# Sermon Journal





April 27 - May 31

June 1 - June 28



June 29 - August 2



# Good Work page 7

# Mixtape page 49

# What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do page 83

## A Note From Pastor Tom

This is a wonderful time of year in the life of our church. I know I say that about every season at Asbury, but we have many reasons to be grateful and to celebrate! For starters, our confirmands (what we call those students who are going through the confirmation process) are being baptized and joining the church. The word "church" literally means "called out ones" and these young people are growing and maturing in their faith, and being called out on mission to their places of influence (we all have influence!). We also recognize our seniors who are graduating from high school and preparing to head into the "real world" – away from the security of home and all the things they know. We have an OUTSTANDING (yes, I'm SHOUTING—they are INCREDIBLE!!!) group of seniors this year. Remember to pray for them as they are entering a time in life where their faith will be challenged. We also think of the moms and dads (Mother's and Father's Day) who are working hard to raise their kids with a solid spiritual foundation in a world that is increasingly hostile (or indifferent) toward Christians. Pray for these folks too—especially our single parents. And finally, on Memorial Day, we remember those from our congregation who have gone ahead of us to be with the Lord. We are saddened by our losses, but we can rejoice knowing those who persevered to the end are receiving their reward. This is an important life-lesson for all ages because if we don't finish well, then the beginning doesn't matter! At Asbury we have folks all along the continuum of life, that is one of our strengths, and I think "4 generations" makes us unique in the family of God. It means we have a very broad sphere of influence.

Paul said we've been saved by faith for good works. Prepositions are important! We aren't saved by our works but for them. Our good deeds are evidence of our salvation and faith in Jesus. That's where this journal begins—looking at God's design for work (there are some surprises here). Then we'll spend the summer in the books of Psalms and Proverbs and see how David and Solomon's inspired words are helpful to every generation in living the fullest kind of life. That's what I want for each of you, the full life, and that's why Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is my prayer too: "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:14–19)

I'm thankful we're in this together. I wouldn't want to be any place else!

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Dr. Tom Harrison, Senior Pastor

# Prayer and Priority List

- Every Sunday, come to worship, grow and influence.
- Every Sunday, Communion and prayer available at 9:00 am in the Mason Chapel.
- Every Monday, Celebrate Recovery, Celebration Station and the Landing meet.

#### April

Sun, 4.24	Confirmation service, Sanctuary, 6:00 pm
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Sun, 5.1	"Good Work" sermon series begins
	Communion in all services
Sat, 5.14	2nd Saturday, serving the community, 8:15 am–noonish
Sun, 5.15	Graduation Sunday
	Day of Pentecost
Sun, 5.29	Memorial Day recognition
June	
Sun, 6.5	"Mixtape (Psalms vol. 1)" sermon series begins
	Communion in all services
Sun, 6.11	2nd Saturday, serving the community, 8:15 am–noonish
Tues, 6.21–24	Vacation Bible School and prayer watch
July	
Sun, 7.3	"What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do" sermon series begins
	Communion in all services
Sun, 7.4	Independence Day
Fri, 7.8–9	UMW garage sale to benefit missions
Sat, 7.9	2nd Saturday, serving the community, 8:15 am–noonish
Sun, 7.10	Family Bingo Night
Sun, 7.24	Welcome Brunch, 9:15 and 11:00 am in the Parlor
Sun, 7.31	Outdoor Movie Night

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# How to Use This Journal

Congratulations on your decision to engage the Word of God on a daily basis. You have chosen the best approach to spiritual growth available.

Pastor Tom developed the journal several years ago to offer a structured, daily reading plan because he wants people learning how to feed themselves spiritually. He places tremendous value on personal study and exposure to the whole Bible. There are many reading plans available, but he thought it best to provide one connected to the sermon series.

Journaling is typically a personal or "inward" discipline. How you relate to the Lord depends largely on your personality and the nature of your relationship. Some may prefer a more academic approach of word studies and cross-references while others may carry on intimate dialogues with Jesus using the Scripture as a springboard for conversation. However you approach journaling is OK.

While journaling is an inward discipline, the journal itself can be used as a guide for group discussion or family devotionals. Think of it as a tool for spiritual growth. Asbury puts time and effort into creating these journals because it is one of the best ways we can help develop all generations for significant lives in Christ.

To begin, you will need a Bible you can understand; the New International Version is a safe bet and the version our pastors use for preaching. The New Living Translation is a little more "user-friendly" for beginners.

- 1. Pray first. Ask for wisdom and understanding and for the Lord to speak to you through the text.
- 2. Read the scripture referenced at the top of the page. If you have trouble locating passages, use your Bible's table of contents. References are always listed in this order: book, chapter, verse(s).
- 3. Respond to the scripture by answering these three questions in your own words: What does the passage teach me about God? What does the passage teach me about people? What does this passage teach me about myself? (These guiding questions may be used every day.)
- 4. The daily reflections offer insight and can be used for personal application. You may use the blank lines to write or "process" your own thoughts and reflections. Discussion questions have also been provided for small group use.
- 5. Consider everything you write as dialogue with God—a casual, informal prayer conversation that helps you grow into knowing Him (and yourself) better.

Finally, be sure to bring your journal every Sunday to take notes from the sermon.

by Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

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## The Gift of Work

In the beginning, God worked. God worked out of sheer joy and delight, and He deemed the whole fruit of His efforts to be "very good" and worthy of His ongoing care and engagement. While many consider work a four-letter word and a necessary evil, something we must do to pay bills and get on to the more desirable parts of life, the Genesis account of creation demonstrates that our work is both an expression of God's image in us and His providential provison for the world. Our work can be good for us and good for others.

#### WEDNESDAY / APRIL 27, 2016

## Genesis 1:26-28

God's desire was for all creatures to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, but only human beings were given the dignity of a job description—because we were made in the image of a God who works. In their book *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, Tim Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf wrote, "We are called to stand in for God here in the world, exercising stewardship over the rest of creation in his place as vice-regents. We share in doing the things that God has done in creation—bringing order out of chaos, creatively building a civilization out of the material of physical and human nature, caring for all that God has made…" "Victor Hamilton notes that in surrounding cultures such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, the king or others of royal blood might be called the 'image of God;' but, he notes, that rarefied term 'was not applied to the canal digger or to the mason who worked on the ziggurat…But Genesis chapter 1 uses royal language to describe simply 'man.' In God's eyes, all of mankind is royal." And in the New Testament we are referred to as co-heirs and co-laborers as well as a royal priesthood.

Questions to consider: Is the notion of God as worker and humans as royalty who bear God's image to the world new to you? What are the implications?

#### THURSDAY / APRIL 28, 2016

## Genesis 1:31-2:3

In the beginning, God worked. God worked out of sheer joy and delight, and He deemed the whole fruit of His efforts to be "very good" and worthy of His ongoing care and engagement. Bible scholar G.J. Wenham said, "The harmony and perfection of the completed heavens and earth express more adequately the character of their creator than any of the separate components can." Genesis uses the Hebrew word *mlkh* to describe God's providential and creative work, which is the same word used for ordinary human labor. Such work was not beneath God, yet many choose not to work at all rather than do work they feel is beneath them.

Question to consider: How can a healthy theology of work put all human activity into a new light?



#### FRIDAY / APRIL 29, 2016

## Genesis 2:5–22

Old Testament scholar Terrance Fretheim once noted that Genesis does not present creation as a finished product, wrapped up with a big red bow and handed over to the creatures who keep it exactly as originally created...Indeed, for the creation to stay just as God originally created it would constitute a failure of the divine design. In the Bible's second account of creation, God also planted a garden, watered it and caused it to grow beautiful and productive. He placed man and woman in the garden to till, work, cultivate and serve the garden by ensuring it grew to its potential and purpose. What's missing here? That old idea that working the land was a punishment for sin. A careful reader will observe that God the worker commissioned man and woman as workers *before* they sinned in Genesis 3.

Question to consider: What would change if you viewed work as part of God's good and original plan for you?



#### SATURDAY / APRIL 30, 2016

## John 5:16–20

Philip Jensen asked, "If God came into the world, what would he be like? For ancient Greeks, he might have been a philosopher-king. The ancient Romans might have looked for a just and noble statesman. But how does the God of the Hebrews come into the world? As a carpenter." The Bible compares God to a gardener, farmer, potter, metalworker, architect, soldier, builder, composer, musician, shepherd, winemaker and king, and many times to a nurturing mother and father. In fact, Jesus spent about 90 percent of His life growing up and working in a small business, but only three years in formal ministry. Even when He had laid aside His hammer and chisel, 45 of the 52 parables He told were set in the workplace. In John 4:34, Jesus indicated His aim was to "do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Questions to consider: What would the world look like if we did what we see the Father doing, and by finishing His work? What would you do differently?



SUNDAY / MAY 1, 2016

## Genesis 1:26-28

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / MAY 2, 2016

## Isaiah 2:2–5

Asbury's Director of Discipleship, Jason Jackson says, "Our picture of the good life is a life without work; and our pictures of God's intended future are often the same...Isaiah envisions a day when war, not work, will end. He sees a day when weapons are transformed into tools, when people worship and work together rather than wage and prepare for war. For Isaiah, violence is the human dilemma, not vocation." The prophet envisions a resuming of the harmony and symbiotic relationship of people to one another and to the earth, relationships that God originally included in creation.

Question to consider: Some have to work for income. Others don't. The need for work isn't only about what it does for us but is more about what it does in God's grand plan for humanity and the world. With this in mind, how can you inspire and encourage people to cooperate for the common good?



#### **TUESDAY** / MAY 3, 2016

## Isaiah 65:17-23

"In Isaiah's new heaven and new earth, people build houses, plant vineyards and enjoy the work of their hands. He envisions a restoration of life in Eden—the redemption, restoration and recovery of work as a sacred vocation free from the pain, toil, frustration and futility that have marred our work since we were exiled from the garden...In Jesus, God's great restoration and redemption project has begun. Therefore, we are being made new (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are learning to live in a new way that no longer conforms to this world but is conformed to the image of Jesus," notes Jason Jackson.

Questions to consider: How is the rest of the world more aware of God's loving provision as a result of the way you spend your life? How is God continuing to make you new through your work as a spouse, parent, volunteer or professional?



# The Purpose of Work

God called work "good" long before sin entered the picture. But what role does our work play in a world corrupted by sin? Beyond providing for your needs, God will use your work to shape the culture of your community and advance His kingdom through a moral, relational, social, economic and redemptive influence.

#### WEDNESDAY / MAY 4, 2016

## Jeremiah 29:1–14

The people of God had a lesson to learn about faithfulness and obedience, so even though God could have snatched them up or empowered them to escape from their captivity in Babylon, He gave them something else to do and a vision that extended beyond themselves: stay put, live full and fruitful lives—even in difficult circumstances—and actively pray for and work for the prospering of the very people who held them captive. If the city they were in prospered, they would prosper, too. For several years in a row, less than half of American workers are satisfied with their jobs, and many of the reasons cited are because of practices and environments that run counter to biblical values. In a perfect world, it wouldn't matter, but in a post-fall world, a challenging work culture is common. God calls us to flourish, insomuch as we're able, regardless of our work situation, because the impact of our work is bigger than we realize. But God doesn't want Israel to be hopeless or discouraged; He promises He is not far from them and makes the future worth their investment today.

Questions to consider: How often do you pray for the prospering of businesses, nonprofits, churches, organizations, schools, governments and the people who make up your city? How often do you let others carry the weight of civic engagement and success? What's keeping you from starting to do that today?

#### THURSDAY / MAY 5, 2016

## Proverbs 11:10–11

When conversation turns to vocation and work, the question of "What is God's will for me?" inevitably comes up. Simply put, God's will is for you to provide for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of those under your care. The greatest thing you can do with your life is love God and love others. Idleness is a danger for the able-bodied because it renounces the God-given task of bearing His image through work and puts undue strain on those who do work. Paul removed all ambiguity when he said, "The one unwilling to work shall not eat." Beyond providing for your needs, God will use your work to shape the culture of your community and advance His kingdom through a moral, relational, social, economic and redemptive impact.

Question to consider: Theologian Frederick Buechner wrote, "Vocation is where our greatest passion meets the world's greatest need." How well are your passions and gifts, your sense of calling and purpose, aligned with the ways you're spending your life?



#### FRIDAY / MAY 6, 2016

## Psalm 147:1–20

Circle the verbs in today's text. Consider all the ways God continues to cultivate and care for His creation through us. He equips and empowers architects, builders, engineers, managers and homemakers to build up a city, and law enforcement officers, firefighters, public servants, attorneys, garbage collectors and leaders to protect it. He uses medical professionals, counselors, social workers and both lay and professional ministers to care for people. He blesses farmers, ranchers, chefs, manufacturers, transportation and dock workers, and local grocers with the capacity to grow and make food available around the world. He gifts inventors, entrepreneurs, artists, writers and musicians with the ability to create and share beauty and provoke thought. Our work serves many purposes.

Question to consider: One of the goals of the farm-to-table movement and community gardens is to help children discover how God provides for them. Are you aware of all the people who have contributed to your daily lifestyle, or how you contribute to the lives of others? If not, perhaps it's time to dig a little deeper into the avenues by which goods and services flow into and out of your life.

#### SATURDAY / MAY 7, 2016

## Proverbs 31:10-31

In Jewish culture today, it's the MEN who memorize and sing Proverbs 31 in praise of *eshet chayil* or a woman of valor. The only instruction in the text is the last line: honor her for all she does and help her successes to bring her praise. The image of God is most brilliant within us when we are working out of our strengths and benefitting others, which can happen in our work at home, in a professional field or through charitable acts. Some claim this text sets an unattainable standard for both men and women, but in many ways it is an accurate depiction of a modern family's life, and it reminds us there is great value in all aspects of our work when it is done for the glory of God.

Question to consider: Even when busy and overwhelmed at times, we are more likely to experience abundant life when we "fear the Lord." Take a few moments to study this phrase. What advice or encouragement does verse 30 offer you?



SUNDAY / MAY 8, 2016

## Jeremiah 29:4–7

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / MAY 9, 2016

### 1 Peter 2:9–12; Romans 12:1–21

From "Making Mondays Meaningful: 6 Ways to Glorify God and Serve Others Through Your Work": 2 Peter 3 states that everything temporal will end. "Everything I work so hard to create, God is going to destroy in a heartbeat. You know, there are only two things eternal—the word of God and the souls of men. Engineering pays the bills, but my real work is telling people about Jesus. I get up every morning and ask God to give me the courage to talk about Him to everyone I meet. And He does." At this, Michael asked, "Why don't you quit your job and go to work for the church so you can do that full time?" The man said, "Are you kidding? I talk to more non-Christians in a month than my pastor does in a year. This job makes my ministry possible. You know the verse in John where Jesus says, 'Don't work for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life?' That's talking about winning souls, Michael. And there's no better place to win souls than at work."

Questions to consider: Have you ever been tempted to quit what you're doing so you can do something "more meaningful?" What guidance do today's texts offer?



#### TUESDAY / MAY 10, 2016

## Ecclesiastes 1:12-18; 2:1-11, 17-25

Ecclesiastes 1:3 asks, "What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?" Unfortunately many people spend their entire lives feeling crushed by the burdens and responsibilities of providing for themselves. Their weariness robs them of joy and fulfillment, so they begin to experience their life as wasted and/or engage in various means of distraction to attain a momentary lift in their spirits. It is vital to remember that God is both Creator and Sustainer and realize that we "take a living" from God rather than "make a living" for ourselves. By viewing the to-do list, the job description, the bottom line, our employees and employers, clients and coworkers through the lens of God's purposes for God's beloved, they don't have to feel like meaningless chasing after the wind.

Questions to consider: When are you most discouraged with your roles in life? Where do you turn for momentary relief? For enduring strength and motivation?



# The Temptation of Work

The capacity and compulsion to work makes us vulnerable to the temptation to over or undervalue others and ourselves, to be prideful, greedy and unjust, to place too much hope in ourselves and what we produce, to find our identity in what we do instead of who and whose we are. Work is a good thing, but work can supplant other priorities and become an idol if we don't humbly align ourselves with God's purposes for work in our world.

#### WEDNESDAY / MAY 11, 2016

## Genesis 11:1-9

God's directive in Genesis 1:26 was to be fruitful, multiply, fill and cultivate the earth. Instead of working cooperatively to fulfill God's purpose and vision for His creation as His chosen representatives, the people in this text spurred one another toward a proud and selfish effort to make a name for themselves by building a great city with a giant ziggurat. They worked for their own gain and glory. Today many work for the same reasons: to obtain money, gain power or influence, garner praise, honor and prestige, to support a lifestyle of acquiring and doing things that elevate themselves in the eyes of others. Ideally we will work to make a name for God, not for ourselves.

Questions to consider: What are some "monuments" we build to ourselves? Why are such things a temptation?

#### THURSDAY / MAY 12, 2016

## Haggai 1:1–15; 2:1–19

The Jewish exiles returned from Babylon in 538 BC with the goal of rebuilding the temple, but 15 years later they had built beautiful homes (perhaps monuments for themselves?) instead. The Lord told them to "give careful thought" to their ways and priorities, and showed them that their work wasn't fruitful or meaningful because they weren't making their spiritual lives or working for God's purposes a priority. What if the same is true for us? How often do you find yourself a "day late and a dollar short," never quite getting ahead or gaining traction? Working hard but with nothing to show for it? God blessed the people when they took the first major step in obedience and laid the foundation for the temple (verse 19).

Questions to consider: What has God told you to do? What is keeping you from stepping out in faith and obedience?



#### FRIDAY / MAY 13, 2016

### **Deuteronomy 8:1–18**

Today's text suggests there are several temptations we should be wary of: forgetting where you came from, disregarding the legacy and story that were passed on from those who came before you, a general lack of gratitude, a sense of entitlement. Among the most dangerous temptations in our work is to forget the Lord's role as deliverer and provider, which contributes to the illusion of self-sufficiency and independence. The ability to work and to gain anything for ourselves through work is a blessed gift from God. "*Pride precedes destruction; an arrogant spirit gives way to a* nasty *fall*" (Proverbs 16:18, VOICE), but Deuteronomy 8:8 indicates that humble obedience helps us be successful in our endeavors.

Questions to consider: Do you tend to take credit, inwardly if not outwardly, for your abilities, accomplishments and earnings? What does this tell you about yourself?



#### **SATURDAY** / MAY 14, 2016

## Malachi 3:6-15; Luke 12:22-34

Undoubtedly, we are intended to work as part of God's grand design for His creation. One great temptation is to believe that the resources we generate and steward through our work should be held onto tightly with a declarative cry, "It's mine, all mine!" A more biblical view of earnings is to see them as "His, all His!" One-hundred percent of what we earn belongs to God. He returns 90 percent back to us for our needs and wants, and He expects us to let Him use the other 10 percent, the tithe, for His kingdom mission in the world. When we don't give Him the tithe, God equates it to robbery. Aside from ignoring the difference in ownership and stewardship, another major temptation and sin is to hold onto that tithe because we don't trust that 90 percent is enough for us. Jesus said, "Be concerned about his kingdom and what has his approval. Then all these things will be provided for you." (Matthew 6:33, GW)

Questions to consider: Are you bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse for the sake of God's ministry? If not, why not? If so, how has this act of obedience transformed your life—or do you ask, "What do we gain by carrying out his requirements?"

**SUNDAY** / MAY 15, 2016

## Genesis 11:1–9

Sermon Notes:

#### MONDAY / MAY 16, 2016

## 1 Timothy 6:1-19

God commands us to refrain from making anything else into an idol, yet some yield everything to a boss, to a coveted title or career path, to desired market share or profit margin and thus draw their sense of identity and value primarily from work. Others never stop working to engage and enjoy a life outside of work, while others leave Christ behind in search of money, and end up using, exploiting and stealing from others to gain more for themselves. Paul reminds us of all these temptations with a call to a higher ethic in our behaviors and relationships.

Questions to consider: When are you most tempted to subject your role as a believer to your role as a worker? Is it possible to pursue wealth and righteousness at the same time? How does contentment bring the freedom to pursue wealth, and the opportunities to bless through wealth, without being trapped by it?



#### TUESDAY / MAY 17, 2016

## Colossians 3:22–4:6

We often read this text and wish Paul addressed the horror of slavery, but what he did instead was address character in ways that apply to all of us. It's been said that character is what you do and who you are when no one is looking. Paul's call is for congruence and continuity between the new creation we are in Christ and the way we conduct ourselves, reminding us that the way we live makes a proclamation and that we are to constantly be in diligent prayer for others.

Questions to consider: Whether you work at home, in the community or at a job, does your work enhance life, enable fruitfulness, encourage others? Does it contribute to beauty, truth, healing and justice in the world? Does your work bring light to darkness, function to dysfunction, order to chaos? Does your work contribute to the common good and advance the kingdom? Does it make God look like the loving, gracious provider that He is? Do you do your work as if you were working for the Lord? If so, your work is good work and is worth your time and energy.



## The Rest of Work

A distinctly Christian theology of work requires us to recover a theology of rest, play and re-creation. God gives explicit commands regarding the practice and purpose of Sabbath rest that includes not only us but God's creation. Sabbath-keeping is an overt act of trust that reminds us, and the world, that we are more than what we produce; we are people created in the image of our Creator.

#### WEDNESDAY / MAY 18, 2016

## Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Since we were commissioned to work on God's behalf, we are tempted toward the sin of prideful self-sufficiency, believing that our work is more important than anything else and that who we are is primarily dependent on what we do. Pharoah tried to make that true when God's people were slaves in Egypt and they labored all day every day to make as many bricks as possible, as a determination of their worth. Sabbath-keeping affirms that we are not His slave labor force but daughters and sons whom He loves, that our value is found in the God who made us in His image, delivered us from slavery through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and invited us into a covenant relationship with Him.

Questions to consider: What does it mean to keep the Sabbath holy? Do you view Sabbath-keeping as a commandment or a suggestion? How is that view reflected in your practice?


#### THURSDAY / MAY 19, 2016

## Leviticus 25:1-7

Remember what God said when He beheld His creation? "It is very good." God commanded us to cultivate, develop and protect the earth, and that protective care for all creation is echoed in His commandments regarding the Sabbath. Bible scholar Dr. Sandy Richter says, "In contrast to the consumer culture in which we live, Leviticus teaches that it is not acceptable to take from the land everything you can. Rather, God's people are commanded to leave enough so that the land is able to replenish itself for future harvests and future generations—even though such methods would significantly cut into the farmer's short-term agricultural profits. Why? 'Because I am the Lord,' says Yahweh." God's design includes provision for people, creatures, the land, the soil and even those who don't have the ability to produce food or income for themselves (Exodus 23:11).

Questions to consider: Did you realize that this degree of creation-care was built into the Law? What does that tell you about God? About mankind?



#### FRIDAY / MAY 20, 2016

## Exodus 31:1-18

Exodus 25-30 include God's instructions for the building of the tabernacle; 31:1-11 make it clear that God filled people with the Spirit, with wisdom, knowledge and all kinds of skills to make everything needed for the tabernacle. Then verse 12 abruptly shifts back to the Sabbath. Why? What greater time was there to be tempted to break the law of the Sabbath than after God gave them a monumental and vital task? Sabbath was a gift that distinguished them from all other people, a sign that they were sanctified and set apart by Jehovah-Jireh, The Lord Who Provides. It was "separated from common use" to teach us to "rest from worldly pursuits and the service of the flesh, and to devote ourselves, and all we are, have and can do, to God's glory," "throughout the generations" as a lasting reminder of the covenant between God and Israel. (*Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Bible*). And why punishment by death for breaking the fourth commandment? Because it would be disobedience of a commandment included in the moral, judicial and ceremonial law, but more importantly, it would suggest a lack of faith in God's trustworthiness.

Questions to consider: Why do you think children, servants, animals and guests were not to work on the Sabbath? How is the Sabbath a sign between us and God today?

#### **SATURDAY** / MAY 21, 2016

## Zephaniah 3:14-17; Zechariah 8:3-5

A distinctly Christian theology of work requires us to recover a theology of rest, play and re-creation. "Play is subversive, really. It subverts business as usual. It subverts necessity. It subverts all the chronos-driven, taskmaster-supervised, legalism-steeped activities that mark out most of our lives that make us oh-so-useful, but bland and sullen in our usefulness. Sabbath is for play," wrote Mark Buchanan. Madeleine L'Engle said, "Kairos. Real time. God's time. That time which breaks through chronos with a shock of joy...In Kairos we become what we are called to be as human beings, cocreators with God, touching on the wonder of creation."

Questions to consider: As they say, "All work and no play makes Johnny a dull boy." Where's the fun? Where's the refreshment, refuge, re-creation for you, your family, those with whom you work?



SUNDAY / MAY 22, 2016

## Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / MAY 23, 2016

### Matthew 11:28-30

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (MSG). We often make things much harder than they have to be, but Jesus reminds us that when we come to Him we take a major step in restoring some of the balance in God's original creation.

Questions to consider: What rhythms are built into your life to experience grace more fully? What does Jesus' invitation mean for you and those under your care?



#### TUESDAY / MAY 24, 2016

## Mark 1:35-37

Christians talk a great deal about being Christlike, which often refers to selfless acts of service and love or of being self-controlled. But we forget that to retreat to ground ourselves in prayer is also very Christlike.

Exercise: Just pray, listen and rest in God's presence during this devotional time.

Your prayerful reflection:

"Seven days without a Sabbath makes one weak." - Ben Patterson

## The End of Work

Work is good, and as they say, all good things must come to an end. However an end of work can feel like an end of significant life if we don't understand that we while we retire *from* some things, we retire *to* others. Scripture offers a clear vision of our later years as a season of bearing much fruit, sharing a lifetime of skills and wisdom for the sake of God's kingdom and ultimately receiving the reward of resting in Christ.

#### WEDNESDAY / MAY 25, 2016

## Matthew 25:14-30

Each servant received an amount appropriate to his ability to handle it, so none could claim he was overwhelmed by his circumstances. Look at verses 21 and 23 and compare the responses. What's different? They weren't rewarded for the amount of fruit, but for the fact that there was fruit of their labors. We are to use our time, talents and treasures—which really belong to God to begin with—to diligently serve God in whatever we do. Look again at verses 21 and 23. What invitation is given? Our hope would be to hear similar words from our Lord when we reach the end of our work.

Questions to consider: What, if any, regrets do you have about the way you have spent your life thus far? What do you want to see happen in or through your life before you die? What are the next steps you can take toward that purpose?

Your prayerful reflection:

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." –2 Timothy 4:6–8

#### THURSDAY / MAY 26, 2016

## Psalm 39:4–6; Psalm 90:12–17

A sound theology of work, rest and play calls for a healthy theology of retirement as well. To retire is to retreat or withdraw from work at an agreed upon time, so a great way of looking at retirement is to look at it as well-earned Sabbath rest. Just as we've discussed in previous weeks, Sabbath rest is an overt act of trust in both God's provision for you and for those who will come behind you to carry on the valued work you've been doing. The only time retirement is specifically mentioned in the Bible is in Numbers 8:23–26, "The LORD said to Moses, "This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the tent of meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites."

Questions to consider: It is often hard to think about the brevity of life, but we only tend to appreciate life, and the privilege of doing a life's work, as a gift when viewed in light of our own mortality. For some, however, an end of work can feel like an end of significant and productive life. What was the role God assigned to the retired Levites? Are you comfortable with the concept of using a season of life to simply help others?

#### FRIDAY / MAY 27, 2016

## Psalm 71

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard observed that life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward. "Not to revisit one's past is to suffer a great loss and to inhibit others from learning how to live better. It is to lose access to a great source of creativity for the second half of life and a lively interest in the present and future, with wisdom to contribute," according to *Finding the Way: A Theology of Ageing.* Verses 15–24 offer a clear vision for one's later years. There is tremendous opportunity and a great good that can be done when you take a lifetime of skills and wisdom and selflessly offer them to others for the sake of God's kingdom purposes.

Exercise: Regardless of your age, make a list of skills you have that you can share with others.

#### SATURDAY / MAY 28, 2016

## Psalm 92:12–15; Isaiah 40:28–31; Romans 4:18–25

"It is not because there is something 'wrong' with us that our bodies decline...In this light, our decline and dying are an expression of our commonality with all created things. They show that we are finite creatures..." (Finding the Way: A Theology of Ageing). These three short texts cast a vision for our later years, reminding us that it doesn't matter how many years there are in your life if there's still life in your years. The challenge is to see a life in a declining body as a life still worth living to the fullest. Remember Wednesday's text? Each was expected to do only as they were able. "Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you," says the Lord in Isaiah 46:3–4.

Questions to consider: What is the source of that life, energy, motivation and zeal? How can you cooperate with God so His purposes for you are not unnecessarily cut short.



SUNDAY / MAY 29, 2016

## Matthew 25:14-30

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / MAY 30, 2016

## Acts 20:22-24; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Questions to consider: Use today's study time to ask yourself if the "task the Lord Jesus has given me" is complete? If you feel it is, how can you celebrate that victory? If not, how can you lean on His strength to bring God's purposes for you to fruition?

#### TUESDAY / MAY 31, 2016

## Hebrews 4:1–11; Revelation 14:13

Questions to consider: Will you enter that eternal rest that is reserved for those who have accepted the gift of salvation from sin? If you're uncertain, the next step might be easier than you think.

This is how you do it— **Admit:** Admit you are a sinner. Repent and turn away. **Believe:** Believe that Jesus is God's Son and accept God's gift of forgiveness from sin. **Confess:** Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

This is why you do it— **God loves you.** "This is love; not that we loved God but that He loved us." 1 John 4:10 **Sin separates you from God.** "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23 **God sent Jesus so you would not die for your sins.** "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

# mixtape

by Stephanie Hurd

1F60

Psalms vol. 10000000

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Mixtapes originated in the '60s and became popular in the '80s especially among youth who created them as gifts for others, with songs carefully selected to convey a message. Today, people of all ages make compilations or playlists to suit every occasion, such as driving, working out, studying and celebrating, or to voice a mood. Yet, this is not a modern practice. The greatest mixtape of all time is tucked inside our Bible, King David's mixtape and Israel's hymn book—the book of Psalms. David felt and understood the breadth and depth of all human feelings in all situations and was able to create a collection of songs that speak to a person's various emotions, and give them expression. Because David's mixtape captures every aspect of our life with God, it is a gift to all people for all time. David's mixtape translates into a mixtape for everyone.

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"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

-Ephesians 5:19-20

## Repeat: The song you want stuck in your head.

If there is one psalm worth memorizing this is it. The phrase, "the valley of the shadow of death" speaks to our worst fears and most immobilizing emotions—sorrow, despair and depression. But it also comforts us with reminders of God's goodness, His continuing presence, His protection and provision. Psalm 23 is among the most treasured and most repeated because it has guided the hearts of thousands of people over thousands of years. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want." That's the song you want stuck in your head.

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." – Ephesians 5:19-20

#### WEDNESDAY / JUNE 1, 2016

## Psalm 23

Today's psalm is a profession of joyful trust in the Shepherd-King. This psalm celebrates God's abundant protection and provision. Even when the chances of survival seem non-existent, this psalm reminds us that God supports and nourishes us at all times—He is the provider for our needs. He will never leave us nor forsake us, and nothing will separate us from His love. When we give serious thought to God's infinite goodness, the "cup" of our hearts naturally brim over with love and appreciation for Him.

Questions to consider: What's your go-to song when you're feeling "up?" "Down?" How do these songs give expression to your emotions?

#### THURSDAY / JUNE 2, 2016

## Psalm 22

Before the comforting words of Psalm 23, come the haunting words of Psalm 22. Here is the anguished prayer of David suffering from the unprovoked attacks of his enemies—attacks from which the Lord has not (yet) delivered him. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David wrote prophetically of the circumstances Jesus would endure during the crucifixion. In life, there will be times we are overwhelmed with sorrow, despair and feelings of isolation—when no one can possibly know or understand what we are experiencing. At such moments, both David and our Lord, through their example, give us permission to embrace our sorrow and cry out to God, who is with us in our suffering.

Question to consider: How comfortable do you feel being honest with God in your times of depression or despair?



FRIDAY / JUNE 3, 2016

## Mark 15

Looking at the Psalms as the "hymn book of the Bible" and learning how much the Jews used the Psalms for worship makes me wonder about this moment in history. As Jesus hung on the cross, being crushed under the weight of the world's sins for nearly six hours, what was going through His mind? We know from the other Gospel accounts that He took care of some business, but here at the end, in the final moments—what was He thinking? Was David's psalm of suffering giving voice to His agony? Was He seeking comfort through the psalm that reminded Him of His Father's faithfulness and kept Him in a state of worship? The words that escaped His lips were, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Was He quoting the Scripture, or was He singing it?

Question to consider: When has God used a psalm or a song to bring you comfort?

#### SATURDAY / JUNE 4, 2016

## Psalm 30

The ancient Israelites used Psalm 30 for occasions of innovation, such as the temple's dedication. I think it captures the spirit of God's greatest innovation, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, beautifully. It also captures the common human experience, at least for a person of faith. Oftentimes we feel secure, like we'll never be shaken. Yes! But then something happens: a late night phone call, a bad test result, a serious loss, a grievous sin exposed...and quite suddenly, we're devastated. This is life—good times and bad times and good times again. The Lord's mercies are new every morning. But without the night, there is no morning. Without the grave, there is no resurrection.

Questions to consider: Describe a time in your life when God did something innovative for you. Did your heart sing to God? Do you owe Him a song?



**SUNDAY** / JUNE 5, 2016

## Psalm 23

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / JUNE 6, 2016

## Psalm 95

This is a call to worship. God is big. He's so big! He is Maker of and Lord over the mountain peaks, the deepest valleys and everything in between. Yet this great King is so personal and affectionate toward His people, the Psalmist likens Him to a shepherd keeping vigilant watch over His sheep. But He's not a push-over. The Psalmist warns us—today, if you hear His voice, don't make the same mistake the ancient Israelites made when they forgot God's faithfulness. Today, if you hear His voice, guard your heart from sin by giving thanks and praise to God, and by always remembering He cares for you.

Questions to consider: Do you tend to give thanks based on your circumstances or God's unchanging character? Why is it helpful to do both (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?

#### TUESDAY / JUNE 7, 2016

## John 10:1–18

After Jesus healed a man born blind, the Pharisees devoted themselves to harassing the man and his family because they were so perturbed by the miracle. Jesus proceeds to contrast Himself with Israel's religious "caretakers," those who act like hired hands and thieves. *They take, I give. They scatter, I lead. They destroy, I save. They kill, I lay down my life to give my sheep the fullness of life.* The blind man in John 9 followed the voice of the Good Shepherd while the Pharisees said to one another, "Why listen to Him?" Christ is the only shepherd who knows what it feels like to be a "sheep." He "gets" what we're going through as One who has experience, and offers us His guidance and protection. If we don't listen to Him, then to whom on Earth would we listen?

Question to consider: How can you better tune-in to the voice of the Good Shepherd?

## Pause: When the tape breaks.

Most the time things are good. We work, play, pay our bills, enjoy our hobbies, friends and family. But sometimes life is challenging and can become overwhelming. We experience insecurity, fear and anxiety. Whether it's continuous and low-grade or catastrophic and paralyzing—those are the moments when our tape breaks and the rhythm of our lives gets disrupted. Those are the moments we should pause to pray. "Listen to my cry for help," the psalmist pleads, and then he waits in expectation.

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"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."

–James 5:13

#### WEDNESDAY / JUNE 8, 2016

## Psalm 5

In this morning-prayer, David asks the Lord to perceive his thoughts—when his worries and fears render him incapable of putting words to his prayers, he asks the Lord to understand what's in his heart. Sincere prayer is the affirmation of God's interest in His people and His creation. When we take our worries and fears to God first, we appeal to His mercy and acknowledge Him as Savior. No matter how undeserving we may feel (or be), we can always humbly turn to God and appeal to His loving kindness.

Questions to consider: How do you typically handle your worries and fears? Which ones seem "prayer-worthy" to you and why? Do you pray with expectation?



#### THURSDAY / JUNE 9, 2016

## Psalm 6

A note from my Wesley Study Bible: "Illness may seem like a betrayal; serious illness can seem like abandonment. Being diagnosed with a serious illness is frightening and disorienting. The future becomes uncertain, and your hopes and dreams are dashed while tears and grief abound. At the heart of seeking comfort in the midst of illness is the practice of prayer. In prayer, we are able to share with God our laments and pains, our feelings of betrayal and abandonment. In faith, we know that God has heard those prayers, and we know that God is working for our healing and comfort."

Question to consider: How is this psalm appropriate for any person (family, church or nation) who is in distress?

#### FRIDAY / JUNE 10, 2016

## Psalm 55

David often spoke of hardships his enemies brought on him, but here he speaks of something worse—the betrayal of a friend. Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor and close friend, incited Absalom, David's son, to launch an assassination plot against him. David was betrayed by his friend, also by his son and many Israelites who suddenly abandoned him for Absalom. The disillusioned David realizes in hindsight, Ahithophel was nothing more than a smooth-talker with a conniving heart who was seeking his own gain (2 Samuel 15–17). In this personal and professional devastation, David prays morning, noon and night! His final encouragement to wounded souls like his: even if every other person betrays you, you can always, always trust God.

Questions to consider: What psalm best gives expression to your trust in God? If you don't have one, maybe it's time to get one.



#### SATURDAY / JUNE 11, 2016

## Psalm 86

Here David is so distraught that he prays "all day long." David is poor and needy but remains devoted to God. Why? David recounts the timeless truths about God and His character: merciful, forgiving, good, abounding in love, awesome, wonder-working, rescuing, compassionate and because He, alone, is God. Because prayer is the expression of our whole lives toward God, it includes the articulation of our deepest feelings as well as our desires for God's presence. David takes it a step further by asking for an undivided heart. When we focus intensely on God's strengths, our problems become smaller by comparison.

Questions to consider: How can the Psalms guide your prayers? What is the value of praying Scripture?

**SUNDAY** / JUNE 12, 2016

## Psalm 5

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / JUNE 13, 2016

## Luke 11:1–13

When He teaches us to pray, Jesus affirms what David has modeled: We should always acknowledge God and trust Him to meet our needs. We should persist in prayer on the basis of God's goodness. Also, in Matthew 6:5–21, Jesus teaches us to approach God with sincere and undivided hearts. Jesus models a life of prayer throughout the Gospels, demonstrating its value and its place in a faithful person's life with God. I know my kids won't always have me, but they will always have the Lord so I tell them to pray about everything. I want their first response in any given situation to immediately start talking to God about it. Only after they've prayed, do we discuss it with each other.

Question to consider: It's natural to pray during a time of crisis but is it possible you have a non-crisis situation that God is waiting to help you with, if only you would ask?

#### TUESDAY / JUNE 14, 2016

## Luke 22:31–53

Look! Jesus has prayed for Peter (who is about to fall hard), He instructs the disciples to pray so they won't give into temptation, then He takes His own distress to His Father in prayer. Jesus is "walking through the valley of the shadow of death," feeling isolated as His friends dozed beneath the olive trees. So anguished and sorrowful at this unprecedented moment in history that His sweat became like blood. And then the betrayal, one of Jesus' closest companions exposed this sacred, secret place of prayer to His enemies and Him to death. This week's readings have shown me the human experience is universal, extending even to Jesus. But God's attention to us in our experiences is compassionate, loving and intensely personal.

Question to consider: What have you learned from David or Jesus about giving voice to your needs and your emotions through prayer?



## Side A / Side B: One side is always better than the other.

As long as people have been making recordings it seems all the best songs are found on side A. Even with our own mixtapes and playlists, there are some songs we tire of before others, some songs we skip or fast forward. In the psalms, we see a qualitative difference between those who feed their souls on God's Word and those who do not. Like the songs closest to our hearts—the righteous just have more staying-power.

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"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

-Colossians 2:6-7

#### WEDNESDAY / JUNE 15, 2016

## Psalm 1

Moses presented Israel with the five books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). David presented Israel with the five books of the Psalms (1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150). Psalms provides a "sung theology" about human nature, God's greatness and life in His kingdom. John and Charles Wesley learned from the Psalter that singing has a unique power to instruct a community in righteousness, convey its deepest emotions, and bind it together under God's lordship. Psalm 1 introduces one of the book's prominent themes: The value of living according God's instruction.

Question to consider: How is a large oak tree an appropriate metaphor for a person who feeds his soul on God's Word?

#### THURSDAY / JUNE 16, 2016

### **Matthew 3**

Yesterday's reading speaks of the righteous, those who revere God and seek to live according to His will. They are like trees that bear good fruit. He also speaks of sinners, those who "miss the mark," and the wicked, those who deliberately rebel against God's rule. The psalmist warns: their ways make them like chaff, which blows away in the lightest wind. Today we read about John the Baptist who was a relative of Jesus and His forerunner in ministry. He preached repentance. Repentance is turning from sin and heading in the opposite direction, toward God. John has a particularly harsh warning for the Pharisees and Sadducees, those with the "appearance" of righteousness but without the fruit of righteousness. They look like trees but Jesus is coming with an ax for such as these. They are chaff that won't blow away, but will be burned in the fires of the final judgment.

Question to consider: Why do you think John— and later Jesus—are more critical toward those who "act righteous" but aren't righteous than they are toward sinners and run-of-mill wicked people?



FRIDAY / JUNE 17, 2016

## **Ephesians 5**

Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus (modern Turkey) to help them better understand God's eternal purpose and high goals for the church. The Christian existence is not merely on an earthly plane but receives meaning and significance from heaven, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, that life is lived out on earth where the believer continues to work out God's purposes through practical daily living. Paul proceeds to show the steps toward fulfillment of God's purposes for the church through the lives of individuals, "Be very careful, then, how you live..."

Questions to consider: What are the contrasts in this passage? Why do you think Paul includes these instructions, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"? (Ephesians 5:19–20)
#### SATURDAY / JUNE 18, 2016

## **Ephesians 6**

Tomorrow is Father's Day, so it is fitting to consider this week's readings in regard to a man of God. He delights in the Lord's instruction, chooses his company and counselors carefully, practices the art of repentance, refrains from sexual immorality, is wise enough to put his trust in God and delights to sing His praises. The man of God is a husband who loves his wife, and a father who instructs his children in the ways of the Lord. A man of God is a warrior who puts on the full armor of the Lord and prays in the Spirit on all occasions. Fathers, be strong in the Lord and mighty in His power!

Questions to consider: How well does this describe yourself or someone you know? How does it help you pray for someone you know? Does it give you cause to thank God for someone you know?

**SUNDAY** / JUNE 19, 2016

## Psalm 1

Sermon notes:

#### **MONDAY** / JUNE 20, 2016

## Psalm 32

One of David's greatest teachings was that of the difficult art of repentance. This psalm appears to be a liturgical dialogue between David and God in the presence of an assembly of worshipers. It is a reflection on David's sin with Bathsheba, Nathan's confrontation, David's confession and God's forgiveness (2 Samuel 12). David was inflicted for his sin but confession and repentance brought him relief. From his experience, he exhorts others to pray to the Lord and seek forgiveness. Psalm 32 begins and ends on an exuberant note: happy are those whose sins are forgiven! The righteous are different from the sinners and the wicked because they learn to trust in the Lord and be obedient to His instruction. They are surrounded by His unfailing love and their joy becomes infectious.

Questions to consider: What is the difference between confession and repentance? Why do you think both are important?



#### TUESDAY / JUNE 21, 2016

## Psalm 127; Psalm 128

These psalms belong to the "songs of ascent" and are nestled among the Psalm's "Hallels" (think "Hallelujah," which means *in praise of "Yah"* or Yahweh; rendered "alleluia" in the Greek). Many believe the songs of ascent were sung by pilgrims as they traveled up to Jerusalem for their annual religious festivals. Psalm 127 and 128 touch on the many concerns that occupy a person's thoughts: man's main concerns include building a home, earning a living, finding a marriage partner and raising good children. The psalmist offers godly wisdom on how to succeed in these important endeavors—teaching us that all human effort is futile if it's not blessed with God's divine approval and assistance.

Questions to consider: Why is God's help essential for a man or woman to succeed in life? What would you say to those who think otherwise?



# Decibels: The song you want to crank up and sing along to.

Volume measures loudness. Decibels measure intensity. If there is one psalm that captures our life with God in volume and intensity, this is it. It begins and ends with God's majesty. Sandwiched in between is David's amazement over God's sovereign order of creation and praise for His astounding endowment of the human race with "glory and honor." Who are we that God would be mindful of us? When we consider the reality that God would make us, love us and save us—we are compelled to raise our voices and sing, "Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

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"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

-Colossians 3:16-17

#### WEDNESDAY / JUNE 22, 2016

## Psalm 8

If you have ever been at a vantage point to see the Milky Way or any vast, starry sky on a bright, clear night when the host of heavenly lights stretch from horizon to horizon, then you can probably relate to David as he wrote this psalm. On such a night, all the small affairs of day-to-day living give way to deeper thoughts about God, the universe and humanity's existence. To look at the vastness and majesty of the heavens as God's handiwork causes one to marvel at what the Creator has done for His creation, especially us—who are here today and gone tomorrow.

Questions to consider: Can you think of a time when you realized your own smallness or finiteness? What might it mean to think of yourself as worth receiving the Almighty's personal attention?

#### THURSDAY / JUNE 23, 2016

## Psalm 24

David composed this psalm on the day he purchased land from Araunah, the Jebusite (1 Chronicles 21:17–22:19). Known as Mount Moriah, this is where the Jews believe God created Adam and where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac. David's son, Solomon, was instructed to build here a permanent resting place for the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's manifest presence on earth, and Psalm 24 was intended for the temple's inauguration. The temple's location was to serve as an inspiration to the Israelites to emulate the spotless virtue of the first man on the day of his creation, while the Psalms (as a whole) represent David's effort to raise Israel to the level of Adam before he sinned. David was elated when he sang this psalm because its verses contain the most profound truths any mortal lips were ever privileged to utter concerning the ways of God in the history of man: God created the earth. He, Himself, fills it. And by His grace, humans are permitted to share in His kingdom and in His glory.

Exercise: Try composing your own psalm today, even if it's just three lines.



FRIDAY / JUNE 24, 2016

## **Ephesians 1**

Today we return to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. According to my study Bible, verses 3–14 are all one sentence in Greek. They are considered a doxology because it recites what God has done, and is an expression of worship to honor Him. Remember, this letter is about God's purposes for the church, of which Christ is the head and we are the body. Paul writes that God "chose" us to emphasize our salvation depends totally on Him. Through Christ, we are made holy and blameless. What's more, we who are "in Christ" have already been made beneficiaries of every spiritual blessing that belongs to and comes from the heavenly realms. What are humans that God is mindful of us? What are humans that God would make us the praise of His glory?

Question to consider: Why is it important for Jesus to make us holy and blameless?

#### SATURDAY / JUNE 25, 2016

## **Ephesians 2**

Some of Asbury's staff are required to take CPR training biannually. Our teacher always says this profound statement: *When you administer CPR, don't worry that you might mess up and kill the person. The person is already dead. By giving her CPR, you are giving her a chance at life.* That reasoning applies to every person on a spiritual level. We are already dead! If anyone shares the gospel with us, they are giving us a chance at life. The gospel of Jesus Christ is spiritual CPR—it puts the life-breath of God into our dead bodies. Because God is who He is, He not only makes us alive in Christ, but He makes us (Jews and Gentiles, under the Lordship of Christ) His dwelling place, His holy temple. Lift up your heads Christian people, and open your hearts, so that the King of glory might come in!

Question to consider: How does thinking of a person as spiritually dead and waiting for a chance at life, make sharing the gospel feel less scary?



**SUNDAY** / JUNE 26, 2016

## Psalm 8

Sermon notes:

#### **MONDAY** / JUNE 27, 2016

## Psalm 103

What makes humans human? Answer: the soul. The soul is the spiritual principle of every man and woman. Each soul is individual, immortal and created as an act of God's will. The soul is the innermost aspect of man, and that which is of greatest value to him because it gives him the dignity of being made in God's image. It is the seat of our consciousness and our free will. But we are also made of matter. Humans are both spiritual and corporeal—the two form one nature. The soul and body together form the whole person. The soul is separated from the body at death and is reunited with it at the Resurrection. Therefore, we are to honor our bodies and use our time on Earth to enrich our souls as we prepare for eternal life with God. In this psalm, David praises God for this unique gift that is the very essence of human life.

Questions to consider: How are humans uniquely "qualified" to have God's Spirit dwell in them? How aware are you of your own soul? How does Psalm 103 help you understand your value?



#### **TUESDAY** / JUNE 28, 2016

## Psalm 16

We end this series thematically linked to where we started. Psalm 16, like Psalm 23, underscores faith and trust in God as an essential characteristic in our prayers and our lives. Taking no credit for himself, David appreciated everything God granted him. David's life and words illustrate for us that even the mightiest king must humble himself in recognition that all good things come from above. God provides instruction for righteous living and He, alone, makes known the paths of life. The Psalms demonstrate that the Lord was David's greatest fortune in this life, and his promise of a life to come. May we, like David, find daily comfort, security and joy in the Lord's presence. *Selah*.

Question to consider: What's your go-to song or psalm when you want to praise God for His goodness?

# WHAT TODO WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW TODO

by Stephanie Hurd

In this five-week study from the book of Proverbs, King Solomon offers mic-dropping wisdom 140 characters at a time. Solomon's words are so simple that people often overlook them—but making complex ideas simple was his inspired genius. Proverbs gives us Solomon's brilliant road map for life—principled wisdom that helps us know what to do when we don't know what to do.

. . . . . . .

"Fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment."

-Proverbs 9:10, NLT

# What Makes Us Strong?

A wise man once said, "Do to others what you would have them do to you." This little "proverb" sums up all the teachings of the Old Testament. It is a rule of thumb that guides those devoted to God in making wise decisions and choosing right behavior, and when lived out, produces a society where people are treated justly and generously, with honesty, dignity and love. Blessings naturally flow from a life of righteousness, to the benefit of many.

#### WEDNESDAY / JUNE 29, 2016

## **Proverbs 14**

Wisdom is understood as knowing the way of the righteous; it implies the proper choice between two opposite courses of action, such as truth and lies, patience and impatience, peace and envy, God-devotion and God-avoidance. The correct choice is called "wisdom" and the incorrect choice is called "folly." Wisdom shows a person which path to choose. Also how, when and to what degree to use each trait for the greatest benefits in life. The proverbs have layers of meaning—providing guidance to those who have never opened the Bible but simultaneously illuminating the most profound biblical teachings to those who are willing to dig for the richness of God's wisdom.

Questions to consider: How do you think God-devotion makes a country strong? In what ways might a country be strong (character, charity, protecting life, treating people with dignity...)?

Your prayerful reflection:

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#### THURSDAY / JUNE 30, 2016

## 1 Kings 3

When Solomon began to rule in David's place, he feared (revered) God enough to know he would need a wise and discerning heart to lead God's people. The Lord was beyond pleased with this request and made Solomon the wisest man to live (until Jesus). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon used his vast understanding and his unique ability to compose hundreds of proverbs to make Scripture more intelligible for God's people. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for directing all human activity—training in righteousness and equipping for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16). To look seriously at Proverbs is to gain wisdom for living in this world and that naturally progresses us toward our life to come, because wisdom doesn't end at the grave. Solomon's wisdom is timeless because it originates from God. It is useful because it shows us God's paths for life. And it is understandable because it is intended for every audience—from scholar to farmer to gullible youth.

Question to consider: How and when do you seek God's wisdom for daily living?



#### FRIDAY / JULY 1, 2016

## **Deuteronomy 6**

This passage appears to be part of Moses' sermon based on the first commandment (Exodus 20:3) and includes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–9) which is the Jewish confession of faith (recited regularly). It is also the greatest commandment, according to Jesus (Mark 12:29–30). The term "love" in the ancient Near East indicates a richly emotional term. These verses command complete devotion to God—loving Him with everything we are and everything we have. "How" someone loves God is what Moses spends the rest of Deuteronomy explaining. It was only after God delivered the children of Israel from slavery and entered into covenant relationship with them, that He demanded anything of them in terms of external, ethical behaviors and commandment-keeping. Doing what is right and good in the Lord's sight so that it might go well with you—this is the righteousness that results in blessings.

Question to consider: Why do you think doing what is "right and good in the Lord's sight" causes things to go well?



#### SATURDAY / JULY 2, 2016

## Psalm 37

This psalm is an alphabetic acrostic (in Hebrew) that contains a series of proverbs instructing godly wisdom and exalting the life of righteousness. Though it appears the wicked experience the good life, their power is fleeting and their prosperity will not last forever. Despite the seeming injustices of this life, we are told to be still and wait on the Lord for He is just, and His righteousness extends throughout creation. David assures us the Lord upholds His righteous followers and trusting in Him brings true and lasting blessings. Like a light that is visible to all, everyone will clearly see the salvation of the faithful. After prayerfully reflecting on Psalm 37, I can't help but think it was also on Jesus' mind when He preached the Sermon on the Mount.

Questions to consider: What role do you think the Psalms and the Proverbs played in Jesus' life and ministry? How might they play a larger role in your life and ministry?



SUNDAY / JULY 3, 2016

## Proverbs 14:34

"God-devotion makes a country strong; God-avoidance leaves people weak." – Proverbs 14:34, MSG

Sermon notes:

#### **MONDAY** / JULY 4, 2016

## Matthew 5:1–20

The Beatitudes reveal the gift of blessedness for those who participate in God's kingdom. Looking at the Beatitudes in light of this week's readings, I see new layers of application. Most obviously, Jesus was addressing the first century Jews of Judea who were probably on the fringes of society—the spiritual zeros and religious losers. This was good news to them because the old religious system kept them at arms-length, but Jesus was making God's kingdom available to all. This came to apply to the Gentiles, who were outside God's covenant relationship at that time, and today it applies to whole nations who are living in darkness and deception. Through Jesus, the kingdom of God is available to communists, Islamists, humanists, and all the other "ists" who are willing to receive it. Much like Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, Jesus uses the Sermon on the Mount to explain the "how" of living a life of devotion to God as members of His kingdom. Matthew 6:33–34 captures it most succinctly, *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* 

Question to consider: In what ways are blessings or blessedness more about being than about receiving?

#### TUESDAY / JULY 5, 2016

## Proverbs 12

Notice the contrast in actions from today's reading. We see two phrases set side by side depicting two different, even opposite, types of behavior. The two behaviors are labeled as foolish and wise, and make sharp distinctions between the wicked and the righteous. Wisdom for right living benefits Christians because it keeps us on the paths of life, but ultimately the wisdom of God is given for the good of the community, and the seeking of wisdom ought to serve God's purposes. Jesus told us to be "salt and light" because wise and righteous actions demonstrate charity toward others, and benefits those around us as much as it does ourselves. John Wesley said, "It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you," (Sermon 24).

Question to consider: Look at the "righteous" side of the "buts" in Proverbs 12. What is generally true for "the righteous"? List the ones that stand out to you.



# Where Do We Begin?

Our culture is information overload. We probably know more than any other generation, but knowledge without insight or application is like a screen door on a submarine—not very useful! That's where wisdom comes in—wisdom takes knowledge, especially biblical knowledge, and makes it usable. Which is where God comes in—because all wisdom starts with God. He gives it generously to those who seek it because He knows wisdom brings life.

#### WEDNESDAY / JULY 6, 2016

## **Proverbs** 1

Fear of the Creator is a fundamental prerequisite to wisdom. Fear of God generates the desire to seek His wisdom. Jewish scholars say, "Fear is to wisdom as a foundation is to a building." To fear the Lord means to know about God and as a result of that knowledge to subordinate ourselves to Him. It is fear of the Lord that makes us open and receptive to His wisdom and discipline (discipline is understood as the perfecting of godly character traits, which is inextricably linked to wisdom). God-fearers search the Scriptures to learn how to avoid spiritual pitfalls which lead them away from the Lord. When we fear God, then God's wisdom becomes precious! We search for it and hold on to it. A "skeptic" does not fear the Lord, therefore wisdom and discipline hold little value; there is no sin to avoid and no righteousness for which to aspire. What's more, skeptics scorn that which seems unattainable—because, quite frankly, they have little motivation to achieve it.

Questions to consider: According to verses 1–4, what is the purpose of Proverbs? Do you generally consider it as such? Why or why not?



#### THURSDAY / JULY 7, 2016

#### **Proverbs 8**

Although the book of Proverbs is more practical than theological, God's work as Creator is highlighted. Proverbs 8:22–31 is a hymn describing wisdom's role in creation—here personified and later embodied by Jesus who is the supreme manifestation of wisdom (John 1:1–14; John 17:5; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 1:15–17; 2:2–3). Jewish scholars say Torah (the wisdom of God) is the blueprint for all creation and that all things were made to fit with it. This concept can be challenging for us "Greek-thinkers" who work in linear fashion. For example, we would say parents have children and those children are commanded to honor their parents because that benefits society. A Jew would say God created children because wisdom dictates that parents are to be honored by them. Therefore, children facilitate the performance of Torah's commandments which serve as the spiritual foundation holding up the structure of creation. Children honoring their parents benefits society because that's the way society was created to be. To put it another way—we were created to bring glory to God because wisdom dictates that God is to be glorified (Hebrew thinking). Instead of our usual, we glorify God because He made us (Greek thinking).

Questions to consider: "The wisdom of God as found in Scripture is the blueprint for creation and all things were made to fit with it." Would you agree or disagree with this statement? How would this viewpoint affect a person's opinion and application of Scripture?

FRIDAY / JULY 8, 2016

## **Proverbs 19**

An uncomplimentary term often used in Scripture is "fool." A fool is someone who is not deficient in his ability to understand wisdom but rejects it because it does not allow him to indulge his every desire. A fool does not appreciate learning, often desiring spontaneous "knowing" without the diligence it takes to study the Scriptures. When a person's minimal efforts do not result in becoming an instant Bible scholar, he or she will abandon the study and quickly move on to something else. To know the source of all truth and righteousness, but not pursue it is "foolishness." Proverbs also speak of the "simpleton," as one who lacks understanding and is easily swayed toward evil inclinations. And the "scoffer/mocker," as one who mocks wisdom (and anything else that is based on faith alone) because it cannot be proven through logic. A scoffer, like a skeptic, lacks the fear of God, which is the key to wisdom.

Questions to consider: Do you ever behave like a fool, simpleton, scoffer or skeptic? How does it typically manifest itself?



#### SATURDAY / JULY 9, 2016

## Psalm 14

Atheism says, "There is no God." Practical atheism is *living as though* there is no God. Practical atheism is people trusting in themselves rather than in God, which (let's be honest) even those of us who profess faith in God sometimes do. But Scripture tells us God has set eternity in our hearts and that "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Romans 1:20). God looks to see if there is anyone who seeks Him; Jesus promises those who seek will find; and James, our Lord's brother, assures us that if anyone lacks wisdom, we should ask God who gives it generously (Psalm 14:2; Matthew 7:7–8; James 1:5–7). Lord, make us a people who seek You every morning, who ask for more wisdom every day and trust You with our lives, in practice not just in theory.

Questions to consider: According to this Psalm, what does God say about those "who never learn" and "who do not call on the Lord"? How does Ephesians 2:1–10 offer hope?



**SUNDAY** / JULY 10, 2016

## **Proverbs 1:7**

"Start with GOD—the first step in learning is bowing down to GOD; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning." – Proverbs 1:7, MSG

Sermon notes:


#### MONDAY / JULY 11, 2016

#### Matthew 13:1–23

I love it when God takes a familiar passage and shows it to me in the light of a new and larger context. Look at the parallels between the soils in this parable and the types of people discussed in Proverbs. The seed that is sown along the path, or amidst the rocks and the thorns fails to produce—like the fool, the scoffer and the skeptic there is no place for the Word of God to take hold and grow. But good soil is ready to receive the seed. Good soil produces a crop. Wise people are good soil. The heart that genuinely seeks understanding will receive it because God gives it generously to those who ask! Whoever is wise enough to ask for wisdom (like King Solomon) will receive even more. The more of God's wisdom that takes root in a person the more that person will flourish in life and in God's kingdom.

Question to consider: How does "fear of the Lord" factor into the parable of the soils?



#### TUESDAY / JULY 12, 2016

#### **Proverbs 9**

It seems Proverbs may have been written to help young men on the threshold of maturity as chapters 1–9 personify both wisdom and folly as women, each of whom are seeking to persuade simple youths to follow their ways (using appeals, warnings and enticements). The young man who fears the Lord will choose "a wife of noble character"—Lady Wisdom, who is "worth far more than rubies," (Proverbs 31:10). Proverbs instructs us on how to live wisely and successfully in the fear of Lord—it includes reverence for, trust in and commitment to God and His will as revealed through His Word. To put wisdom in this context means following God's design for human happiness within the created order. The result? Quality of mind and quality of life. Wisdom brings life!

Question to consider: How have you seen the enticements of verses 1–6 and the warnings of verses 13–18 proven true in real life?



## How Do We Live?

A wise man once said, "Arrogance is loud. Confidence is quiet." Our culture often mistakes arrogance for confidence and has little use for humility. But Scripture regards humility above all other character traits. Humility is a purposeful striving to recognize and remember who we are in comparison to our Creator, but not in comparison to each other. True humility is a challenge, but it is also liberating and life-giving.

#### WEDNESDAY / JULY 13, 2016

## **Proverbs 3**

Generally, Proverbs deals with the improvement of character traits, but this chapter has more to do with correct thinking. If a person's thinking is correct, he or she will develop character traits that are correct. However, if a person's thinking is warped or lacking trust in /acknowledgment of God, that person will think himself wise and be less likely to accept instruction and correction. If someone is unwilling to accept instruction or correction, there is little hope of improving or perfecting his or her character. When we create a "mindset" that the purpose of all we do, no matter how big or small a thing, is the fulfillment of God's will, then He will direct our paths and our successes.

Question to consider: How is correct thinking more about trusting in God than human intelligence?

#### THURSDAY / JULY 14, 2016

## Proverbs 22:1–16

From my Wesley study Bible: "Proverbs' theological premises have much in common with Wesley's understanding of divine grace and the process by which one comes to accept God's love and grow in holiness: 1) Wisdom is a gift from God. 2) Wisdom begins with fear of the Lord, and awe and respect for God. 3) Living by God's wisdom leads to a certain kind of life, a life in keeping with God's will. Wesley's approach to religion was practical, and he valued the book of Proverbs for the practicality of its moral guidance. In his journals, he frequently mentions Proverbs 22:6, the importance of training children in the way of wisdom; Proverbs 18:12, humility versus pride; and, most frequently, Proverbs 3:17, the peace that comes from following God's wisdom."

Question to consider: What is the value of seeking wisdom?

Your prayerful reflection:

Note: John Wesley was a practical thinker and a person of action. He also coined maxims to make theological points, sayings such as you will find on the plaques of our "Wesley Plaza" located on the lawn at the south entrance—sayings which are easy to say and hard to forget.

#### FRIDAY / JULY 15, 2016

#### Luke 18:9–17

Humility is a modest opinion of one's own importance. It takes humility to fear God. It takes humility to trust God. It takes humility to accept correction. It takes humility to recognize weaknesses and not flaunt strengths. It takes humility to confess sin and ask forgiveness. It takes humility to accept responsibility when things go wrong and give credit when things go right. When our confidence comes from who God created us to be, we don't have to live and die according to every success or failure. We don't have to prove our worth. Only Jesus makes us competent before God—the better we understand that, the better off we will be (2 Corinthians 3:4–6).

Question to consider: What is it about children, that Jesus would use them as a model for humility?

#### SATURDAY / JULY 16, 2016

## 1 Samuel 25

Fools come in a variety of flavors, depending on how their foolishness manifests itself—they can be gullible/naïve, stupid, stubborn, vicious, arrogant, proud, prejudiced, lacking self-control, or greedy. Nabal, whose name means "Fool," is the surly, mean and proud kind. He and his actions are contrasted with that of his wife, Abigail, who is a picture of wisdom: intelligent, beautiful, humble, exercising good judgment and moving quickly to bring peace. Not only did she save David from an act of vengeance, she also saved her household from his wrath. "No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected. For the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the Lord; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water." (Isaiah 32:5–6) Nabal would not spare bread and water for David's men, but Abigail sent them a feast fit for a king. As a result, she became his queen.

Question to consider: We sometimes equate humility with low self-esteem, but they are not the same. How did Abigail demonstrate confident humility?



#### **SUNDAY** / JULY 17, 2016

## Proverbs 3:7–8

"Don't assume that you know it all. Run to GOD! Run from evil! Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life!" – Proverbs 3:7–8, MSG

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / JULY 18, 2016

## **Proverbs 16**

Proverbs 15 ends with a verse about humility, and chapter 16 addresses the application of it. It is difficult for humans to trace their own motives. Even noble deeds can be done for ignoble reasons, such as gaining honor for oneself. It can be difficult to see our own faults, but the Lord sees beneath the surface and knows our true intentions. By committing all our deeds to God (such as working to succeed in business so that we can give more to church and charity), then He will see to it that our thoughts are honest, upright, pure and good (Proverbs 16:2–3). We are reminded God does not abide pride and conceit (Proverbs 16:5). In fact, He demonstrates the value of humility most eloquently by sending Jesus, to be born human and suffer the cross. Pride seems to come naturally for adults. Humility, however, is a character trait that must be made a special object of desire, prayer, faith and practice.

Question to consider: How do you make humility a matter of pursuit and prayer?



#### TUESDAY / JULY 19, 2016

## 1 Peter 4:1 – 5:11

This passage teaches us to live according to God in regard to the spirit, and shows us ways to apply humility in the day-to-day. Peter exhorts his readers to:

- Pray, which is to seek God
- Love one another, even those who don't measure up
- Practice hospitality, without grumbling
- Serve others and do good, a great way to actually practice humility
- Be willing to suffer, like Jesus was willing to do-the ultimate in humility
- · Resist evil inclinations and to commit oneself to God

He iterates Jesus' teachings when he says, "cast all your anxiety on God because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). And Peter may have been thinking of the time Jesus washed the disciples' feet (in spite of Peter's protestations) when he quoted Proverbs, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humility and doing the Father's will should be our top priority—when we run to God, the rest will take care of itself.

Questions to consider: What is God calling you to put into practice? Consider setting a goal and getting an accountability partner to help you.

# Whom Do We Trust?

To trust is to put confident expectation and hope in someone or something. We trust our chair will hold us and we hope our plane won't crash! Life requires us to trust much, but there are no guarantees—things break and people fail. But God does not. He is eternal, unchanging and faithful—hope placed in God never fails.

#### WEDNESDAY / JULY 20, 2016

## Proverbs 11

This week and last week are closely related. Pride is trusting in oneself while humility is thinking rightly about oneself (or humanity in general) and thinking rightly about God. We know humans are fallible and God is infallible but for some reason we want to put our trust into that which we can see, hear and touch, no matter how imperfect. The Israelites were a theocracy from the time of Moses until they asked for and received a flesh-and-blood king to lead them. The all-knowing God anticipated this long before it happened, of course, so he gave Moses guidelines for Israel's future kings to follow (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). And when the prophet Samuel lamented the people's request for a king—God said, *"It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."* (1 Samuel 8:7)

Questions to consider: Prayerfully consider where you tend to place your hopes (parents, children, spouse, job, finances, government...)? How might that be misplaced? How is it unfair to the person or thing in which you place your hope?



#### THURSDAY / JULY 21, 2016

## Psalm 118

We can relate to the ancient Israelites wanting a leader they could put their hopes in, can't we? Our nation tends to elect people based on the promises they make or their charisma over their character. Yet, as God's people we know His protection is better than that of all the world's leaders—no matter how much they promise. We understand that God works *through people*. He "sets up kings and deposes them" (Daniel 2:21), but our confidence remains in God because our help ultimately comes from Him. Without a single word of assurance from God, His protection is still better than any other because He who made us is the only One capable of delivering us in every regard—mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually and materially. As a matter of course, we should humble ourselves, pray for God's mercy and praise Him because all help comes from Him, however He should choose to send it.

Question to consider: Describe a time that God worked through another person to bring you His help. How did you know it was the Lord at work?



FRIDAY / JULY 22, 2016

## Psalm 146

Yesterday's reading has Messianic overtones, "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," the "stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and God has made His "light shine upon us." Today's reading is a hymn of praise for the heavenly King who focuses His attention on those who are broken, oppressed and vulnerable. The Psalmist goes on in Psalm 147 to explain how the Lord heals the brokenhearted, binds up the wounded and sustains the humble. Those who acknowledge they are without resources to deliver or sustain themselves—those are the people who put their trust in God, even when there are no guarantees of the outcomes. These Psalms point us to humanity's most trustworthy King, Jesus our Lord, our source of hope and our source of worth.

Question to consider: The Lord sees you as you are and He loves you with an everlasting love. How does this give hope? How does this give you courage?



#### SATURDAY / JULY 23, 2016

## Daniel 2:1–28

In the ancient Near East, people believed dreams had meaning and could predict the future. When King Nebuchadnezzar needed a particularly serious one interpreted, even he didn't trust his advisors. The dream came from the God of Israel. It foretold future events, and no one would know it or understand it without help from the "revealer of mysteries." When the Nebuchadnezzardream-crisis hit Babylon, Daniel and his friends sought mercy from God through prayer. When God revealed the dream of a king, Daniel gave Him thanks and all the credit. Daniel acted with wisdom and humility—praising God for giving him the wisdom, not only to act, but to provide an answer to Nebuchadnezzar, saving many lives in the process.

Question to consider: Daniel was living as a captive in a foreign land. In what ways does his example inspire you to navigate life's challenges?



**SUNDAY** / JULY 24, 2016

## Proverbs 11:7

"Hopes placed in mortals die with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing." –Proverbs 11:7, NIV

Sermon notes:


#### MONDAY / JULY 25, 2016

## 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:16

In summary: "The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

Question to consider: Why is the contrast between human wisdom and godly wisdom such an important distinction to make, especially in our culture?

Your prayerful reflection:

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#### **TUESDAY** / JULY 26, 2016

## 1 Corinthians 3:1 – 4:5

Paul wrote this letter to address issues of conduct in the church at Corinth. Even today, Christians are heavily influenced by their cultural environment and must deal with problems of spiritual maturity, jealousy, divisions, marital problems, sexual immorality and so forth. This letter still serves to instruct and inspire because God's Word is eternal and His wisdom is the foundation of His creation. The problems don't change—only the people, places and times of those dealing with the problems. The solution, however, remains the same. When we place our trust in God through Jesus and apply His wisdom over and against the wisdom of this world, then we will grow steadily in sanctification and holiness of character, and live more and more fully into the life that God intends for us.

Question to consider: What do you personally find most hopeful about this passage?

# What Do We Say?

A wise woman once said, "Just because you can, doesn't mean you should." Our Creator has given us an incredible source of power, a power that sets us apart from all other living things on Earth—*words*. From the same mouth can come praises or curses; truth or lies; life or death. There are many things we can say, but it doesn't mean we should. Proverbs helps us choose words that bring life.

#### WEDNESDAY / JULY 27, 2016

## **Proverbs 13**

According to my study Bible, Proverbs devotes equal space to describing a wise man according to his character, his relationships *and his words*. From Proverbs we come to understand words have the power of life and death. They can build up or tear down. They can bring healing or cause wounding. They can incite quarrels or foster peace. They can cultivate relationships or destroy them. Of all the faculties God has given humans the use of words is among, if not the, most valuable. Because words are so powerful—there is much biblical instruction for how to use them and how not to use them. Proverbs teaches us the character of a wise person's words are honest, few, rational, peaceable, timely and persuasive—not boastful, argumentative, contentious or gossipy. When we look at words in this way, it is easy to see why some lead to life and others lead to ruin.

Question to consider: To guard the mouth is to exercise constant discretion. How would others describe the words you use?



#### THURSDAY / JULY 28, 2016

### **Proverbs 18**

A Jewish scholar tells the story of a Persian king with a life-threatening disease that could only be healed by drinking the milk of a lioness. But how to acquire such a commodity? The king sent his physician with a delegation to King Solomon, who entrusted the job to a guy named Ben. Ben took 10 goats and went to a den where a lioness was nursing her cub. On day one he threw the goat from a distance, which she ate. Ben continued to throw goats and draw progressively closer each day until he was close enough to befriend the lioness and draw the milk. As the delegation was returning to Persia with the milk, the physician dreamed his body parts were arguing about who was most important—the feet for transporting the milk, the hands for milking the lioness, the eyes for finding the way, or the heart for the idea to consult Solomon. Finally the tongue proclaimed, "I am superior to you all." But they strongly disagreed. The tongue replied, "Today you will see you are all under my control." When the physician awoke he went before the king and announced, "Here is the dog's milk you requested." The king was furious and ordered the physician's execution. On the way, all the parts began to tremble and the tongue addressed them, "If I save you, will you admit you are in my power?" They all agreed. The tongue said to the guards, "Return me to the king!" When the physician was in the king's presence, the tongue explained that in his hometown the word for dog and lioness are the same. The king accepted this explanation, drank the milk and was healed. Then all the other body parts admitted the tongue was in control. It is about such an incident that King Solomon said, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

Question to consider: How do you think the "fruit of a man's mouth" can fill his stomach?

#### FRIDAY / JULY 29, 2016

## Matthew 12:15–37

Consider this passage in light of our theme, paying careful attention to the many word/speech references: Jesus warns people not to tell who He is, to fulfill what was spoken about Him, that He is the One who will proclaim justice; He will not quarrel or cry out and no one will hear His voice in the streets (either in a loud and coercive manner, or perhaps referring to the Gentiles not receiving the good news from Him but from the disciples through the Great Commission). When He heals the demon-possessed man restoring his ability to talk, the Pharisees accuse Him of using demonic power to perform the miracle, and Jesus responds with a terrible warning—any word spoken against Him will be forgiven but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not. Jesus is just warming up at this point. He goes on: How can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks; people will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. *For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned*.

Question to consider: Compare Proverbs 18:7, Proverbs 18:21, Matthew 5:21–22, Isaiah 6:5 and Romans 10:9–11 and today's reading. What are our own words capable of bringing upon us?

#### SATURDAY / JULY 30, 2016

## Psalm 141

Any parent raised in the '80s has probably had this experience: *Hey kids let's watch Goonies* [or insert any PG movie made during the 1980s]. *I haven't seen it in 25 years but I remember really liking it when I was your age*. Two hours later: *Gee, kids, sorry about that. I guess I forgot about all the cussing.* The kids respond: *Don't worry, mom, we can handle it. We go to public school.* We're all surrounded by influences—some are good and some are not so good. We also *have* influence (hopefully good). In this Psalm the mouth is compared to a door because it is always opening and closing. David prays the Lord will save him from abusing the gift of speech, to guard his mouth so that his heart will be protected and kept from sinning. We don't live in isolation, we live in a world that can be rude and crude and demeaning—let's pray, like David, that our words will be well spoken.

Questions to consider: What influences or situations most put your words at risk (exposure to foul language or gossip, jealousy, wanting to impress, the distance barrier of social media...)? How can you mitigate your "danger zones"?



#### SUNDAY / JULY 31, 2016

## **Proverbs 13:3**

"Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything." – Proverbs 13:3, MSG

Sermon notes:

#### MONDAY / AUGUST 1, 2016

#### James 3–4

Proverbs and Jesus, teach us the source of a person's words is his or her heart. The words we use expose the inner reality of who we are and what we truly believe. Words put on display our character, our attitudes and our commitments. Learning to control our tongue is one way we demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as He renews God's image in us. Taming the tongue requires us first to recognize the ungodly behaviors that are driving old speech patterns. James gives the examples of envy, selfish ambition, pride and arrogance which lead to boasting, quarreling, coveting, criticizing, judging and slandering others. Which brings us full circle because we've learned the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. James asks, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."

Question to consider: How does humility help us choose words that uplift and bless?



#### TUESDAY / AUGUST 2, 2016

## Proverbs 15

Speech is an integral expression of the total human being—it is the thing that distinguishes us from all other creatures. This week we have established that our words reveal what's in our hearts. What we may forget is our words also reveal how we feel about others. Just as the use of good manners shows people we care about them, so do the words we use. Whether in reply to the provocation of another or in words we initiate—we are communicating how much we value the person we are addressing. Words of wisdom and discipline, when aptly spoken, spread knowledge that leads to life. Medicine may or may not bring a cure to disease, but healing words of wisdom and discipline always benefit the listener—like the tree of life, they are a source of life to those who receive them. May we always endeavor to be the kind of people who speak life into others.

Question to consider: Who can you encourage with words of life today?



#### **Resources:**

*Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* by Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf Tehillim / Psalms - 2 Volume Set: A new translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic sources (English and Hebrew Edition) by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer (Translator)

Mishlei/Proverbs: Volume 1, a New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources (Artscroll Tanach Series) by Eliezer Ginsburg

Mishlei / Proverbs - Volume 2 by Rabbi Eliezer Ginsburg and Rabbi Yossi Weinberger

A special thanks Rod Giles for recommending these commentaries on the Psalms and Proverbs. They were helpful and fascinating!

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