



# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



## Summary

This is much more than a song book. The Psalms are meetings with God which reveal the heights of his glory and the depths of the human heart.

This is done by writers expressing the fulness of their experiences and emotions, fears and hopes as God's Holy Spirit inspires them to turn from self-centredness and isolation to God-centeredness and whole-hearted connection with him.

**Bern Leckie**

# **Sunday January 5: Psalms 1-5**

## **Who can lead us to a meeting with God?**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

I've always thought a good worship song helps us focus away from ourselves and towards God. The Psalms do that, but I find Psalm 1 intriguing. Who is it about? Religious people? We don't normally sing songs about ourselves!

What if, like in Genesis, the writer has been inspired to start "In the beginning, God..."?

Could "the one" who is blessed, leading a walk on the way of the righteous, be Jesus? It would only be the first of many pointers to him in the Psalms (The Lord's son pops up in Psalm 2, for a start...). Why would it matter if it is?

Here's what I think is going on. When we bring our whole selves to worship God, he brings the whole of himself to meet us. It's too much to express in neatly structured prose. So instead, we have these rich, resonant poems and songs which can communicate many true things at once and shake the depths of our souls.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God loves us to meet with him, and he leads us to share the whole of our experience, desires and hopes with him. Jesus seems clearly visible to believers as God shares the whole of his heart for us too.

The worship inspired by the Spirit and expressed in the Psalms isn't polite and emotionally distant from God. He wants us to bring the rawness of our emotions and be ready for him to turn our despair into hope when we trust and delight in him.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I want to get better at worship. I'd quite like this to spill over into writing songs, but I don't want to be a clever writer. I want to be a wholehearted worshiper. Am I ready for this? I don't know. Fully honest worship doesn't seem to pop out neatly, nicely and without pain, by the sound of these Psalms. But I'm going to get to know the range of them better this year so that the Spirit can inspire me to worship from wherever I'm starting.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

Next time I meet with a group of Christians to pray and worship, I'll bring the Psalms and an open mind to let God guide us to where we can meet him.

# **Sunday January 12: Psalms 6-9**

**Can songs of praise be too extreme for 'Songs Of Praise'?**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Most of these Psalms are very different from the songs we sing in worship today. They are a metal maelstrom of raging anger and epic wonder as the writer's heart strains against injustice, while tears and praise pour out at the glory of God.

Life isn't comfortable, it is full of danger and evil, there are furious, violent enemies to be overcome. I believe David, the Psalm writer, is thanking God for his life, not just feeling generally warm and nice about love and stuff.

It makes me wonder what it would take for me to feel the need to praise God like that. Would it have to be a life trauma, or can the same Spirit which lived in David and lives in me search my heart to express praise that clearly?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God is majestic - and Psalm 8 looks like the easiest to express in a modern worship song. But God doesn't just want to sit around and get praised. God engages with the big struggle of good against evil, which gives David his hope of being supported against enemies in the other Psalms.

I think I would shy away from shouting about my righteousness the way David does, but I believe that the Spirit inspired these Psalms, so I think that means God wanted David to have righteous life in relationship with him. I am sure he wants the same for us, which means he needs us to recognise good and the enemies of good in the world.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I'm going to ask the Spirit to show me where the enemies are in my life - the things which get in the way of living a good life, at least (I'm assuming no-one is actually out to kill me at the moment...?!)

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

When I pray with people this week, we'll talk about this, and follow the Spirit in praising God and condemning the enemies!

# Sunday January 19: Psalms 10-15

This feels awkward - is God talking about us?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

In the 1980s, I remember an incredibly awkward TV show called "[Do They Mean Us?](#)" which only worked because it's impossible not to get some sort of emotional reaction to the way other people talk about us - in this case, how other countries reported about life in Britain. If they said nice things, that was funny, but if it was criticism, people would get angry.

Looking at Psalm 14, I can imagine people reading that "there is no one who does good, not even one" and thinking, "Does that mean us? It surely doesn't!" But I think the uncomfortable truth in the Psalms, which would make for a very awkward singing session in our culture, is that God does mean us, and his Spirit can grab our attention and convict us as we draw close to God in worship.

It's the lament of an honest worshiper, wanting to be close to God but sensing the distance between God and evil. The hope is to see God's face, but life is getting in the way, and it might not all be other people's fault.

Yet salvation and restoration are on the way, promised here, delivered in Jesus. So God can tell his people to rejoice!

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God knows us and loves us, and he wants our hearts to know his heart when we bring ourselves to worship. The Holy Spirit enables us to do that, not just have a good time singing.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal more of God's heart in and around worship times, and not just get into the words on the screen.

## Who am I going to share this with?

Next time I discuss writing worship songs with people at Severn, I feel I'll need to be honest about the tension I feel between where we are and where we want to be in worship. How can we express this well? Maybe God can inspire us to do this better together.

# **Sunday February 2: Psalms 16-18**

This praise is inspired

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

The Psalms are a great example of inspired praise. I don't think David's words are entirely his own, because they don't just reflect his experience and feelings. I'm sure David is sincerely bringing himself in praise to God, confessing that he desires and relies on God, calling out for help in real difficulties, and thanking God for real victories.

But some of it sounds a bit too good to be true, for him at least. "I have been blameless before him." Really? "My feet have not stumbled." Wasn't there that time...? "You will not... let your faithful one see decay." Is David talking about himself?

I'm thinking the Spirit has put words into his mouth, and David is really identifying with Jesus. David did ask God to show him the wonders of his love, and God is answering this prayer by showing him what it would be like to praise if he were completely innocent, totally righteous, fully in good relationship with God. No-one would have this relationship before Jesus, but God's Spirit of praise was able to bring David into God's presence as if Jesus' work were already done in him. What we can read, as a result, is pure, inspired, uplifting praise.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants us to draw close to him and the Spirit enables this when we bring ourselves wholeheartedly. We might start with our own experience and moods when we pray, but the Spirit can influence our praise to the point where we don't just open our own hearts, but learn about God's heart.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I don't know if I'm allowing God to shape my prayers and praise like this - if I'm determined to do things my own way, and on my own limited timetable, I don't think it's surprising that there isn't much room for God to have influence and extend my experience in praise and worship. So I'm going to set aside some time to praise without a plan, and see what happens.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

I think I'll mostly do this in my own time, but next time I pray with other people I'll see if we can find more time to praise God together.

# **Sunday February 9: Psalms 19-22**

**Trust that God can shape you**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Last Sunday I was thinking about how much David seemed to identify with Jesus by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he prayed. Psalm 22 is a really clear example of this in the depths of suffering and despair. But today's Psalms also give credit to God for the victories and good times.

I love the idea in Psalm 19 that the skies themselves glorify God, that they are making a silent but far reaching declaration about God's work. If we believe from this that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves and awesome in scope and power, and if we believe that one God is concerned with it all, including us, then we must stop having a small faith. Instead of trusting in the small things our possessions and plans amount to, we can trust in the eternal God of the universe and receive the ability to overcome anything, even death.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God is big and majestic, and his work speaks for itself. He is also listening to our requests and able to give us the desires of our hearts and success in our plans. In the context of these readings and the rest of the Bible, I am sure this means that those desires and plans themselves can come from God if we choose to trust him fully. God's work includes building us up and shaping our hearts' desires, not working through a to-do list we came up with independently of him.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Expect God to shape my desires, plans and prayers more as I allow myself to trust him more, and be ready for the possibility that this will include pain in the short term as well as ultimate victory to come.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

People I pray with next week.

# Sunday February 16: Psalms 23-26

Our life might be drama, but God owns the stage

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

When I listened to this, I found myself cheering and joining in with familiar bits, like it was a NOW album packed with God's greatest hits.

"The Lord is my shepherd" – I know that one! Why does it make me think of funerals? It's comforting and mentions "forever", but I love that it's mainly about what life can be like when we trust God and accept guidance from him. It's for now, not too much later.

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" – huge hit, changed my life. Not only a statement to demolish the divide I might try and keep between religious stuff and the rest of my life, but a loud, repeating call to give God glory as he wants to "come in" and be recognised in and through my life. (How? Have a look at yesterday's reading about suffering and glory in 1 Peter – I realised that the way I react to difficulties and show the hope God has given me can be the way that people start to notice God at work.)

And I love the tension summed up in this line from Psalm 26: "I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me." Why does a blameless person need mercy? Maybe they aren't so blameless, or perhaps God is stretching them as the Spirit expresses words only Jesus could truthfully say about himself. This is such an aspirational Psalm. Can any of us sing along without feeling that we're acting out a role somehow? Would it be so bad if we did?

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Amazingly, God can inspire us to reach for a life we can't get on our own. We might feel like actors in a drama when we bring psalmists' words into our worship, but even if we are, God owns the stage. It's his, along with the earth and everything in it.

Some of the ways that people reach for God using words from these Psalms are famous, memorable and powerfully linked to times in our lives we might have felt desperate, sad or needing comfort. God wants us to be able to reach for him, no matter what state we are in. These Psalms reveal the depth of love God has for people who need and call out to him.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

I have been through periods of not wanting to sing along with worship sometimes, at least to certain songs, because of not feeling that they expressed what was in my heart. In these times, I rarely have a great alternative to belt out instead. Maybe God wants to lift me up through declaring about the life he wants me to live. I'm going to try doing that more wholeheartedly next time I feel like shutting up and shutting off the flow of the Spirit.

## Who am I going to share this with?

Worship leaders next time we chat about song writing and declaring God's glory.

# **Sunday March 1: Psalms 27-30**

## **Everything else is less than God**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Becky Evans:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

The perspective. I love the way it reframes life as it really is, not how I so often see it. God is God. Everything else is less than Him. God came before all the stuff in life and he has the ultimate authority. I don't need to be afraid; I just need to look to God and remember who He is and give him the worship He deserves.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

The massiveness of Father God. He is over all things, majestic, enthroned, glorious, strong and mighty yet gentle and kind, listening when we speak to him and rescuing us. God takes the mess and makes it good when we bring it to him, sometimes we may have to wait, but God will come through because he loves us.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Ask the Holy Spirit to keep my perspective on life accurate. I want to lift my eyes up above the noise of life and look to the one who holds it all together. Trust more, worry less.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Specifically, when I meet or see someone who has a need, I will remember that my Father is the creator of the universe and He is and has what they need.

Generally, as I focus on who God is, He will give me His peace that passes understanding and this will overflow onto the people around me.



# **Sunday March 8: Psalms 31-33**

**In scary times, can God's unfailing love define us?**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

I love that turning to God always looks like a good idea in these Psalms. David was not paranoid – he had good reason to be scared. His choice to trust and praise God regardless defined him. This was the Spirit at work in him as it can be in us too.

Sometimes when I am scared and I turn to God to ask something, it's like I'm trying to make a case that I deserve it. But I love that Psalm 32 shows that God looks at us through the lens of forgiven, confessed sin – we don't need to pretend to God that we've never done anything wrong or don't need correction, even right now.

The end of Psalm 32 stood out to me as God wants us to gain understanding of his ways. God can correct people who don't get what to do through what looks like control and discipline – we'll see a lot of this in Isaiah next week. But look at how different life is when we can learn from God directly, understand his love and resolve to live loving lives.

"Unfailing love" stands out to me as a key concept in each of these Psalms. It's what drove God's creativity and what can drive ours. It's what we should look for to get us through scary times. We could trust in stuff instead, but does stuff answer our prayers?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's "unfailing love" is different from the love I think I can give out by myself. God wants us to recognise that whatever our circumstances, whatever we have done and however we feel, we can and must always remember and trust in him. When we recognise and praise God, he won't just make us feel better (in fact we may carry on feeling bad), but God will act to make it clear that it is right to put our hope in him.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Over the next few weeks, I expect fear levels to rise a bit among us, our friends, neighbours and colleagues. A deadly virus is scary. How do we react? Do we trust in stuff, or something more? I don't think God wants us to be ignorant – we should use our understanding – but I sense that we'll have opportunities to show love in practical ways, trusting in God. Am I ready to be used by God to show what his love looks like? Even if it means letting someone else get the last toilet roll? I think it's time to pray and let God prepare us for what's coming.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

Thinking practically, we need to be looking out for our neighbours and school community. We'll practise looking to God for hope as a church family, including with people on "The SHAPE of you" course this week, and expect to be ready to share what we have our hope in when anyone else asks!

# **Sunday March 15: Psalms 34-35**

**He delivered me from all my fears**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

I love that God speaks through and to people who have been gripped by fear.

The writer David's fears may have been rooted in particular people and events or a more general sense of struggle, being at risk, surrounded by opposition and malice. The uncomfortable details which grabbed my attention were the haters who "maliciously wink the eye" and say, "Aha! Aha!" (This reminded me of times when I have felt undermined, as if people wanted me to fail, as well as a slightly scary episode of "I'm Alan Partridge"...)

It sounds like David had lots to cause him to fear, but one firm commitment to his refuge from danger. "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips."

Praise God? Even in the hardest times? That might sound incredible. But I love that it was when David was looking towards God, in faith with praise and thankfulness, that God revealed his glory: his recognisable presence, promising protection and deliverance.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God can be recognised and found by people seeking him when afraid and needing rescue. When any of us looks towards him with faith, our values can align with God's, turning us away from evil and towards good, away from panic and towards peace worth pursuing (an overwhelming wellbeing in good relationships, not quiet isolation.)

God expects his people to be able to make a positive difference to the world, and he equips us to do so, defending us when needed. "The fear of the Lord" mentioned by David is not a paralysing force which stops us from doing anything in case we mess up. It's the commitment to swap all other fears for respect for God, a faith which lets him direct us.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

We are clearly in a time when fear is rising. Avoiding too much physical contact (and certain newspapers) might help, but I get the sense that God does not want us to feel isolated right now.

I want to remember and share with others that our primary source of hope and life is in God. I want this to determine how I treat other people.

To "seek peace and pursue it" reminds me to grow relationships with neighbours as well as "people of peace" we might have found encouraging. We should ask around to see how we can help in practical ways like food shopping, childcare or things we don't yet know.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family, our neighbours and school community.

# Sunday March 29: Psalms 36-37

A future awaits those who seek peace

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

How are you doing in the Battle of the Bog Rolls? I find it amazing how the world seems completely different today from last month, but I love that God's meetings with psalmist David still feel fresh and relevant, maybe now more than ever if we are under stress and seeking God.

Difficult times can bring out the best and worst in people. Can you feel it? Even the thought of shopping can be enough to put us into stressed, survival instinct "fight or flight" mode. That knocks us off balance and little tilts towards selfishness, impatience and anger can blow up into stuff which looks more like evil. But at the same time, small acts of kindness, generosity, thoughtfulness, sharing and appreciation can make a huge difference for good.

In these Psalms, I like the clarity of these two ways of life contrasted with each other, along with the recognition that good and evil live side by side in our experience. In particular, Psalm 37 addresses how good people, close to God and praising him, can still worry that evil will thrive (and have the last of the toilet paper).

The advice for how to resist evil and commit to God seem very practical and relevant to me right now. Above all, I love the promises that God and goodness will prevail, and that goodness isn't just the product of people trying hard to be good, but being close to God.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God wants our world to be better. He has a long-term plan for involving people to make it so, which includes drawing us into relationship with him, inspiring us with the words and desires of the Holy Spirit and showing us what good life is like through Jesus.

God does not promise us a stress-free life, distant from destructive powers, but he does promise "no future for the wicked" as well as a "stronghold in time of trouble" for people who hope in him, keep his way, wait patiently and take refuge in him.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Good and evil are described as two different kinds of people here, but I think everyone hearing them could recognise some of themselves in each. I certainly can. I also recognise how easy it can be to count myself as righteous while condemning others, even while I miss opportunities to seek God and do good. So I should pray more, and be ready for God to answer those prayers through me and my family! But what should I be praying for?

Here is how I understand Psalm 37:4, "Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." When I approach God with delight, he doesn't just give me stuff, he gives me his desires. They become my desires too. That changes everything!

So that is what I need to do more – spend more time this week taking delight in God. This is so different from trying to map out a project plan for God to fix the world or even just my own sources of stress. I will choose to praise him, looking for how he seems to be at work,

and trust that he will shape my desires so that good gets expressed more effectively than evil this week.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I will talk with my family about how we approach and trust God, and what difference we are seeing this make. I've also got a growing list of people I've promised to pray for and with, so I'll be checking in with them to find out what is helping us to take delight in God.

## **Sunday April 5: Psalms 38-41**

**You uphold me and set me in your presence for ever**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

I could feel the journey from pain to joy in these Psalms. David's situation does not sound good – he is aware of enemies and opposition – but his biggest source of pain sounds like awareness of his own “sinful folly.” How conflicted does he sound in Psalm 38? He is troubled by his sin but seeks only to do what is good. He confesses to God but seeks refuge from evil accusations. What David wants is so different from what he has, not just in life around him which he cannot control but in his own conduct too.

Isn't it a pain to feel out of control like that? When I feel that way, I can lurch between wanting to fix myself and trying to order the world around me. What I love about these Psalms is that, in the meeting with David, God recognises this. David's internal and external conflicts get passionately expressed with the help of the Holy Spirit. But David needs another dimension in his life to move forward with confidence.

I love that the Spirit guides David towards seeking God. And God shows up. In Psalm 40, God's response is uplifting, firm, a new song, wondrous deeds, confidence to share about them, renewed relationship, and maybe even glimpses of salvation in Jesus.

Does that make David's enemies go away? Has the danger around him disappeared? No. But when God answers David's prayers, David receives the power to live differently, with confidence, not rooted in his own fragile achievements but in God's eternal love.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God hears us even when our own sin is making us desperate and when our focus on ourselves and our pain is shaping our prayers. God answers in good time and wants to turn our lives around, and he himself is the rock on which we can push into a different direction. God's power to do this is shown by his everlasting, timeless existence which cuts across all of our limited lifespans. God's unique presence can even prompt a man to pray echoes of the future and know Jesus, the saviour who, from David's perspective, had not yet been born.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

In a time when it seems easy to point to crisis beyond my control as a source of stress, I will allow God to meet me and guide my prayers more - the Spirit knows me better, reveals more, gives me access to much greater meaning in life, and prays really good prayers!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

People I hope to pray with online this week as we finish “The SHAPE of you” course and meet in virtual communities as we get ready for Easter.

## **Sunday April 12: Psalms 42-45**

**From dark depression to brilliant hope**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

These songs by "Sons Of Korah" (great name for a metal band!) are raw, honest, epic and glorious. Psalms 42 and 43 were my companions through teenage depression. What I loved about them most was how they could meet someone like me at my lowest points and lift my eyes to a source of hope. "I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God." And I did.

Right now as we are all stressed, and either we or our neighbours could really use some more hope, I've heard questioning of how anyone could believe in God when suffering is having its time. "Where is your God?", essentially, asked one caller today on national radio.

We don't have easy answers to this. There is danger for any of us who think we can wrap up a neat answer to explain why people suffer, and we'll look at that from tomorrow in the book of Job. We don't yet understand as much as we think we do.

But we have hope, and it's more than an idea. Hope for us is substantial, material and spiritual. It can change us, and through us, God can change the world around us. Psalm 45 contrasts strongly with the darker Psalms before it. Out of darkness, we are bound for glory.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

I'm reminded at Easter that God is not remote from our suffering. Jesus chose to suffer for us and experience pain and darkness beyond anything we know. Full of goodness, faith and hope as he died, the words of Psalms 42 to 44 could have foreshadowed Jesus, his pain, his unjust treatment, rejection and death. Was that the end?

Of course not. Happy Easter! We're celebrating his resurrection today, his defeat of death. But for what purpose? Jesus did not endure the cross just to show us what one person could do. He did it so that he could bring us with him through the darkness and into life's light.

Psalm 45 describes a royal wedding. It was probably used at many bright, hopeful gatherings, but we know that Israel's greatest hope was in a messiah we know as Jesus. We also know that Jesus takes us, the church, as his bride. Is this our wedding song too?

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I need to remember from this that it's OK to be real with God, even if that reality is downright depressing. God does not need us to pretend to be happy. He loves us. He is committed to relationship with us for the long term. So I want to grow in my expression of real feelings in worship, as well as commit myself as firmly as these writers to hope in God.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

People I talk about songwriting with. It feels too busy to write now, but if not now, when?

## **Sunday April 19: Psalms 46-49**

**God is our refuge and strength**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

In this time when we are all seeking refuge – physically and emotionally – I'm struck by the writer's confident call for people to declare together that God is not just one of many layers of protection for us, part of our refuge portfolio. He is our refuge and strength.

"Be still and know that I am God" – does this reflect how I deal with stress? I'm aware that I generally feel much better when I can get on and do stuff. It gives me a huge sense of wellbeing to feel engaged and useful, to make even a little progress on a project or work task. I realise I must have been desperate to do that this week – I even tidied up!

But look at the difference when people rely on God together. The writer refers to difficult times, wars, desolations, uproar and falling kingdoms – this would shake anyone. Yet the Spirit stirs God's people to sing praise to God and lead "all the nations" as they do.

Why is this so important, and is it for everyone or just people without anything else to rely on? I'm struck by Psalm 49's description of the levelling effect of wisdom for "both low and high, rich and poor alike." No matter how wealthy, well prepared, educated or insulated anyone feels because of "trust in themselves", all we have and all we are is perishable. Lasting life only comes from relying on God for refuge and strength and, amazingly, this is equally accessible for all.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God knows how we are in times of challenge and he loves us. So instead of leaving us to work things out by ourselves, he calls us to connect with him.

His Spirit enables and encourages people to do this collectively, not just individually – note how many times the Psalms say "we" and "our". He also engages our whole minds and beings as we do, not just our singing voices – look at how rich and wise some of the ideas are, far more than catchy choruses while still poetic and beautiful to absorb.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I thank God a lot for the work I can do and the stuff I can use to work with. I feel blessed to have opportunities to be creative and do good things. But I need to check my perspective and get better at being still, knowing and trusting God. I don't want this to be an extra thing on my to-do list (SCHEDULE QUIET TIME. CHECK!) but maybe I do need to carve out time for more breaks from stuff so I can build my everyday, 24/7 reliance on God.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

In my upcoming work conversations, I'm going to look for chances to share what else is important to me, including this.

## **Sunday May 3: Psalms 50-53**

**I don't want your religion – I want your heart!**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Chris Simmonds:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

I love it when the Bible seems to score an own goal.

Israel means 'God contends' and Jacob is understood to have acquired this new name due to his wrestling match with the Angel of God.

Fitting then, that Israel's scriptures themselves so often read like an open, honest tussle between competing ideas. It often seems, however, that it's in the tension between such competing values that wisdom is to be found.

In today's reading we find just such a self-critique. For those of us who followed this reading plan through Leviticus (well done!), you'll be familiar with the huge number of very specific instructions around appropriate sacrifices to make, for all manner of different situations.

Yet here, God seems to be throwing a total curveball – 'I'm not interested in your sacrifices and religious trappings' – *"If I were hungry I would not mention it to you."* Boom.

It's not of course that God is rubbishing the elaborate rites and rituals of his people, but rather is warning they are the vehicle not the destination – that above all what he wants is our genuine gratitude, humble obedience, and simple trust (Ps.50:14-15).

Psalms 51 almost reads like a response – *"you desire honesty from the heart, so you can teach me to be wise in my inmost being"* (Ps 51:6) God wants our honesty, our naked vulnerability, our inner 'yes' of total unblushing surrender – and with that, he can transform us and the world we touch.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

These Psalms reveal a God who just wants us, as we are - our broken, vulnerable selves - *"The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit"* (51:17). He wants us to lay down all egoic pretence and rest in his sufficiency, stand in his grace and acceptance. *"Create in me a clean heart oh God. Renew a right spirit within me"* (51:10)

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Customs and rituals can be helpful at a societal level to embed certain values in culture, to get everyone 'on the same page'. But on an individual level they must be infused with meaning and significance or they will just be empty shells. I am going to meditate on the key verses that have jumped out at me, allowing God's Spirit to embed them deeper within me.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I'm going to pray and ask God to put someone on my heart who particularly needs to hear these deep truths today and share it with them (as well as whoever's reading this!)



# Sunday May 10: Psalms 54-57

## Deciding on certainty

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

There's a clear pattern among the multitude of things going wrong for the Psalm writer today. It looks like he has enemies everywhere and, worse, betrayal by a close friend in Psalm 55. With so much against him, he is understandably afraid and uncertain about what life will bring next.

But he keeps turning to God. Initially, "Save me, O God" sounds like a desperate voice in the darkness. Maybe it's the prayer of anyone in desperation, whether or not they believe.

Reading on, it's more clear that the writer's roots with God go deep. Repeated resolution to turn to God in crisis has gone along with patterns of life, from praising God to making voluntary sacrifices, which sound like religion but in this case, I think, reflect relationship.

When I got to Psalm 57 and read "My heart is steadfast", it seemed to me that this resolution and relationship may be what had changed the writer so they could find certainty in their heart with God, even though everything else around them had turned bad.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants us to know, recognise and praise him. This is probably not because God's ego is fragile, and he needs us to encourage him. God knows that we can be changed and supported through crises when we have strong hearts which keep trusting in him.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I'm aware how much uncertainty can undermine us. As I'm writing, I've got a sharp pain in my leg which is similar to things in the past which put me in hospital for days. I'm seeing the doctor shortly, but the uncertainty is almost as uncomfortable as the physical pain, and I'm reminded that if I can't be sure my leg will support me, it's very hard to get anywhere!

We're all dealing with lots of uncertainty in life right now – when will we be able to go out freely? What will happen about work, money, eating? Will we be OK if and when we get the coronavirus?

Looking at the Psalm writer's choices to deal with pain and uncertainty, not by ignoring it but by embracing God, I can see what a help it was for him to find certainty. He could build his life on his faith and relationship with God.

I'm resolving to praise God like this every day too. I would like my life to be defined by the certainty of God's love and faithfulness to us, whatever else comes along.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

We'll see who I end up meeting over the next few days!

## **Update (24 hours later):**

I feel very thankful that the doctor was able to check my leg and tell me that it wasn't the kind of thing that put me into hospital a couple of times in the past. Turns out it's an infection, but probably one that can be treated with antibiotics.

So I've gained freedom from the restrictions of a hospital stay, but not yet from the pain! And I was incredibly thankful that my wife was on holiday yesterday and could help navigate fetch quests across the city to get all the bits I needed.

I'm reminded (for the umpteenth time) the difference it makes in a painful time to be rooted in thankfulness coming from a relationship with God. Not just in how I felt about myself, but also how I deal with other people, especially when difficulties arise. I can be a really bad customer when I'm hurting. But when I'm thankful, I notice how much more easily good things from God (like love, joy, peace and patience) can flow through, massively changing how I deal with others, so avoiding hassle for them!

I don't know how convinced you might have become these last few weeks that God can use us to do and be good in a hurting city, but if you are thinking that might be possible, let me encourage you to dig into today's Psalms. Yes, there's uncertainty and pain. No, it's not comfortable or fair. We might reassure ourselves that God is in control. But I think the biggest help God gives us comes from when we take control, thank and praise God, and choose the certainty of his love as our life's base.

# **Sunday May 17: Psalms 58-62**

**Lead me to the rock that is higher than I**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

It's easy to lose perspective in lockdown life, isn't it? Tiny niggles and doubts can seem like the whole world when we can't feel our connection with a busy workplace or a crowded high street. I find it's also easy to forget some of the bigger things God wants to do with us and the world when we feel powerless to get a pint of milk without an epic queue.

These Psalms are not pleasant. They are born from pain, injustice, war and suffering. Little details like "Break the teeth in their mouths" and "May they be like a slug that melts away as it moves along" grab my attention like grit in my shoe.

But what I love most about these Psalms is the way they frame God's big picture view of us. They show God's epic power to deal with the sources of problems with eternity in mind.

So while I'm concerned about the details of school life when some of our families can't afford iPads, God is working to fix inequalities and injustices by equipping anyone who asks for strength and wisdom. While I'm gloomy about our misfortune of a broken light socket at home, the Psalmist remembers that "Power belongs to you, God."

How can we gain God's perspective and appreciate his plans? I'm struck by the inspired call: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." This does not keep the Psalmist safe in his place, but connects him with God's "unfailing love", the ability to love and a reward for doing so.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God has the power to shelter us but works to elevate us too. God knows the gritty pain of our everyday lives but gives us glimpses of eternity filled with love and faithfulness. God recognises the biggest forces at war in and around us and inspires us to join him, "for human help is worthless. With God we shall gain the victory." He supplies power and love.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I'm conscious of how long it took me just now to think of examples of actual suffering in our lives at home. Little things can look big to me because we're incredibly fortunate and blessed on the whole. I need to thank God more, not just for what we have but who he is.

We're right, I think, to look at lots of details carefully when considering re-opening our local school. But I think there is more I can do to seek and share God's big picture perspective on our situation. I'm also hoping that a number of believers in our community will be inspired to help with faith and practical love, and wondering how to help point to God directly here.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

I need to connect with some of the people at school I've prayed with but not seen recently.

# **Sunday May 31: Psalms 63-67**

**What has God ever done for us?**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Something I find a bit weird about the Old Testament is the way that people lived through incredible times of earth-shaking, sea-splitting, awe-inducing, life-changing miracles and then, just a short time later after a bit of discomfort, seemed to forget what God had done.

The writers clearly have a point to make, and I don't think it's just about history. I recognise that some days it feels like God has done everything, and other days nothing. Sometimes there seems to be so much to praise God for, we could rejoice for hours. Other times, even armed with a list of people's stories, thankfulness and prayers, it feels hard to connect.

What I love in these Psalms is David's determination to move from longing for God like something he does not have, like water in a desert, to satisfaction with the fulness of God's nourishing presence. How does he do this? He remembers what God has done and chooses to praise God for as many things come to mind.

I'm struck by the range of things mentioned. The Spirit inspires the writer (or writers) with more than personal memories, but with a way of seeing the whole earth as full of the work of God and "filled with awe" as a result. How many of the natural occurrences like rain, crops and the look of the landscape do we still credit to God? How would it change our outlook and our feeling of connection with God if we did?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's influence and involvement in our lives and world are more wide ranging than we might normally think about. This does not mean that it's good to stop believing in physics as a way of explaining and forecasting the weather – lots of good things come when we grow our understanding of the world. But it's still God's world, his physics, and his glory when we choose to credit him and not rely on ourselves independently from God and his love for us.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I want to keep expanding the range of things I credit and praise God for. I know it sounds archaic and even ridiculous to acknowledge God's hand in things we can explain physically without having to believe in God. But I want this kind of connection with God, seeing and praising him in the natural world, not just limiting our recognition of him to "supernatural" things which we don't know how to explain in other ways. I want to grow in boldness to credit God among people who don't necessarily share my faith.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

In our multi-faith school community, we are just about to start bringing our children in and out of school again. I want to share thanks to God with them for what we are seeing, learning and hoping for in this unique and significant time.

# Sunday June 7: Psalms 68-69

Justice is coming, and it's furious

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

These are not nice songs. The writer's life is not nice, his feelings are not nice and the response he is looking for from God to deal with injustice is a long, long way from nice.

This is not to say that there is no goodness in what the writer wants, sees and credits to God. Families, showers, refreshment, gifts and praise: these are all things we might typically call "nice" in English. If our lives are going pretty well, these are nice things.

Maybe that's why we've developed quite a nice culture of niceness around faith and church, and why we generally sing nice songs, nicely. Life could be better, but it's not too bad. So why make a fuss? Why grumble or protest? If you must, could you not do it nicely?

That depends on how much there is to protest about, how much change is needed, how big the turnaround needs to go – in this case – from death to life. These pleas are not gentle and nice because they are desperate, urgent, pain-fuelled indictments of evil, cries for rescue and faith that relief will come from God with vigour and fury, power and glory.

These standout passages remained front of mind for Israel when they experienced the crushing injustice of invasion and desperately hoped for a saviour. In John 2, it's clear that people joined the dots between the inspiration of Psalm 69 and the life and passion of Jesus. He did not suffer so life could be a bit nicer, but because it needs to change massively.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God knows the full extent of injustice and suffering in our world, more than we can maybe feel or identify with personally. He will not let evil win. He responds by empowering people who trust in him and may themselves suffer in a battle for justice. The Spirit helps them to contrast their situation with the bright hope of salvation, seeing a world which can be better and praising God as if it is already here. Jesus showed how to get there, and we can follow.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

In the last week, I've been struck by how limited my hopes and prayers for comfort and the ability to "get back to normal" have been. Normal didn't work. Normal wasn't just. Normal was more desperately wrong than I experienced personally, but aren't I connected by the Spirit with these big, urgent, desperate hopes? Aren't we all?

As my Facebook feed has filled these last few days both with agreements that black lives matter and with condescension for protestors who aren't socially distancing, I can't pretend that I know what to do, but I want God to guide my response. Some of it won't be nice.

## Who am I going to share this with?

As our school community starts to reconnect in person, I'll look for what God wants there. Many families have come from different kinds of suffering. I want to understand and empathise better and for God to use us to provide hope and change.

# Sunday June 14: Psalms 70-73

Can we have a great leader?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

The troubles faced by the writers of surrounding Psalms make Psalm 72 stand out to me as vital, an urgently needed and deeply heartfelt cry of praise for a brilliant leader.

At first glance, this is a blessing for the king of Israel. "Of Solomon" suggests it's by or about David's successor, who was well known for his wisdom and general lack of understatement. He was the king of bling, with a more extensive household, network of allies and sense of his own significance than perhaps any other leader of his time.

Did that make him great? Is a vision of Solomon's potency fuelling this Psalm? I don't think so. He would have relished bringing prosperity through wise rule "from sea to sea", but even his expansive ego did not envisage his reign "to the ends of the earth."

What may have started as a call to bless a human leader quickly becomes, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, a recognition of the greatest leadership to come. Encouraged by this vision, people could hope to flourish and prosper, with the weak defended and oppressors crushed. They could imagine this leadership being recognised far beyond the boundaries of Israel. They could live with strength and stability we can scarcely dream about if this leadership could in fact "endure forever". But how could this be possible?

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

The writer credits God directly "who alone does marvellous deeds." God does bless human leaders and gives us glimpses of his character through them, but God's plan was always for us to be able to approach and know him, so that we can be led by him directly.

God arranged Israel in a way that would point each generation as well as surrounding peoples towards him and the fulfilment of his plan to answer this prayer for a great leader. We know that leadership in Jesus.

If you haven't yet imagined this Psalm as a recognition of Jesus, why not read it again with Jesus in mind? Does this start to look like the kind of leader you want to follow forever?

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Reading the stories of mostly terrible leaders in the Bible this week, as well as our own mixed bag of leaders in the news every day, I feel extremely keen to find and associate myself with better leadership. I don't want to settle for leaders who talk tough to get votes but fail to grasp their need to grow in wisdom, serve people better and defend those that need the most help. I don't want to fall into the same trap of believing that riches and cleverness can do what only God and his love can do. So I want to be better at being led directly by Jesus, his example and Spirit, and maybe God can use me to lead others too.

## Who am I going to share this with?

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

# Sunday June 28: Psalms 74-77

I will remember the deeds of the Lord

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Do you remember when plastic straws were the worst thing in the world? Sometimes things get overtaken by events, new problems loom larger than old ones and, like the writer of these Psalms, we can feel rejected forever, unable to be comforted even by God.

I love the way that the writer expresses this so honestly in Psalm 77. At the start, it doesn't seem that he has simply forgotten God and then remembers his love. The pain runs deeper than that. When he thinks about God, he groans, recalling the anguish and frustration of Psalm 74 where God appeared so remote, he needed to be called back to defend himself against rising uproar and mockery.

That is some deep desperation. No believer thinks God is that vulnerable. But we can be, especially when immediate emergencies make us lose our sense of perspective about what is most important, reliable, trustworthy and powerful in the world. Are we a bit lost too?

If so, the decision the writer makes at the turning point in the middle of Psalm 77 could be our turning point too. He decides to remember more than feelings and frustrations, but to start counting actual stuff done. What can we credit to God? What have we seen? What do we believe others saw before us? When we push past the pain of the here and now and look for evidence of God's power across the world and through history, does that change our perspective? Can we start to see ourselves the way God sees us?

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God knows that we feel isolated and powerless at times, but he works to connect us with himself, his heavenly powers and other believers across all times. God's work can be seen in his big story as well as in countless stories of our own. God lets us struggle from time to time, but his Spirit can always help us to connect what we remember and believe about God's love and power so that we can overcome our feelings of frustration and powerlessness.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

I remember a particularly depressing time as a teenager when I felt remote from God and struggled to remember good things from him. So, I decided to write down at least one per day, even if they were outweighed by bad things. I barely managed one for the first couple of days, but then two seemed right, then three or four, then a short list, then a longer list. After a couple of weeks, it felt too overwhelming to write them all down and I haven't felt the need since. But when I do get stuck, for example, in working out how to praise God with words, this will be a good thing to remember and do again – God worked powerfully before!

## Who am I going to share this with?

People I follow Jesus with and maybe people I might write songs with in the future.

# Sunday July 5: Psalm 78

## Our place in his story

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

There are things I love and, at the same time, feel uncomfortable about in the big picture presented here.

I love the familiarity of the story, the concrete reminders of the power and love of God at work in the shaping of a national family. What a heritage to hold onto, remembering ancestors who were saved and sustained by God's miraculous power. And what a culture to be part of, where important "hidden things" like people's significance in the world and our relationship with the creator of the universe can be revealed through sharing stories that children can understand and remember.

So what is difficult about this? It's in the stories – we can know them but still forget them. We can know God but still live as if we don't. We can believe that we are part of God's family and be surrounded by so many reminders of Father God's love for us, but we can still prioritise other things, replace God with other gods and keep making the same mistakes.

However, I love that God's story does not get derailed by this. Instead, God set out a plan through history to bring us back to him. From the writer's point of view, David is seen as the servant shepherd chosen to look after the flock. From our point of view, we can see flaws in David but fulfilment of what he represented in Jesus.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants everyone to know him. In the past, God chose one people to show what relationship with him was like, but his purpose was to show the world that making him Lord in our lives is good. Whatever our background, and in spite of our mixtures of motives and patchy track records at keeping our own commitments, God loves and leads us with integrity. He can show us that we are not alone or insignificant but connected with huge things he has been doing with people which continue, and are vitally needed, today.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I need to reflect on who God says I am and make sure I'm living by this, as well as sharing it with others. This week I had a sudden spike in people checking out my (not up to date) LinkedIn profile, as well as some good news about future work. Both of these things made me wonder if I should put more effort into representing myself well online through showing off stuff I've been doing. But I'd love to get even better at showing what God has been doing in and around me. I'm reminded here that my biggest significance in the world isn't down to any project or job I've done, but in my place in God's much bigger story. I'm still looking for what else he wants to do through me and my family!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others I follow Jesus with.



# **Sunday July 12: Psalms 79-82**

**If my people would only listen to me**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

I loved listening to today's Psalms. I'd highly recommend clicking the "listen" link rather than just reading, as there's a noticeable turning point halfway through this selection which jumps out from the recording perhaps more than it does from the page.

It's a move from darkness to light, the desperation of needing God to the joy of celebrating his presence, going from not knowing what to do to having a sense of certainty. It's joyous!

What made the difference? To be fair, I don't think these Psalms are ordered to tell a story, but there is still a character who jumps out as Very Important: "the man at [God's] right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself." (Psalm 80:17). Hi, Jesus!

What difference does he make? He brings revival, but of what? Not just having a good, peaceful time. The Psalmist is looking at a renewal of relationship between people and God, a time when "we will not turn away... we will call on [God's] name" and "be saved."

I love that Psalm 81 carries such joy, it's as if this prayer and longing for a saviour has been answered. And yet, there is still a reminder of how important it is to remember God as a rescuer, to have no other gods and to listen to God, keeping on listening. It makes all the difference.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants people to choose to listen to him so that he can guide. There is an alternative – God lets us develop "stubborn hearts" so we can follow our own guidance instead. But God has good things we cannot know unless we decide to listen and prefer his guidance over our own.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I still need to spend more time listening to God. I will do that this week, in prayer and while reading and listening to more of the Bible.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

# **Sunday July 19: Psalms 83-86**

**Give me an undivided heart**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

I'm struck by the power and necessity of being in God's awesome presence, better one day in his courts than a thousand elsewhere, as it says in Psalm 84. I'm also delighted that Joanna Moss will be talking all about this later today, so you'll want to check out her thoughts about this.

The other big theme which jumps out at me across this Psalm selection is that whether the writers are in a calm or stressful, blissed or busy, protected or vulnerable place, they long for God, not just to be with them but to define them. They don't just call for peace, they call for change from the inside out.

"Give me an undivided heart" reminds me that where God's people (and I) have failed to get important things right, it was often not because we didn't know the right thing to do, or stopped believing in God, but that other things seemed to compete. That can lead to impossible balancing acts, too much to try and process, too many people to please or an excess of noise making God's calm, assured whisper of a voice too hard to hear.

I'm looking at Deuteronomy in advance of next week's Bible In A Year and remembering how much God stressed to have "no other gods". "The Lord is one. Love the Lord... with all your strength." In Psalm 84, the Psalmists want their strength to be in God, which I take to mean that God defines it, so we aren't bringing ourselves to God with a show of strength, but trusting him to make us strong, part of his work, indivisible from him. Is that possible?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God knows that we may approach him from many directions and with lots of other things on our minds and hearts. God loves us wholeheartedly and wants us to experience life in his presence, knowing his nature and not remaining as we were, but being redefined by him. His Spirit can inspire us to call for what we need, including forgiveness, teaching, strength and an enduring desire to want what God wants with undivided hearts given by him.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I'm nervous approaching the summer holidays. One of the things I've realised during lockdown and home schooling is that I absolutely love my son, but if my mind, attention and heart are divided and if I try and do too many things at once, I can't give him my best. I've got a lot of stuff to do, but I need the undivided heart that God offers so that his priorities rule. So, I'm going to spend time each day in undivided listening to God, and trust that my busyness the rest of the time can be ordered, with strength found in him.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family!

# Sunday August 2: Psalms 87-89

## God's closeness in pleasure and pain

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

Mal is going to be talking today about the problems of hurry, and Psalm 89 is a great example for any worship leaders picking a last-minute set in a hurry, checking the introduction and thinking, "That sounds great! Let's use that!". It may end in tears.

If you're in a hurry, you might just glance at the beginning and end (not the very last "Praise be to the Lord" but the closing sentiments of "How long will your wrath burn like fire?... For what futility you have created all humanity!") and wonder how we could possibly have got from here to there. What made praise turn to lament in a few short (long feeling) minutes?

The visual image which struck me was of a worshiper in rapturous intimacy with God, set against a background of majestic creation and wonder. At the centre, they are seeing David and remembering his everlasting covenant promise with God. But as the camera slowly zooms out, it starts to include brokenness in the surroundings, ruined buildings, fractured relationships, enemies, war and the smoking remains of a splendid palace.

The story of human rebellion against God's sovereign glory is ancient, but I'm struck by the raw pain of the Psalmist who, for a time at least, seems to blame God for the gap between where the world is and where it should be. If God has rejected his anointed one, he has "renounced the covenant" which was meant to last forever, and all hope is lost. Is life really that bad? Is it possible to hold hope in God at the start of a song and lose it by the end?

If so, I wouldn't pick that song for Sunday worship.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God inspires praise in the Psalms, but also far deeper, emotionally resonant cries of pain and despair when these can authentically come up in our processing of life with him. God seems to share and echo our sense that the world could, should, must and will be better than it is.

Even when God makes clear his plan to change the world, through a promised line of leadership which would give birth to Jesus, victory and pain seem as close from God's point of view as they are on the cross with Christ. If we are going to truly rejoice with God about the life he can bring to our world, he may let us join him in surprisingly painful times too.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Seek God, not just good feelings, in worship. Trust him more that his power can be revealed in difficult times, and that when I feel as bad as the Psalmist does here, God is still close.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Family and people I pray with.

# **Sunday August 9: Psalms 90-93**

## **Trust God**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

I'm awestruck by the writers' perspectives on eternity, of God's enduring presence and power reaching far over our greatest current concerns.

I could have heard Psalm 90 and come away with a sense of insignificance, but instead I remember that it is God's Spirit inspiring this exchange, building a relationship, growing desires for things God wants us to have, like wisdom, gladness and satisfaction.

I could have heard Psalm 91 and decided I can do whatever and things will work out fine but – wait, isn't this the Psalm Satan quoted at Jesus when tempting him? Instead, I'm reminded that God wants us to live with him, under his promised protection when he is our home, not just an emergency callout service.

I could have heard Psalm 92 and thought it was just an encouragement to sing and play, but instead I'm feeling the Spirit's encouragement that our understanding of God, who he is and what he does can grow when we apply our creativity to trying to express this, with his help.

And I could have heard Psalm 93 and thought of "The Lord reigns" and other worship choruses we might miss singing in crowds but I'm reminded that, even though we feel isolated right now, "the seas have lifted up their voice" with us. When we praise God, it echoes through all of his creation.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God knows how big our concerns are, even the ones which feel too big for us to carry. He calls us to trust, love, live with and worship him anyway. He promises that he will be with us and providing more peace, stability, fruitfulness and blessing than we can imagine.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

This hasn't been a week where peace and stability are making the headlines. In Lebanon, especially, the image which comes to mind isn't a long-lasting cedar as much as the awful damage which can be done by man-made things in just a few moments.

As I pray for people there, and how God might help us get involved in any practical response, I'm going to remember how his power to heal and restore is greater than the biggest destructive power we can even imagine.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

People I pray with this week, and I hope that will include a chance to pray with others about supporting people where needed in Lebanon.

# Sunday August 16: Psalms 94-97

Sing to the Lord a new song

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Is there anything which feels a bit too "samey" in your life? I've certainly felt short of inspiration at times this year, especially with limited scope for travel and lots of pressure to get piles of routine stuff done. There's comfort in the familiar, and I've often found myself defaulting to set patterns of things to cook on each day of the week with staple ingredients.

What I love about Psalm 96, nestled among sets of familiar old stories with repeating themes about God's unchanging nature, is that while God does remain the same, he can still be the inspiration for creativity, new songs, and that we've had thousands – millions? – of fresh expressions of worship over centuries where God and scripture have been constant.

How can this work? Looking into Psalm 96 gives me clues about God's creative nature and how he shares it with us.

His "marvellous deeds" are one source of inspiration. God has done things which should make us react, not just with appreciation but awesome wonder. And he keeps doing them! We can think about big, historical things or just the things which have changed our lives personally. I think about how God has grown love and forgiveness in me and my family.

"Ascribe to the Lord glory" sounds to me like an encouragement to look at the most amazing things I've noticed going on or changing in and around me and look for where God seems to be at work, then give him the credit as worship. From the last week I can think of a dozen times I've learned something from reflecting with God on life as a father.

"Let the heavens... earth... sea... fields... trees... all creation rejoice" reminds me that while there is one God, his work impacts billions of us and far more around us. So if everything and each of us simply resonates authentically with what has made us marvel at and credit God's deeds, that's more new and different songs every day than we can count.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is the creator whose being and works can inspire fresh creativity forever. He gave us the ability to recognise him and process thoughts and feelings which can turn back into creative worship, if we look to shape them. God wants us to do this, enjoy his presence, appreciate his work and share his glory.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

I've been busy getting other creative work done but putting off expressing worship through new music for far too long. I'm reminded from this that I don't necessarily need to learn more about music, songwriting or technology to break through a creative deadlock here, but I do need to reflect more on who God is, what I see him doing and how to express that.

## Who am I going to share this with?

I'll probably stew on this alone for a bit, but if anyone wants to work together, let's chat!

# Sunday August 30: Psalms 98-102

Wherever we start, can we end up praising God?

Today Bern Leckie writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Have you ever not gone to church because it didn't feel right that day? Or gone a bit late because you wanted to go but praising God just wasn't something you felt in a proper mood for? I know I have. I'll sometimes blame it on not being a morning person generally (I'm really not, and I normally write these at night...) but I admit that sometimes I'm put off by the thought that other people will be far more into it and I'll be embarrassed by feeling like an imposter in the crowd. (Remember crowds? Singing together? Simpler times!)

You'd be right to criticise me here for making worship of God somehow all about me and how I feel. I know. But doesn't God want us to come into his presence as we are, with whatever is in our hearts? What if that isn't an immediate "Thank you God!" or anything which might be shared by a bunch of other people at Service Time o'clock on Sunday?

This diverse range of Psalms is encouraging me. I believe each is a Spirit-inspired meeting with God, and each seems to map a different personal path into God's presence and praise. I'm picturing these five Psalms as five people worshipping, all very different. Maybe you'll recognise some of them?

Psalms 98 is going straight for it, arms aloft, tambourine in hand. Is that you on a Sunday? I miss you. Psalm 99 bears international affairs in mind, might have been listening to the news on the way in. (This is probably me.) Psalm 100 doesn't say much but knows they are blessed and thankful. Psalm 101 is clearly feeling holy, and while it could sound unnervingly self-righteous, if it's Spirit-fuelled, it's more a reflection of God's heart and a direction for looking forwards. Psalm 102 couldn't sound any more different. Coming from brokenness, it still gets guided by the Spirit into recognising God, praising him and declaring deep truths about his enduring nature while everything else, including troubles, will perish.

Maybe it's this last one, most of all, which amazes me at what God brings together even when we feel different, separated, not enough "into it". It seems like, wherever we start from, there is a Spirit-led path to connection with God and when we take it, we can't help it if praise starts to come out.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is so different from being a product of our diverse needs and wants. Some people need many gods to reflect that. Instead, he is one God drawing everyone and everything together, even (especially?) on days we don't feel like it or, like today, physically can't meet.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Invite the Spirit to guide me to praise in worship time today and express thanks as they come to mind. I know there'll be other words to sing, but there's time for the rest too.

## Who am I going to share this with?

My family. They're the only ones who will hear unless we shout REALLY LOUDLY (we might!)

# Sunday September 6: Psalms 103-104

Enough about me, let's talk about you

Today Bern Leckie writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

It's fair to come to the Bible looking for guidance, relevant words with some recognition of us and our situations. There are certainly lots of Psalms like 102 which start where we are, or might be some other time, and take us on journeys into God's presence.

But I love today's Psalms for something else. They aren't about me as much as they are about God. Instead of focusing on human problems, they shine with God's glory.

So, are these just from and for people who are finding that life is going great? Far from it. I love the theme of forgiveness and healing running through Psalm 103, especially in the key central lines: *"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

By focusing on praising God, I love that the writer gets to see far beyond their own life and circumstances, gets over the need to justify themselves to God or try to plead innocence to get themselves out of trouble. Looking at God in a broader way, we get to see the heights, depths and immeasurable volume of his love.

Our eyes need to be taken off ourselves to appreciate God's work everywhere else, like in Psalm 104. These are bold statements, crediting God for all sorts of wonders in nature. Just because we know lots of the science of geology, water cycles and astronomy, it doesn't mean we can't keep a sense of awe or acknowledge the creator.

When we do this, it could change our world. If you're looking for some inspiration for how a big view of science and God together with careful observation of humble plants can lead to a complete revolution in how we understand ourselves, look up [Gregor Mendel](#).

But if all we do today is look up at God's wonder and thank him, I think that's enough!

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God loves us and wants to know him. He encourages us not just to focus on ourselves but also on him, so that we can start to know how much we are loved and appreciate the huge scope of God's forgiveness, as well as the wide world of freedom he opens up for us.

By changing our focus, God can also help us to see the world the way he sees it, expanding our hope and sense of possibility. Maybe he'll use us for incredible things tomorrow. Today, it could simply be enough to be in his presence, connected with his awesome creation.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Enjoy relationship with God, being in his presence and praising him today!

## Who am I going to share this with?

My wife. It's our wedding anniversary today, and we'll remember how we praised and credited God on the day we chose to commit to each other with his strength and love.

# Sunday September 13: Psalms 105-106

We get to know our story through his story

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Isn't there something special about family stories? I find it amazing how discovering something about people anywhere up my family tree can make me feel connected to something much bigger than me. But it's more than that. Knowing about where I came from, even if it's way back in the past, always makes me at least look again at myself and wonder, "Has this made me who I am? Is this me too?"

I love this pair of Psalms as a complementary set of family stories, and they are deeply embedded in Jewish tradition too. Psalm 105 is read every year among families gathered on the first night of Passover. Some also read Psalm 106 on the second night. If you know you have a family connection to Abraham, this is your big family story. It's meaningful because God gave blessings and made promises to last "for a thousand generations" to free you from slavery to oppressors and bonded instead to each other and to him.

I love the glorious, famous first story about liberation, and how it's packed with colourful details the way family stories often are. Can you feel the pain of Joseph's shackles, the creepiness of frogs in the bedrooms or the comfort of God's presence as a night light? That's the idea. You could share this with a child, and they would grow up knowing more than what God wanted to them to do, but who God made them to be.

The second story is more of a challenge. It's still a reminder of God's faithfulness, but this is contrasted against people's sin, our ancestors' and our own. The pictures of rebellion and trouble are just as vivid and memorable but far less comfortable, because they are reflections on how we don't just need the world changed around us. We need to change.

But even with this in mind, I love how the writer doesn't conclude they need to go away and try harder. Instead they press into relationship with God, cry for help and put trust in him.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is not just a lawmaker trying to get people to follow a religion and a code regulating life's stuff. He is ultimately a father, our father. He has been gathering people around these family stories for centuries, and while we might not be part of Abraham's line, Jesus has grafted us into the family tree, so these are our stories too.

God wants us to deal with him in a family relationship which isn't broken by sin, but we should still know when to turn and ask for help instead of "wasting away" in rebellion.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Mal has done a great talk for Severn today on Psalm 139, inviting God to search our hearts so he can clean and strengthen us within family relationship. I will follow his process today.

## Who am I going to share this with?

Other people in my family.



# **Sunday September 27: Psalms 107-108**

**Don't get seasick, keep looking at God**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Psalms 107 made me feel a bit ill, and I had to look a few times to work out why. It could not have started any nicer. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever." I know a song about that! It's a joyous, upward-looking beginning to a worship session.

But from verse 4, there begins a series of increasingly deep dips and dives caused by people ignoring or rebelling against God, followed by upwards movement again as people turn to God and he saves them. Each cycle is like a wave, and they get upsettingly choppy.

Down go the people just wondering around, forgetful of God, but up they come as they cry out and get satisfied. Down into darkness go the rebels against God's plans, finding bitter labour in the depths of their condition, but up into the light they come as God busts them out of their confinement. Down, down deeper go some rebels whose bodies suffered from their foolishness, but what happens when they cry to God? You got it! Up, up they come, healed and ready to thank God.

Then it gets a little stranger. Here comes the Merchant Navy, getting on with stuff. What are they doing wrong? The storm which forces them up and down seems to come from God! Maybe the point is that, surrounded by God's work, they were self-absorbed with their own ability and courage until they realised, they didn't just need nature on their side, they needed the creator.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

The creator's power to recreate - knock down, build up, lay waste, redeem - gets seen on a national and international scale by the end. Through all these downs and ups, the writer gives God the credit, and I take two lessons from this.

First, whatever we think we can do, God can do bigger. Second, we think we control our personal worlds, but as we get rocked by the actions of people and God, we realise we are like boats on the ocean, at the mercy of power far bigger than ours thrusting us up and down. How do we avoid getting seasick? Just like in a boat - keep looking out, beyond ourselves and our circumstances, at the horizon.

It's worth remembering that we can turn to God and be saved, but we might as well avoid the trouble and be wise - remember God's goodness and keep our eyes on him.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I can pray about things I'm aware of, but I need to ask God to show me what he wants to change in my world that I might be ignoring, forgetting or blind to. If I can look to God, I can trust that he will do what he has done here for everyone who turns to him.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

Other people I pray with.

# Sunday October 4: Psalms 109-113

## How to have no fear of bad news

Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

If you watch the news at all, I think you'd agree this hasn't exactly been a quiet news week. From notable people catching and spreading coronavirus in the UK and US to various crises affecting our pockets, prospects and planet, it's been a non-stop, rainy miseryfest. And that's on top of the fears we might have about our personal health and wealth right now, news we can't just turn off when it gets us down. So, what can we do about this?

I love the direct answer from the author of Psalm 112 – “Surely the righteous will never be shaken... they will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” Great! But what does that mean? And how do we get that?

The rest of Psalm 112 could make us think that being righteous is all about stuff we do to earn God's favour. There's a lot about commands, being generous, lending and giving. Funny how God picks on those things I often feel least like doing in crisis time, when it feels better to protect myself and save for a rainy day (I mean the next rainy day). But is that it? Does freedom from fear come from making myself give away stuff more freely?

I think there's a common thread through these Psalms which suggests that this isn't what makes us righteous, though it is something to enjoy when we've received righteousness. And where do we get that? It's from God. It's not a reward for things we've done, but a relationship with who he is. When we let his Spirit guide us into expressing our hearts freely in this relationship, look at what we end up giving – not just our stuff, but our selves. And not just our nice, churchy, smiley selves, but our whole selves, including our fears.

The writer of Psalm 109 has a massive mess of cursing desperation to bring to God. With Psalm 110, it's trust in future judgement and reckoning. Psalm 111 recognises God as the source of wisdom and lasting justice. Psalm 113 caps this all, praising God and crediting him for restoration from the poverty and fruitlessness we might fear.

Does any of this long-lasting good news look smaller than this week's bad news?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

There is even more to Psalm 110 than meets the eye at first. Jesus quotes it in Matthew 22:41-46. It's about him! This is important because it shows that God answers our prayers with his presence. He does not remain remote from our suffering but intervenes personally.

So we don't gain freedom from the fear of bad news by forcing ourselves to do more “righteous” stuff to please him. Instead, we bring ourselves to him, growing to trust him and what he has done. Righteousness is the relationship he gives us. Our hearts and stuff follow.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Take more time this week to bring news, fears, hopes and praise to God, wholeheartedly.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others I discuss the news with!

# **Sunday October 11: Psalms 114-118**

**Not to us, Lord, but to your name be the glory**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Happy Birthday, Severn Vineyard! Did you know, our church is 11 years old today? We are going to celebrate (as if we needed a reason!) and I love the timely reminder from these Psalms that while it might look like we're celebrating what we have done, we are in fact celebrating what God has done. All eyes are on him today.

Some think religion is more about trying to do good things, maybe rallying around an idea, an inspirational image or idol. But the writer of Psalm 115 knows there is a huge difference between doing things our own way and trusting in the real God. I love how he rallies people to keep trusting God, remembering their relationship with God and so many blessings.

Reminders of history, like in Psalm 114, make a huge difference in this kind of living faith in God, that we are here because of specific things he has done, and not just in our own strength. We'll be hearing lots of stories today about things God has done, and this reminds me to keep thanking God for his work in my life too.

Psalm 116 is a reminder that God can rescue from death. Psalm 117 reminds me that great things can come in teeny tiny packages! And Psalm 118 is a reminder that God is far more than an inspirational idea for us, but an actual source of love which endures when we need it and can't love enough on our own.

I love that the recognition of God's love in Psalm 118 runs so strong and deep that it bumps into Jesus, the ultimate expression of the Father's love for us. He quotes verse 22 in Matthew 21:42, and it points to the human rejection, even by God's own people, of his work and leadership, but the promise that God kingdom would prevail in any case.

So, it's a really good idea to remind ourselves today of what God has done, and commit to praising and glorifying him for that, everything we are now, and our hopes looking forward.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God is not distant but present in our lives. He wants us to remember that he hasn't just given us good things to look after in our own way, but wants us to keep seeking his strength and love so we can live his way.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Spend time today celebrating Severn's birthday! This will include enjoying praise time and people's stories of what God has been doing, and I will ask God to bring to mind the things I can praise and credit him for in my own past and present. With this in mind, I can meaningfully commit my future to him too.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

# Sunday October 18: Psalm 119

## The A-Z of praise

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Mary Edwards:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

What an amazing Psalm! In just about every one of its 176 verses, the psalmist mentions God's word in one form or another. His law, statutes, precepts, decrees, commands, promises, word of truth, and His word which we now know is Jesus! The psalmist relates how he depends on, delights in, relies on, and longs for God's word. He seeks it, meditates on it, speaks of it, obeys it, trusts it, hopes in it. What a challenge!

There are some heartfelt prayers in this Psalm as the writer struggles with many difficult situations, fears and everyday temptations. So much to relate to! But through all that, he discovers a refuge and comfort in God's unfailing love and a freedom in the situations he finds himself in.

When I first became a Christian, well over 50 years ago now, I was given verses to learn. Two of the earliest ones are in this Psalm:

*'Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things in your law' v18*

This is a prayer that I still use today when I read the Bible, and it seems to take me into depths that really do reveal wonderful things! It always surprises me!

The second verse I learnt I think is a good summary of this whole Psalm, and definitely something I would say has proved true for me.

*'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' v105*

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God's word is Jesus, as John declares at the start of his Gospel. This Psalm expresses the depth and wonder of God's word and how it really is the answer to every situation we may find ourselves in. It will show us the way and light our path through any darkness. God's word is something to truly seek after and depend on as it brings joy and hope.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I love that God is so dependable but sometimes I forget that and move to worry instead. I want to write out some verses that remind me of His promises to me and put them in places where I'll regularly see them. Unfortunately, my memory is not what it was, so I need to keep relearning verses!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My grandchildren! I'd like to keep encouraging them to learn verses now while they're young.

# Sunday November 1: Psalms 120-124

## The Lord watches over you

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### What did I like about today's reading?

We've just started a big chunk of "song of ascents", Psalms which were sung as people gathered from across the world to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem. After times of separation and darkness, even of national exile, these poems and songs were the sound of moving together in the direction of hope.

I love how we can relate to this right now! 2020 has been a year of unusual separation from a body of worshippers. We have wanted and worked to get together as much as possible but, as I'm writing, the news is breaking that a new lockdown is frustrating our best plans.

What stands out to me in these Psalms, though, is that while God's people clearly love gathering, and Jerusalem is a focus of awe and wonder in Psalm 122, the people who have endured suffering in separation are reminded that they are not defined by where they have been, where they are now or even where they are going physically.

It's their connection to the Lord which brings them together, even across great distance. In Psalm 120, a long way off, they call to the Lord. They look to him in Psalms 121 and 123, and in Psalm 124, they remember and praise the Lord for being with them, always watching back, protecting and answering prayers, even in the worst times of separation. Look again – can you see that recognition of God's presence in each of these Psalms?

So, lots of us might not know what we'll be able to do next week in terms of work and gathering. That is clearly going to be stressful. However, I love that we do know that we can always look to the Lord who always watches over us.

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God promises his presence in our lives even when we are not yet present at a worship gathering. His assurance goes above and beyond the turbulence of our daily news. It's an eternal promise in Psalm 121:7-8...

*"The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore."*

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

My stress levels go up in times of uncertainty, even if I'm not directly affected. I am aware of how my eyes get diverted easily by flashes of breaking news. But keeping my eyes on God who keeps watching me like a loving father is something I can practise and enjoy.

I will take more time this week to pause and remember the certainty of God's presence, protection and love for us. I am sure that he can guide what I need to do, but I will remember that my certainty comes from who I am in God's eyes rather than what I'm doing.

### Who am I going to share this with?

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

# Sunday November 8: Psalms 125-130

Who builds the house?

Today Bern Leckie writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

I am loving these “songs of ascents” which were written for people gathering from around the world to meet for worship. I know that we are by no means the only people in history who have looked to them for inspiration while unable to meet in person.

This selection reminds me that people approach God from different places, emotionally as well as physically. The joyous starts of Psalms 125 and 126 contrast with the painful beginnings of Psalms 129 and 130. I love that wherever we start from today, we might be able to find an encounter with God through Psalms in which he meets us where we are.

But where do we go next? To the house of the Lord! But what does that mean? Is this just about going to some building we put up for religious services?

Far from it. For one thing, “the house” Solomon writes about in Psalm 127 is far bigger than anything we could build. He must have the first Jerusalem temple in mind – we know because it was his life’s work to get this constructed from the incredible piles of resources gathered by his father, David, as we are currently looking at in Chronicles. But this was only ever a symbol of God’s presence, a facilitator for the life God wanted to build for his people.

Psalm 127 points to vital aspects of this life – connectedness, family, things done together we cannot do alone. The other Psalms remind me of the need for both justice and mercy in my life, family and community. These are things God wants us to want from him.

“The house” God promises to build for David is not a palace, it’s a family and community built around God and the life he wants for us. Is it up to us to do our best to build that?

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

*“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain,”* says Psalm 127 verse 1. This is amazing! God promises to be the builder of a God-centred life. He is an awesome provider and putter-together of everything we need for a fruitful, productive, joyful, love-filled life.

I love that these Psalms turn some people’s idea of religion inside out. God isn’t waiting around wanting us to impress him, he has been working on our foundations since before we knew him. God is not remote from us now while preparing to judge us later, but he is intimately involved with building and strengthening who we are and how we can live today. And while God loves receiving our love and worship, we can only give what we receive from him.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

We have house problems at the moment, involving builders, plumbers, engineers and lots of awful smells! I’m going to remember that we credit God as the source of our stuff, livelihood and love, so trust his provision for fixes, and praying to meet good builders too!

## Who am I going to share this with?

My family and hopefully some of the tradespeople we will talk with in days to come.

# Sunday November 15: Psalms 131-135

Bring what you do and be amazed by what God does

Today Bern Leckie writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

When anyone asks how my week has been, my first thoughts go to what I've been doing, then to how this has been working out. In lots of ways, this week hasn't been the best by those scores (thanks for asking!) The house plumbing which was a problem last week is still a problem today despite our best efforts and those of several plumbers. It's the sort of situation where the stress and smell permeate into the rest of what's going on. Like this! But is that it? As big as these things look to me right now, are they really the most important things going on, even if I am only looking at my own life, or the life of our family?

Looking at Psalm 131, I'm noticing that the people coming to worship God have been on an emotional as well as physical journey. "I have calmed and quietened myself" suggests that the writer's state of not being emotionally unhealthy and concerned with great matters is a new one, not a permanent one. The "myself" isn't an indicator of self-reliance, either, as the rest of the picture shows God's role as a parent, weaning and training for healthy life. I love the big journey in this small Psalm from intense self-focus to massive eternal hope.

Psalm 132 appears at first to be about what David did, self-denying, swearing oaths, working to find a place for God to live in. But I love the reminders from verse 11 that the most important oath is the one God swore to David to establish an everlasting kingdom of blessing, salvation and joy through his family.

These other Psalms follow a similar pattern, starting with the important little things we do, encountering God and then realising the massive, everlasting, world-changing things God is doing. Along the way, we might realise, as the writer of Psalm 135 did, that God has done an incredible list of things which have changed the world, overturned injustice and shown us where to look for real power to transform our lives, not just feel better at the end of a week.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God loves to receive our praise and worship, but he doesn't want empty words from us. He wants us to bring our whole selves, including our current thoughts and issues. God knows that even in a worship gathering centred on him, our heads will often be starting off full of what we or other people are doing. He loves to meet us in this and show us what he is doing too. When we realise this, he can lead us into wholehearted praise.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want meetings like this with God to be not just once a week but, ideally, all day every day! In many ways, I already know this is possible and find myself praying and praising at odd moments, including stressful ones. But this reminds me to look for that point in a meeting with God where he changes my perspective and makes it more about what he is doing than what I am doing. I will ask and expect him to do this more over the next week.

## Who am I going to share this with?

My family and other people I pray and praise God with.

# **Sunday November 29: Psalms 136-138**

Enduring love

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Chris Simmonds:

**What did I like about today's reading?**

**What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

**What am I going to do differently as a result?**

**Who am I going to share this with?**



# **Sunday December 6: Psalms 139-141**

Search me, O God

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Becky Evans:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

The contrast between God, who He is and how He cares for us, and the 'evil' and 'violence' that is in the world. Reading through the three Psalms, the content and sentiment change quite dramatically several times, which highlighted the contrast to me.

I also liked the warning/check for me about how easily I fall into the evil and violence around me.

David says, "Search me, O God" (Psalm 139 verse 23) to see what is going on inside of me and then he asks for God to keep him from straying into 'evil.' "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth..." (Psalm 141 verse 3)

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

How much Father God knows me and cares for me.

That He is over all things and so much bigger than I can imagine.

And that the Holy Spirit is always with me, always.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Look more honestly and with purpose for my faults and weaknesses because...

- a. I can be secure in knowing that I am totally known and totally loved by God
- b. I want to be who God made me to be. I am free in Jesus now, but I know how easily I get caught up in the things around me that aren't of God. I want to live in the freedom and life God has for me now.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

People around me, by being honest and not defensive about my faults.

# Sunday December 13: Psalms 142-144

## Getting real with God

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Emma Simmonds:

### What did I like about today's reading?

How real David was with God. There was no stiff upper lip here, just absolute despair and devastation. Admittedly things were pretty bad.... He is hiding in a cave which sounds horrendous, feeling totally alone, being hunted by Saul who really does want to kill him and has the full machinery of the state behind him, you can understand why his hope has deserted him...

Phrases such as:

*'My spirit grows faint within me'*

*'I have no refuge; no one cares for my life'*

*'I am in desperate need'*

... are not phrases I have ever had cause to utter in quite the same way as David did. Psalms 142 and 143 really do put things in perspective! David's relationship with God in this dark place is inspiring and humbling.

He pleads with God... *'answer me quickly'... 'Do not hide your face from me'*

But through all of this is a narrative of total trust and expectation – that God is with him and will respond. It's not questionable... it's fact. The maturity of his faith in these psalms is humbling and inspiring.

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

That we can expect him to respond.

That being able to verbalise how we feel is important and he wants us to share our raw, naked, ugly, desperate feelings with him when the seeming chaos around us has brought us to the point of despair.

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm going to try to express more readily and honestly how I feel with God and with others.

It's important to be real about situations, while preserving our trust in God.

### Who am I going to share this with?

My housemates.

# Sunday December 20: Psalms 145-147

Look this way for positivity

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

## What did I like about today's reading?

It's pretty obvious that life has ups and downs at the moment. Getting ready for Christmas is a stress at the best of times, especially if you need exhaust yourself working to get ready for a little rest, or if the gatherings are more an emotional burden than a relief. Add in the stress of a pandemic and the daily changing rules on how to deal with it, we're all going to appreciate some good news and positivity. Where do we look for that?

I love these Psalms for reminding me that there is no better source of goodness than God, and perhaps no more positive thing in the world than praising him.

Psalms 145 is a choice to turn this way. "I will exalt you, my God the King," followed by reminders of God's character, summed up in one of my favourite verses in the whole Bible: "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love."

Psalms 146 lifts us from sources of disappointment, like trusting other leaders who can't deliver what God brings, and paints a big picture of hope sustained by God's faithfulness.

Psalms 147 credits God on every level from the local to the universal, "mighty in power" with dominion over creation as well as personally revealing wisdom to his people.

As songs in a book, they are nice. But what if these words became the authentic expressions of our hearts? How would it change our Christmas, and the rest of our lives, if they did?

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God loves us and wants us to connect with him in praise. He is not like human leaders who crave praise because of their insecurities. Following them is sure to sap our energy in the end. But it's the reverse with God. He is the best source of security we can find. He wants us to praise him so that we will grow in recognising, enjoying, celebrating and sharing what he is like. This can massively uplift us in the most stressful times.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

On busy days in the immediate part of this season, remember to take time out to pray and praise God! When God answers my prayers for inspiration and strength to get through difficult times, remember how he answered them, so these can feed into my future praise. And when we get to a time of holiday and rest coming soon, I will enjoy resting with God rather than only resting from work, including God-related work!

## Who am I going to share this with?

My family and people on the team at church.

# Sunday December 27: Psalms 148-150

## Little songs of massive victory

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

"Praise the Lord" isn't subtle here, hidden away like our faith can be among opposition or blurted out quickly like a cliched greeting among friends. These final Psalms are meetings with God in which the wholehearted, open praise of God is so massive, it's unmissable.

In Psalm 148, I love how the scope of praise for God is pictured as immense. When we join in with it, we are not alone, quite the opposite. People praising God are part of a chorus of creation connecting young and old, men and women, rulers and everybody else, nature and the universe. What do we have in common? God as our source. Praising him connects us all.

Psalm 149 makes it clear that praise is not empty and gratuitous. God's kingdom is a movement against suffering, injustice and powers that oppose God for selfish reasons. It's a forceful reminder that God wins these battles. His love overcomes, even when opposed by powerful kings and presidents. This is more than a praise song, it's a victory song.

Psalm 150, then, isn't just a nice expression of praise. It's a triumphant expression of total, massive victory.

Maybe that's where we feel we are today. Maybe not – there were plenty of Psalms before this coming from suffering, expressions of grief, pain, worry, anger and frustration in a search for hope. This is where they are all leading. We have lived with suffering, we have hope today, and victory to look forward to. When we believe that, we can join the praise.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God meets with us where we are across many different states of mind and heart echoed across the whole book of Psalms. When we meet with God and are open to be moved by him, he lifts us up and turns us in the direction of hope and future victory.

He also gives us plenty to celebrate now, including knowing that we are his people and part of his creation always, even if we don't know what will happen to us tomorrow.

God invites us to join him in victory and in his work of creative renewal – "Sing to the Lord a new song" – the end of this huge book of Psalms is not the end of fresh expressions of praise and worship. It's the beginning of our next steps on a lifelong walk with him.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I have enjoyed this year long trip through all the Psalms with you and the other writers who have contributed to Bible In A Year 2020. I'm encouraged by this to celebrate God's victory over death even while disease is rising among us. Over the next few months, I'll be spending less time writing notes like this and more time writing new music, perhaps some new songs. I would like to grow in my ability to share a worshipful heart honestly and faithfully.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family, and others at church who enjoy making music and writing.