly promises and superficial words, but with determined, merciful and self-sacrificing love and faithfulness.

Thank the Lord your God because his "steadfast love" endures forever.



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Perhaps, while reading these psalms, you've thought of writing a psalm yourself, or setting an existing one to music. We encourage you to do so and share it with us or someone else.

You can find additional materials and a PDF version of this booklet on the website bczagreb.hr/en/challenge40

