

## **RAW PRAYERS: Praying Through Our Fear**

**Week 1**

**May 7, 2023**

### **DAY 1 PRAYING THROUGH FEAR WITH HONESTY**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 3](#); [2 Samuel 15:13-17](#); [John 14:27](#); [Joshua 1:9](#)

**Reflection:** Many of the Psalms are written as laments to model how to pray during hard times. Tim Keller says, “Most of us just stop praying when we are suffering or put up nothing but the brief petition asking for relief. But the Lament Psalms show us that the right thing to do is to process out our suffering through sustained prayer.” In Psalm 3, as David pours out his heart to God while being pursued in a coup attempt by his son Absalom, he offers us four steps to guide us as we pray through our own fears.

First, work to identify or define the source of your fear so you can specifically ask God for help. David is very clear in Psalm 3:1-2 about the danger he is facing. (If you, however, struggle instead with a vague sense of anxiety, tell God that, too.) Next, move from a fixation on your fear to focusing on God’s character. In Psalm 3:3-4 David carefully lists what God does for him. Thinking of God’s promises and ways He protected you in the past reminds you that He will help you now. Then in Psalm 3:5-6, David affirms his faith in God’s protection and actually falls asleep! He can rest even in the midst of danger because He knows God is in control. Finally, in Psalm 3:7-8 David expresses his need for God’s help with full emotion. He is honest about his desire to be saved from his enemies but also for justice. We can pray the same way also, even while recognizing that God calls us to love our enemies and justice doesn’t always come quickly.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- How does reading David’s prayer change the way you think about praying through your fears?
- You may not be hiding from your rebellious son and an army of 12,000 men, but how can you use this model of David’s prayer to pray about your anxieties and worries more honestly?

**Pause to pray through your fears:** Identify one fear you face and read Psalm 3 aloud as your personal prayer to God with your own fear in mind. You might need to change the words a bit to make it your own.

**Take a Next Step:** Begin a list of promises and characteristics of God that you can pray back to him when you are afraid. Start with John 14:27 and Joshua 1:9.

**\*Look for the *Raw Prayers* season of the MY CHAIR podcast to supplement this reading plan.**

### **DAY 2 PRAYING THROUGH FEAR WITH PRAISE**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 18](#); [2 Samuel 22](#); [Matthew 6:34](#); [Isaiah 43:1](#)

**Reflection:** Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 are nearly identical. 2 Samuel records David’s personal song, and Psalm 18 records it as a song of praise for deliverance for the whole nation of Israel. When we remember how God faithfully answered our prayers and came through for us in the past, it gives us the

courage to overcome our present fears. Through practice, we can learn to praise God in advance for the ways He is working to calm our fears and deal with our issues before we even see those answers.

While prayers of honest lament help us define and express our fears, prayers of praise can also act as an antidote for unhealthy fear. As we rehearse God's past goodness in our lives, thank Him specifically for His awesome characteristics, or sing songs of worship, we may find our fears moving farther into the background of our minds as God comes into the center. Chuck Swindoll writes, "When we have God in clear focus, His powerful presence eclipses our fear." As we remind ourselves that God never changes, that He loves us, champions us, and always has good plans for us no matter the circumstances, our prayers can shift toward praise that ushers in His peace.

**Ask Yourself:**

-How have you seen praising God lead you to peace when you are afraid?

-What are praise songs or prayers you use during times of fear?

-A lyric by Bethel Music says, "Let praise be a weapon that silences the enemy"—how can praise silence the lies and fear the enemy throws at you?

**Pause to pray through your fears:** Read Psalm 18:1-5 as your prayer to the Lord and thank Him specifically for a time (or times) that He saved you from physical danger or enemies or from Satan's attacks or accusations.

**Take a Next Step:** Think back over your life and begin a list of ways God has been faithful to you and protected or rescued you. This list will be a resource to remind you of His faithfulness when you are afraid. Add Matthew 6:34 and Isaiah 43:1 to your list of promises and characteristics of God.

**DAY 3** PRAYING THROUGH FEAR WITH PEACE

**Scripture:** [Psalm 23](#); [Romans 8:38-39](#); [1 Peter 5:6-7](#)

**Reflection:** Psalm 23 is a short, well-known psalm of comfort and not a traditional lament psalm. No specific fear-provoking situation prompted this psalm, but you can trace the roots of our common anxieties. How will my needs in life be met? (vs. 1) What is God's plan for my life? (vs. 2) What will I do if I must face death? (vs. 4) Who will rescue me from enemies? (vs. 5)

David identifies each of these fears, but he also highlights the character of God in the familiar word picture of a caring shepherd, painting the entire scene with an overriding brush stroke of peace amid danger. Without the shepherd, the sheep is defenseless and faces thirst, starvation, losing his way, enemies, pestilence, and even death. There is every reason to fear, but because of the shepherd's care, the sheep is at peace. Sheep are fearful animals. They are even afraid of running water, which is why they will only drink when the shepherd finds them a still pool. They are prone to parasites on their sensitive heads, so the shepherd places oil on their heads to protect them. Similarly, God anoints us with the oil of the Holy Spirit to protect our minds.

Throughout the psalm, David acknowledges God the Shepherd's protection that leads to peace. In every line, the honest expressions of fear are met with the peace of knowing God the Shepherd is good and is in complete control.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Read through this psalm again and trace how God meets your needs just as the shepherd meets the needs of the sheep. Can you trust that God will never change?
- Read the promises in Romans 8:38-39 and 1 Peter 5:6-7. How can the truths in these promises help you sleep well?

**Pause to pray through your fears:** Pray Psalm 23 using your name in the place of “I” or “me.”

**Take a Next Step:** As soon as you wake in the morning, say Psalm 23:1, “*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*” As fears arise in your day, repeat this promise and remember God as your Good Shepherd. Add Romans 8:38-39 and 1 Peter 5:6-7 to your list of promises.

**DAY 4 PRAYING THROUGH FEAR WITH ASSURANCE**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 34](#); [1 Samuel 21:10-15](#); [Philippians 4:6-7](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#)

**Reflection:** David doesn’t mention this specifically in Psalm 34, but the heading indicates this psalm celebrated God’s deliverance of David from Abimelech (another name for Achish of Gath) in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. God led David to use his wits to escape his enemies by feigning insanity, and David gives God all the credit for this. We, too, should remember to credit God with His deliverance, even if it seems to come from our own effort.

As we read through Psalm 34, we see the assurance of God’s protection and deliverance at every turn. Charles Spurgeon writes, “It is well to mark our mercies with well-carved memorials,” and David remembers God’s goodness with unbridled joy. Verses 1-3 are filled with general praise, while verses 4-7 offer both personal and corporate examples of God as our deliverer. In verses 8-11, David again details the blessings of God’s provision and protection, and the wisdom of verses 11-14 reminds us that following God is always worth it. From verses 15-21, we again see specific remembrances of ways God delivers and saves His people, but we see the ultimate deliverance and redemption in verse 22 with an eternal perspective of God’s final salvation of His children from sin and condemnation. God may not deliver us immediately in a physical sense, as the lives of the martyrs prove, but He will always redeem His children with life forever with Him.

**Ask Yourself:**

- How does the assurance that God is my eternal deliverer help me deal with my daily fears?
- We have looked at both Psalms of lament, where David cries out to God amid his fears, and Psalms of deliverance, where he praises God on the other side of his fears. How can each of these help us find confidence in God when we are afraid?

**Pause to pray through your fears:** Pray Psalm 34:1-4 to God as praise for His goodness in your life, and then praise Him for specific ways He’s rescued or delivered you.

**Take a Next Step:** Add to your list of ways God has delivered you personally. And don’t forget to add Philippians 4:6-7 and Isaiah 41:10 to your list of promises.

## DAY 5 PRAYING THROUGH FEAR WITH HOPE

**Scripture:** [Psalm 57](#); [1 Samuel 22:1-4](#); [1 John 5:14](#); [Romans 12:12](#)

**Reflection:** After David escaped from Saul and then from Achish of Gath (Ahimelech,) he ended up hiding in a cave. There he became the head of an army of 400 ragtag malcontents. This was not a pattern for success, and from a human standpoint David's future looked bleak. From the cave he writes this lament of Psalm 57. Again, we see David starting from a position of praise even as he begs God for mercy. He affirms that God will fulfill His purpose for David, and he praises God for His character of love and faithfulness. There is a rhythm of back-and-forth praise and petition, but the final ending of the psalm is David's resounding hope. His future is secure, and he thanks God because He is worthy of gratitude and praise, regardless of the trouble David is enduring. David is still a relatively young man as he writes this psalm, but he has rock-solid hope and confidence and praises God in advance for his anticipated victory over the enemy. Wow! What a challenge for us as we face our fears and learn to cry out to God with honest and specific needs, praise Him amid our fears, acknowledge that He is in control and let that lead us to peace, and express our emotions to God even as we trust Him for the outcome with assurance and hope.

### **Ask Yourself:**

- How can you, in the power of the Holy Spirit, make the command in Romans 12:12 real in your life?
- How can remembering God's goodness and past protection help us rejoice in hope?
- What does it mean to be '*constant in prayer*'?

### **Pause to pray through your fears:**

- 1-Think of one fear you have and tell God about it- be specific! "*God, I'm afraid of \_\_\_\_\_.*"
- 2-Tell God how you feel, "*and God, I'm feeling \_\_\_\_\_.*"
- 3-Remind yourself of God's character, "*But God, I know You are \_\_\_\_\_.*"
- 4-Take a few deep breaths and pray that sentence over a few times. As you inhale, say, "*But God, I know,*" and as you exhale, repeat the characteristic of God.
- 5-End by thanking Him for the way He will save you from this fear. *Amen!*

**Take a Next Step:** As you review your list of promises of God, add 1 John 4:14 and Romans 12:12. Pause to rejoice in God's faithfulness. Challenge yourself- memorize at least one of these promises!

## RAW PRAYERS: Praying Through Our Pain

Week 2

May 14, 2023

### DAY 1 A PRAYER BOOK FOR EVERYONE

**Scripture:** [Psalm 22:1-31](#); [John 16:33](#); [John 14:25-27](#); [Hebrews 4:14-16](#)

**Reflection:** The world we live in is broken. Pain and suffering are inevitable, even for believers. As we face the consequences of sin, the sting of persecution, and the confusion of unexplained tragedies, we struggle to find the best ways to process our pain. Mercifully, Jesus assured us that although trouble would come, he would equip us to navigate through it. He did this by sending the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us. He also personally modeled how to pray through times of pain.

Like the generations of Israelites before him, Jesus used the Psalms as a prayer book, quoting sections or using their themes to express his thoughts and needs to God. The Psalms were written for that purpose; to teach God's people how to come to Him with their full range of emotions, including pain. Praying certain Psalms gave voice to their suffering and helped them connect with God in the midst of it.

Psalm 22 is a striking example of this type of prayer, and it's the one Jesus used to express himself to God in His time of deepest pain ([Matthew 27:46](#); [Mark 15:34](#)). Scholars don't know the specific situation that led David to write this deeply personal plea, but God's Spirit clearly guided him to process his personal pain in a way that prophetically applied to the suffering of Jesus in the moments before His death on the cross.

But Psalm 22 wasn't just for David's circumstance and Jesus' suffering; it provides guidance for our prayers too. Through their examples, we gain confidence that addressing God boldly with our questions, our struggles, and our pain is not only acceptable – it is the best way to find peace and hope in our times of need.

#### Ask Yourself:

- What portions of Psalm 22 do you find difficult to relate to?
- What portions can you connect with it?
- How do you think using this (or another) psalm as a basis for prayer can help you go deeper in your conversations with God?

**Pause to pray through your pain:** *Heavenly Father, thank you for providing your word to teach and guide me. Help me to come to you authentically and honestly when I'm confused or hurting. Today I am especially struggling with \_\_\_\_\_. Please grant me your comfort and counsel... In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Take a Next Step:** Dig a little deeper into Psalm 22. Try writing an outline of its progression in your own words. What are its primary themes? Make note of any patterns or contrasts that support those themes.

**\*Look for the *Raw Prayers* season of the MY CHAIR podcast to supplement this reading plan.**

## DAY 2 PERSISTENT PURSUIT

**Scripture:** [Psalm 22:1-2](#); [Psalm 10:1](#); [Psalm 6:3-6](#); [Luke 18:1-8](#)

**Reflection:** The first two verses of Psalm 22 dive directly into David's feelings of frustration and abandonment. We don't know the specific issue he was facing, but we can tell that David had been praying, even pleading, for God to intervene. And we can tell that David thought God wasn't answering fast enough.

Perhaps you have been there – desperate for relief, or at least an answer. You never thought this 'thing' would happen to you, and you certainly did not expect God to feel so distant or be so silent when you needed Him most. Maybe you too, have asked questions like "Why?", "Where are you?" and "How long?" Maybe unmet expectations have left you disoriented and on edge. This psalm, and others like it, shows us that we are not alone in these reactions and that it's ok to express these frustrations to God.

However, we should also notice that despite his emotions David didn't waver from *seeking* God. He wasn't just venting. Day and night he kept praying, "My God, My God..." Even though he didn't understand what was happening, he still trusted that God was there and that He was able to save him. He still considered him *his* God. We can feel the tension; God seemed absent, but David still believed in Him. Despite his disappointment, David valued their **relationship**. Instead of turning away from God in bitterness or discouragement, he turned toward Him, boldly and persistently expressing how he felt and seeking God's presence.

God's love for us is unconditional and His character is unchanging. David leaned into those truths and taught us that when we find ourselves wrestling with frustration or struggling through a painful season, we can be fully honest with God and trust in His faithfulness. We can, and should, persistently pursue Him, even as we wait for deliverance.

### Ask Yourself:

-When have unmet expectations or a 'delayed' response from God tempted you to give up praying about a specific situation in your life?

-What can help you persistently pursue God even in the waiting?

**Pause to pray through your pain:** *My God, My God – I don't understand why \_\_\_\_\_ . This makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_ . Nevertheless, I will praise you. You are \_\_\_\_\_ . Help me to sense your presence in the midst of this... In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## DAY 3 LET 'WHAT' LEAD TO 'WHO'

**Scripture:** [Psalm 22:1-21](#); [Psalm 16:1-11](#); [Psalm 23:4](#)

**Reflection:** When we're in hard seasons, it's easy to fixate on our circumstances and pain, and fill our prayer times with grumbling, worrying, or expectations about how God *should* help us. Focusing on these things can begin to overshadow our relationship with God and reveal fear, selfishness, and pride within our hearts.

Psalm 22 teaches us that acknowledging **who** God is in the midst of our troubles redirects our attention and moves our hearts toward worship. David began shifting his focus by intentionally calling to mind

God's character and His *historical* faithfulness to deliver the Israelite nation. He reminded himself that when God's people trusted Him, they were not disappointed. (Psalm 22:4-5) The next few stanzas describe David's incremental steps of vulnerability toward God punctuated by declarations of truth about God. David confessed honestly how he was feeling (like a worm) and the things that were really upsetting him. Then he reminded himself again **who** God is, this time reflecting on his *personal* experience of God's protection and deliverance. He described how the situation was affecting him and acknowledged his inability to save himself before shifting his focus once more, this time to God's strength and might.

Honest confession and reflection, followed by declarations of God's character and care, emboldened David's prayers and restored his trust in God's faithfulness. He didn't ignore or gloss over his pain, but instead used it as a bridge to draw closer to God.

David's ultimate requests were simple; God's presence and deliverance. Focusing on WHO God is allowed him to set aside his fear and expectations. Fixing his eyes on God himself helped David move through his pain and find the assurance and hope he needed.

**Ask Yourself:**

- When have you been tempted to fixate on your problems or pain?
- What about those circumstances did (or could) help you see God's character more clearly?

**Pause to pray through your pain:** Try using Psalm 16 as a basis for prayer today. Pray through it as it is written once, and then pray through it a second time using your own words or examples to apply to your situation.

**Take a Next Step:** Spend some time journaling about times that God has demonstrated faithfulness in your community, family, and personal life. Bookmark that page as a resource to help you shift your focus during future struggles.

**DAY 4 SACRIFICE OF PRAISE**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 22:1-31](#); [Psalm 40:1-17](#); [Romans 12:15](#); [2 Corinthians 1:3-11](#)

**Reflection:** Psalm 22's title indicates that it was meant to be sung during temple worship. It may seem counterintuitive to share such vulnerable thoughts and feelings publicly, but the truth is we're meant to live in community, with God and each other. Lamenting our struggles in congregational worship acknowledges our need for God's intervention and invites others to walk alongside us. We are not meant to carry these burdens alone.

As David poetically offered his personal struggles to God, everyone around him witnessed his pain being transformed to worship. His process became a source of faith for others as he laid his heart bare on the altar.

The tone of David's prayer changed dramatically in verse 22 when he started praising God and instructing those around him to do the same. Verse 25 suggests that he had received the relief he sought. According to the NIV Study Bible, "A vow was a solemn promise to offer a gift to God in response to a divine deliverance or blessing." The traditional gift was an offering of cakes and meat sacrificed on the altar. ([Leviticus 7:12-16](#)) Israelite law and tradition indicated that an offering of this

type should be shared with others in the assembly. By presenting his offering during temple worship, David acknowledged and celebrated God's response to his prayers, blessing all who were present and highlighting the faithfulness of God.

While we are no longer compelled to offer sacrifices on a physical altar, the incredible value of surrendering our hearts before God and our community remains. Our sacrifices of praise and our celebrations of deliverance honor God and become testimonies of encouragement to others in need of comfort.

**Ask Yourself:**

- How difficult do you find it to share your struggles with others?
- How do you think lamenting your pain with other believers can help you walk through a difficult season?
- Why do you think God instructs us to make this a part of our corporate worship?

**Pause to pray through your pain:** *Father God, You are so faithful and kind. Thank you for showing me the value of sharing my struggles honestly with you and others you place in my life. Grant me the courage to fully surrender my pain to you today. Use it, Lord, to grow me and to encourage others in your love... In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Take a Next Step:** Consider sharing a current struggle with a small group of believers in your community. Ask them to come alongside you in prayer. Be sure to update them as God responds.

**DAY 5 THE KING IS ON HIS THRONE**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 22:27-31](#); [Psalm 102:12-28](#); [Revelation 21:4](#)

**Reflection:** The final verses of Psalm 22 declare God's sovereignty. It is significant that David concluded his lament by reminding himself, and all who would follow, that God is in control and that His faithfulness echoes throughout all generations. Even in the midst of struggle and pain, God's loyal love has proven Him trustworthy. No matter what situations arise or trials we face, God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He is the one who delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, the one who rescued David out of a pit of despair, and the one who conquered death through Jesus' resurrection. There WILL come a day when all suffering comes to an end. Until that time, we can persistently pursue God with the assurance that He is King and His promises never fail.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Why do you think it is important to intentionally think about God's sovereignty when you are facing difficult situations?
- What makes that challenging?
- What reminders can you put in place to help you lean into that truth?

**Pause to pray through your pain:** *Heavenly Father, I know that nothing escapes your notice and that you work all things together for the good of those who love you. ([Romans 8:28](#)) Help me Lord to submit to your leadership in regards to \_\_\_\_\_. Teach me to trust your ultimate rule in my life... In Jesus' name, amen.*

## RAW PRAYERS: Praying Through Our Sin

Week 3

May 21, 2023

### DAY 1 - GUILT

**Scripture:** [Psalm 51:1-17](#), [Psalm 32:1-4](#), [Psalm 38:4](#)

**Reflection:** Guilt is as important to our lives as physical pain. It's a warning sign that helps us know that something is wrong. But when guilt is not dealt with biblically it can become a paralyzing force in our lives. We've all done things for which we have deep regrets. If those regrets are not dealt with properly, they can really hang us up. Guilt can be a heavy burden, like carrying luggage everywhere you go. You sit there under the weight of it and think – there's no way God could forgive me; there's no way God could use me. It's natural to try to relieve those feelings of guilt.

There are, of course, some unhealthy and dangerous ways of dealing with guilt. Some have tried comparison. They may say something like, "I know what I did is wrong, but it's not as bad as what others have done." Others medicate by eating, drinking, inhaling, injecting, or in other ways masking the pain with cheap thrills. Blame is sometimes used to point the finger at what others have done to us to justify our own bad behaviors. Another unsuccessful strategy is to try to compensate by doing good- hoping that our good will outweigh the bad. And perhaps a favorite in today's culture is to create a different God. A God who doesn't think that what I'm doing is wrong - or doesn't judge, condemn, or punish.

At the end of the day, these ways of dealing with guilt only avoid reality. But there's good news. God's plan for guilt is not to keep you weighed down and feeling hopeless. God's plan for you is that you will discover freedom, joy, a sense of God's love, and a calling even more powerful than before you were overwhelmed with guilt! If you have been avoiding your guilt, consider facing your guilt the biblical way. Bringing your guilt to God will move you out of your past and into your future.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- What regret do I have that causes me to wonder if I can be used by God?
- In what way have I been dealing with my guilt in an unhealthy way - comparison, medicating, blame, compensation, or creation of a different God?
- Am I willing to bring my guilt to God?

**Pause to pray through your guilt:** *My Lord, my Master, my guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. Please lead me on the path to restored joy and gladness, and freedom from my heavy burdens... Amen.*

\*Look for the *Raw Prayers* season of the **MY CHAIR** podcast to supplement this reading plan.

## DAY 2 – I CONFESS

**Scripture:** [Psalm 51:3-4](#), [Psalm 32:5](#), [1 John 1:5-10](#),

### Reflection:

*"I have sinned against the Lord."*

2 Samuel 12:13a

What is Sin? Sin is rebellion against God. In some way or another, our sins are refusal to submit to Him as the Master and Lord of our lives. One way we rebel is by putting our trust in ourselves as our own Master. Other times we put our trust and hope in other people or things. These are forms of putting other gods before Him. And when we put ourselves or others in the place of God we refuse to submit to His ways. We determine what is right and wrong for ourselves.

But in reality, God is the judge of right and wrong. God has established the way of life that promotes our well-being as well as the well-being of those around us. And He has communicated His ways in His written word. His way involves how to follow Him, how to love Him and others, how to pursue success, how to pursue sex and other cravings, and how to pursue satisfaction, peace, and happiness. When we reject what He says and determine for ourselves what is right and wrong, this is rebellion against God. This is sin.

King David wrote Psalm 51 after he had been confronted by the prophet Nathan for not only his sin of adultery with Bathsheba but also the murder of Bathsheba's husband. This painful story, along with its consequences, can be read in First Samuel chapters 11 and 12. It would be easy to point fingers and declare that David didn't deserve forgiveness. And yet, David received exactly that. How is this possible? The answer is in David's response when he was confronted by Nathan. David said, *"I have sinned against the Lord."* (Second Samuel chapter 12 verse 13). Finding forgiveness begins with acknowledging sin and confessing it.

To Confess means "to speak the same thing." Confession is agreeing with God. Confession is acknowledging that the way God sees your sin is right. King David gives a clear example of what confession looks like in words like *"Against you, you only, have I sinned."* And in another Psalm, he says, *"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.'" We can go no further, and freedom from debilitating guilt cannot be found if we will not agree with God and acknowledge the reality and the horror of our sins.*

### Ask Yourself:

- Have I been actively seeking to know what is right and wrong according to God?
- In what ways have I been determining right and wrong for myself without giving thought to what God says?
- Is there anything that I need to acknowledge as sin and confess to God?

**Pause to pray through your guilt:** *"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24) Open my eyes to any way that I have not been obedient to you. And for the things you have already revealed, I confess that \_\_\_\_\_ is wrong. "Against you, you only, have I sinned." Please forgive me now... Amen.*

**Take a Next Step:** Read the story of King David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11:1-12:24. Ask the Lord to show you what you should learn from this story. Make a list of things we can learn about how God deals with us when we sin. For an extra step, do this exercise with another person.

### DAY 3 – FORGIVE ME

**Scripture:** [Psalm 51:1-6](#), [Psalm 103:3-4, 8-13](#), [Acts 3:19](#)

**Reflection:** Have you ever considered the difference between saying “I’m sorry” and “forgive me”? The first only communicates that you have sorrow for what you have done. But the words “forgive me” are asking the person you have offended to do something for you. You are asking them not to hold you wrong against you. When you say, “I’m sorry,” it’s often returned with the words, “It’s okay.” But when you say, “Will you forgive me?”, if the person is willing, you’ll hear the words that bring far more comfort, “Yes, I forgive you.”

But only if the person is willing. Our offenses toward God are far greater than those against any person. How can we know that He will forgive? As you have asked forgiveness from others you may have wondered if they will be compassionate. Will they be merciful? With God, we can know what His answer will be. We know how He will respond because we know the qualities of His character.

As we read the words of David in Psalm 51 and in other Psalms, we see that the king was confident that, if he asked, forgiveness would be granted. Why? Because David knew that God’s love is unchanging and His mercy abundant (Verse 1). When we ask God for forgiveness, we do not have to wonder what His response will be. We do not have to wonder if He’ll be in a good mood or if we have pushed Him to His limit. He is always slow to anger and compassionate with those who fear Him.

And when God forgives us, what exactly do we receive? In Psalm 103, we have a wonderful example of what God does when He forgives us. His forgiveness is complete as He *“forgives all our iniquity”* (verse 3). His forgiveness means He is no longer angry with us (verse 9). His forgiveness means He does not *“repay us according to our iniquities”* (verse 10.) His forgiveness means that our offenses are removed far, far, far away from us (verse 12). When you ask God to forgive you, you are asking God to no longer hold your sins against you. And when you sincerely ask, you can know His response. You can be as confident as King David was because your forgiveness rests solely in the unwavering character of God.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- Which phrase do I use most - “I’m sorry” or “Forgive me”?
- What have I asked God’s forgiveness for but still wonder if He has forgiven me?
- What do I need to ask God’s forgiveness for?

**Pause to pray through your guilt:** *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.” Please forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_.* Thank you for forgiving me. Thank you for removing your anger from me. Thank you for not dealing with me according to my sins. Thank you for removing them far, far away from me. I love you... Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Make a list of things you have already asked God’s forgiveness for. Then say out loud, “God has removed His anger from me. God has removed these transgressions from me as far as the east is from the west.” Then shred the paper into pieces.

## DAY 4 – CLEANSE ME

**Scripture:** [Psalm 51:7-12](#), [Hebrews 9:19 and 22](#), [Hebrews 9:13-14](#), [1 John 1:7](#), [Hebrews 10:19-22](#)

### Reflection:

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*

Psalm 51: 2

When we ask for God’s forgiveness we do not have to wonder if we have also received His cleansing. Forgiveness and cleansing go hand in hand even if we do not say the words “cleanse me.” However, considering the meaning of these words gives us an even deeper sense of what God does for us. Think about it, if God only forgave us, we would still have a problem. Sin has made us dirty.

A child can disobey his mom and play in the mud and then ask for forgiveness. His Mom may say, “I forgive you,” but the dirty child still needs a bath! Even though his mom said, “I forgive you” she will still say, “Stay out of my house until you are washed clean!”

From Psalm 51 we have a wonderful description of what God’s cleansing means. Being clean means a deep inner cleansing of our hearts (verse 10). It restores joy (verses 8 and 12), renews the Holy Spirit’s power (verse 11b), gives you new desires (verse 12b), and makes you able to be in God’s presence (verse 11a). When we are clean we can come into His house!

In Psalm 51:7 David says, “*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.*” Hyssop was used in ceremonial cleansing by dipping the stiff branch into the blood of an animal and sprinkling that blood on the person or object to be cleansed (Leviticus 14:6-7 and 51-52). In the exodus from Egypt, God commanded Hyssop to be used as a paintbrush to spread the blood of the Passover lamb on the door frame of each Israelite house so that the LORD would pass over and death would not visit that home (Exodus 12:22-23).

Hyssop was the tool, but the cleansing and protection were by the blood. In the New Testament, we discover that the Jewish cleansing ceremonies by blood were to point us to the greater sacrifice. The one who would shed His blood for our ultimate cleansing, Jesus! Jesus is also called “our Passover Lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7)! So, when we received His cleansing, we were washed by the precious blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! If Jesus is your Savior, you have been made clean, and all the benefits of being clean are yours!

### Ask Yourself:

- Is there any sin in my life that has taken away the joy of salvation?
- How would I know if I’m ready to be in the presence of God?
- Am I confident that I have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus?

### Pause to pray through your guilt:

*Create in me a clean heart, O 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. Amen*

(Psalm 51:10-12)

## DAY 5 – USE ME

**Scripture:** [Psalm 51: 13-17](#), [2 Corinthians 5:17-20](#), [Isaiah 6:5-8](#)

### Reflection:

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*

Psalm 51:13

As we have already learned, the prayer of David that we have been studying is his heart cry for forgiveness after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of her husband. How could David possibly think that he could be used by God to teach transgressors God's ways? Would sinners really listen to him and return to God? Wouldn't God say, "No thanks David. I have better people to represent me"?

David is not being presumptuous. He is not being arrogant. When a person's eyes are opened to the way of being made right with God they naturally want others to know the same. When a person is overwhelmed with what they have received solely by the love and mercy of God, the only logical response is to worship Him, and to desire that God receive more worship by more worshipers. And no, it's not presumptuous to hope that God would use you. It's not arrogant to think that you have something to offer. This is God's plan. God wants to hear you say the words, "Use me." Or in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "*Here I am! Send me!*"

Do you know what you have learned by this time of deep darkness, hopelessness, and guilt? You have learned the way of forgiveness. You have come to know God more deeply as the One who is unchanging in His love and abundant in mercy. You have learned how to be clean by the blood of Jesus! You have learned the way of reconciliation, the way to being right with God. And if you stumble again, you know what to do so that your sweet fellowship with God will be restored!

By the grace of God your path of disobedience and failure has been turned into a school in which you have been trained to help fellow sinners learn the ways of God, return to God, and worship God. You are now an ambassador for Christ! Pray daily, "Use me." For this is God's plan. Reconciled people are God's hand-picked messengers for His work of reconciling others.

### Ask Yourself:

-Do I long to help others discover the forgiveness and love of God that I have found?

-Am I willing to pray "Use me, Lord" every day?

-What would I say if someone asked me how to get rid of guilt?

**Pause to pray through your guilt:** *O God, my Savior, use me. I want to teach others your ways. I want to see people return to you. O Lord, open my mouth that those around me will hear me praise you. "Here I am, send me." Amen*

## RAW PRAYERS: Praying Through Our Doubt

Week 4

May 28, 2023

### DAY 1 WHY, GOD?

**Scripture:** [Psalm 73](#); [John 20:24-25](#);

**Reflection:** *“My steps had nearly slipped,”* the psalmist writes. Have you ever felt like that? Not literally slipping around on the ice, but something happens, or someone asks questions, and suddenly you’re not sure that your faith is on quite the solid footing that you thought it was. *Deconstruction* is a trending cultural movement among Christians today, many of those speaking out about it were once high-profile influencers in the Church. Now, they’re turning away, allowing their unanswered questions and doubts to tear down the faith and the values they once stood for. But is that the right response? Is doubt so serious that it inevitably leads to a loss of faith? Rather than google it, let’s spend a few days digging into God’s words. Let’s see what He has to say about doubts.

The first step to walking through doubt is to understand where it comes from. In Psalm 73:1-15, Asaph reveals that he has been reflecting on the injustice he sees around him, especially among the wealthy and wicked. He found himself disgusted and overwhelmed to the point that his *“feet had almost stumbled.”* Asaph struggled to understand why his God- the holy God of justice and compassion for the poor and faithful- could allow these terrible people to flaunt their wealth, corrupt the nation, and openly despise the Lord. Can you relate to Asaph? In the face of evil and tragedy, have you ever found yourself asking, “Why, God?”

You are not alone in these feelings and questions! Doubt happens when your experience contradicts what your mind believes. Your heart can’t process what your eyes are seeing. You believe that God is good, but your experience tells you that no good God could allow what you are experiencing to happen. This is precisely what was happening to Asaph, and from his psalm, we can learn to pray through our doubts.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- What causes you to ask, “Why, God?”
- Do you generally turn a blind eye to doubt, or do you question everything? How could either of these postures be harmful if taken to the extreme?

**Pause to pray through your doubt:** *God, I believe you are good. But I also see this stuff happening around me, and it is far from good. I’m struggling with this... I want to trust you... I want you to fix it... I want to understand... Over the next few days, help me pray through my doubts... Amen.*

**Take a Next Step:** Praying through your doubts and questions will be challenging because our gut reaction is generally to turn *away* from God, rather than *to* Him when we’re confused or frustrated. In order to be raw and honest with Him, take time to write down the doubts that swirl around in your mind. Don’t be afraid- He is a big God! He can handle it!

**\*Look for the *Raw Prayers* season of the MY CHAIR podcast to supplement this reading plan.**

## DAY 2 HOW LONG, GOD?

**Scripture:** [Psalm 73:16](#); [Psalm 13](#)

**Reflection:** Your next step yesterday was to write down your doubts and questions. Did you do that? If not, please do that now! Some of what you write down may be questions or doubts that you've had tucked away in your mind for years. Some may have surfaced recently, due to circumstances in your life or the world around you. Regardless of how long you have been wondering, you may have gotten tired of the questions. Like Asaph, you may be exhausted by the search for answers. The struggle to understand God and the world around you might have left you mad or sad or ready to give up all together.

David understood waiting. He knew what it felt like to be impatient for God to speak, to answer, to give light, to rescue, to save, or to just offer any response at all. Psalm 13 asks, "How long?" four different times. This seems to suggest that it is okay for us to bring our frustrations and weariness to God. Consider this, though we are worn out and worn down, God is not. He does not tire. His attention never wavers. He hasn't lost his grip on the world. His sovereignty is not threatened by our questions. This doesn't mean that trust, faith, or submission are easy for us. It does mean that no matter where we are in our hearts and heads, God is unwavering, constant, and sure.

### Ask Yourself:

-Have you ever wanted to throw a tantrum at God? What stopped you or propelled you to go ahead with it?

-David says, "*I have trusted in your steadfast (unfailing) love.*" What does it mean to you that God is steadfast in the midst of your rage or sorrow or doubt?

**Pause to pray through your doubt:** Use Psalm 13:1-2 to pray a raw prayer to the Lord. Look at the doubts and questions you have already written down and use them to re-write these verses in your own words.

**Take a Next Step:** David trusted God because he knew Him well. It is very hard to trust someone you don't know. Using your Bible app, search for "steadfast love" or "unfailing love" and read about the God who loves you.

## DAY 3 WHERE ARE YOU, GOD?

**Scripture:** [Psalm 73:17](#); [Psalm 22](#); [Mark 15:24-39](#); [Psalm 73:17-27](#); [2 Peter 3:8-9](#)

**Reflection:** So, Asaph is disgusted by the injustice he sees around him- "Why, God?" And David is crying out to God as he personally experiences injustice- "How long, God?" Now, we also see Jesus crying out to God, using David's own words- "*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" In other words, "where are you, God?" There is no doubt that Jesus was murdered- his crucifixion was the very definition of unfair and unjust. Yet, God seemed to stand back and allow it to happen. And Asaph saw God standing back, allowing the wealthy and powerful to oppress the poor. David felt God standing far off, allowing him to be pursued by enemies. What's the deal, God? Where are you?

And this is where Asaph's feet stopped sliding. Here is where he could have gone off the precipice, but instead, he finds balance. He is overwhelmed by doubt, *"until I went into the sanctuary of God..."* Perhaps he had exhausted all other avenues of understanding- wise men, priests, his parents, etc. But, he finally walks his weary feet to the Temple. Here he finds the people of God gathered in repentance and in worship. And here He finds God himself. The God who saves. The God of justice. And judgment will come. The future King Jesus will rescue and redeem, judge and restore. The final verdict on evil is guaranteed. Just as the final verdict for those who love the Lord is guaranteed. What Asaph found was a sovereign God who was slow to act. "Slow" according to our timeline. Slow for our sake.

Where are you, God? You are here. You are watching. You are working. You are patient. You are keeping your promises.

**Ask Yourself:**

-What are you impatient for God to do?

-How does the "slowness" of God frustrate you? Encourage you?

**Pause to pray through your doubt:** Use David's cries in Psalm 22:1-2 to lead you into prayer- *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest."*

**Take a Next Step:** Like Asaph, like David, don't walk away from the *sanctuary of the Lord*. Rather, walk toward the gathering of God's people. Commit to being in a worship service this week. Allow yourself to praise God, even as you work through your doubts.

**DAY 4 YOU ARE GOD**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 73:1](#); [Job 38:1-7](#), [40:1-5](#), [42:1-6](#);

**Reflection:** Job suffered. He lost his children, his livestock, his servants, his wealth. Job suffered. And he didn't understand why he had to suffer. He was a righteous man- just, kind, good. He didn't deserve the suffering he endured. Why, God? How long, Lord? Where are you, God? For thirty-seven chapters in the book of Job, his friends try to comfort him, try to persuade him to repent of whatever he had done to deserve all of this. For thirty-seven chapters, Job finds no answers. And then God speaks. Not gently, not compassionately, but *out of the whirlwind*. And God has not come to give Job answers. In fact, God has some questions for Job,

*Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,  
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,  
which I have reserved for the time of trouble,  
for the day of battle and war?  
What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,  
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?*  
Job 38:22-24

On and on, God questions Job, making it clear that God is God and Job is not. A reminder that the whole creation, and time itself, belong to God alone. Man did not create himself. Man has no claim on control.

And all of this leads Job to a right and humble posture, as all of us must take before Almighty God. He knows that God can do anything. And he knows that he, Job, will never understand all the things that God does.

Does God ever answer any of Job's questions? Does Job get a full understanding of why he had to suffer? No! As finite, created beings, we must at some point surrender our "right" to understand God and how He works. Instead, we must trust that He is good. Of that, there is no doubt.

"If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties." -Francis Bacon

**Ask Yourself:**

- Which circumstances cause the most doubt in you: your own suffering (like Job)? Or the suffering you see in the world (like Asaph)?
- Compare Asaph's response to Job's. What are the similarities and differences?
- How have past experiences, doubts, and questions, led you to find certainty in the Lord?

**Pause to pray through your doubt:** Begin by proclaiming where you have seen and experienced God's goodness, "*Truly You are good...*"

**Take a Next Step:** Continue exploring God's nature and character. Read Job 38-42. What does God reveal about Himself?

**DAY 5** GOD IS MY REFUGE

**Scripture:** [Psalm 73:16-28](#); [Psalm 27](#); [Joshua 1:9](#); [Proverbs 3:5-7](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#)

**Reflection:** Why, God? How long, Lord? Where are you, God? Life is neither predictable nor always peaceful. With every change, every transition, every emergency, every tragedy, our emotions swing and our minds race. We yell at God. We cling to God. We doubt God. We trust God. All very normal, very human reactions to the broken, sinful world we live in. The deepest faith and trust in God are not formed by the "sunshine and roses" moments of life but by the hardest circumstances. Like forged iron or pure gold, the best stuff comes from tremendous heat and pressure. Job experienced this. Asaph learned it. David lived it. In fact, the faith heroes throughout the Bible endured terrible things. They didn't deserve it. They didn't understand. They doubted. Yet they held on to a promise-keeping God.

Rather than turn away, they turned toward Him every time. Not because He always explained or answered. But because, in Him, they found refuge. In Him, they found strength. In Him, we find life and light and love and hope for eternity.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Consider the emotional swings of both Asaph and David in their psalms. How is it that they have come to find refuge in the Lord?
- What does it look like to take refuge in God even as you work through doubts and questions?

**Pause to pray through your doubt:** Pray David's prayer,

*Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;  
be gracious to me and answer me!*

*You have said, "Seek my face."  
My heart says to you,  
"Your face, LORD, do I seek."  
Hide not your face from me.  
Turn not your servant away in anger,  
O you who have been my help.  
Cast me not off; forsake me not,  
O God of my salvation!  
Psalm 27:7-9*

**Take a Next Step:** In [Ephesians 4:1-16](#), Paul challenges Christians to grow up together in their faith. He seems to suggest that living the Christian life requires us to live it out together. Explore this passage further and consider what it means for you in the coming days.