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Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Psalm 101.¹⁻⁴— just scripture

¹Permit me to laud fidelity and good governance.

Let me, YHWH, sing what is music to your ears.

²I intend to devote myself to sound policy.

So, when will you come to me?

I will act out of a pure motive

toward those under my governance.

³I will never allow harmful counsel

to have a settled place in my administration.

I will refuse to act out of deception.

Such conduct will never be associated with me.

⁴Perverse desires will be absent from me.

I will countenance no evilly harmful thing (Author's translation).

Questionary

Today's reading is the first of two from Psalm 101. For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

¹I will sing of mercy and judgment:

unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.

²I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.

O when wilt thou come unto me?

I will walk within my house

with a perfect heart.

³I will set no wicked thing

before mine eyes:

I hate the work of them that turn aside;

it shall not cleave to me.

⁴A froward heart shall depart from me:

I will not know a wicked person.

1. Though it is less clear in the KJV, Psalm 101 represents the song of an ancient Jewish King, likely in some ritual setting. In this song, the king commits himself to a just reign.
 - ? How does this observation alter the way you read and understand this psalm?
 - ? How does the commitment of this ancient king to reign justly compare with how those who govern in your own nation, state, community govern?
2. In verses 1-4, the Psalmist affirms that soundness of mind, pure motives, discernment in counsel, honesty, temperance in desire, and a strong aversion to harming the citizenry are all personal characteristics of a secular leader that is acceptable to God.
 - ? Based on these characteristics, how good for the nation and acceptable before God is the current occupant of the U.S. White House—the man I refuse to call by any name other than Caligula?

Psalm 101.⁵⁻⁸— just scripture

⁵He who covertly slanders his fellow citizen,
I will totally silence.

The arrogant and over-confident,
I will never empower.

⁶I will keep an eye out for honest citizens;
they it is who will govern with me.

He who acts honestly;
he it is who will serve with me.

⁷They will not remain in my administration,
who act deceitfully.

One who counsels deceptions
will never be allowed a place in my governance.

⁸First thing, I will put an end to all unjust citizens;
eradicate from YHWH's city
all who exercise power wrongfully (Author's translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

⁵Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour,
him will I cut off:

him that hath an high look and a proud heart
will not I suffer.

⁶Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land,
that they may dwell with me:

he that walketh in a perfect way,
he shall serve me.

⁷He that worketh deceit
shall not dwell within my house:

he that telleth lies
shall not tarry in my sight.

⁸I will early destroy
all the wicked of the land;
that I may cut off all wicked doers
from the city of the LORD.

In verses 5-8, the Psalmist affirms that a leader who is acceptable to God searches out the most honest citizens to serve in his administration. He expects and demands that those who serve in his administration govern justly. Administrative officials avoid all slander of others, deceitfulness, arrogance, injustice, and every unrighteous exercise of power.

- ? Based on these characteristics, how has Caligula done in filling government positions with the most honest citizens?
- ? How well have officials in Caligula's administration measured up to the Lord's standard of good governance as the Psalmist outlines it in this Psalm?

Psalm 102.¹⁻⁵

¹Hear my prayer, O LORD,
and let my cry come unto thee.

²Hide not thy face from me
in the day when I am in trouble;
incline thine ear unto me:
in the day when I call answer me speedily.

³For my days are consumed like smoke,
and my bones are burned as an hearth.

⁴My heart is smitten, and withered like grass;
so that I forget to eat my bread.

⁵By reason of the voice of my groaning
my bones cleave to my skin.

Questionary

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's is the first of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. In the previous penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51), we have seen the Psalmist resort to many images and metaphors as he tries to help the Lord, and his reader understand how he feels about his sins and his seemingly incessant inclination to sin. In today's reading, the Psalmist resorts to such imagery once more.
? Take a moment to identify the images that the Psalmist utilizes.
 2. The Psalmist speaks of being "consumed like smoke," "burned as an hearth," and "withered like grass."
? What do you see in your mind as you try to visualize each of these images?
? How do these images make you feel?
 3. The Psalmist complains that "my bones cleave to my skin."
? What do you suppose he means by this?
? What might it have to do with his "forgetting to eat my bread," i.e., fasting?
? How does fasting impact our search for answers and solutions (here the Psalmist is looking for a "solution" to his sins in for form of forgiveness) whatever they may be?
- ? How do you feel about the Psalmist request that Yahweh act "speedily"?
- ? Does this seem appropriate to you?
- ? When is it reasonable to expect God to respond quickly to our needs?

Psalm 102.⁶⁻¹¹

- ⁶I am like a pelican of the wilderness:
I am like an owl of the desert.
- ⁷I watch, and am as a sparrow
alone upon the house top.
- ⁸Mine enemies reproach me all the day;
and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.
- ⁹For I have eaten ashes like bread,
and mingled my drink with weeping,
- ¹⁰Because of thine indignation and thy wrath:
for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.
- ¹¹My days are like a shadow that declineth;
and I am withered like grass.

Questionary

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's is the second of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. As in previous penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51), and in the previous verses of 102, the Psalmist continues to resort to dramatic imagery in order to describe his feelings concerning his sins and his seemingly incessant inclination to sin. In today's reading, the Psalmist uses the following similes: He is
 - “like a pelican of the wilderness”
 - “like an owl of the desert”
 - “as a sparrow alone upon the house top”
 - ? What do these similes have in common?
 - ? What feeling do they convey?
 - ? Have you ever felt alone and abandoned by God because of weakness and sin?
 - ? How can and does the Atonement help chase away such feelings?
 2. Utilizing yet another simile, the Psalmist says that he is “like a shadow that declineth.”
 - ? What do you hear, see, and feel in this simile?
 3. Finally, in describing the feelings brought on by his sins, the Psalmist speaks of having “eaten ashes like bread.”
 - ? What images and impressions come to mind when reading this?
 - ? How effective is this imagery in helping you understand and feel his plight?
- ? How will today's reading impact your determination to trust God with your sin and repent?

Psalm 102.¹²⁻¹⁸

- ¹²But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever;
and thy remembrance unto all generations.
- ¹³Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion:
for the time to favour her,
yea, the set time, is come.
- ¹⁴For thy servants take pleasure in her stones,
and favour the dust thereof.
- ¹⁵So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth thy glory.
- ¹⁶When the LORD shall build up Zion,
he shall appear in his glory.
- ¹⁷He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and not despise their prayer.
- ¹⁸This shall be written for the generation to come:
and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

Questionary

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's is the third of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. In our previous readings from the penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102), we have heard language that expresses the Psalmist's deep sorry and uncertainty as the result of sin. We could say that the Psalmist is "destitute."
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's expressed hope that God "will regard the prayer of the destitute"?
 - ? How likely is it that "the destitute" has difficulty that God will see their plight, hear their cries for help, and be able to effect some type of positive outcome in their lives?
 - ? What sorts of things could you do when faced with someone who is feeling "destitute" for whatever reason?
 - ? What sorts of things would you want to avoid saying and doing so as not to add to an individual's "destitution"?
2. In today's reading, the Psalmist speaks twice of "Zion."
 - ? Why, in a "penitential psalm" focused on repentance, do you think Zion came to the Psalmist's mind?
 - ? What is Zion, anyway?
 - ? What is the relationship between "Zion" and the repentance and forgiveness of sin?
3. Today's reading begins with the Psalmist's statement of contrast, "But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever."
 - ? Take a moment to look back at the previous verses. With what is the Psalmist contrasting Yahweh's endurance?
 - ? What is the significance of this contrast?

Psalm 102.¹⁷⁻²¹— lent

¹⁷He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and not despise their prayer.

¹⁸This shall be written for the generation to come:
and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

¹⁹For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;

²⁰To hear the groaning of the prisoner;
to loose those that are appointed to death;

²¹To declare the name of the LORD in Zion,
and his praise in Jerusalem...

Questionary

For our 34th reading during Lent 2024, we return to the Penitential Psalms. Psalm 102 is the fifth of the seven Penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These psalms have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

1. In each penitential psalm, we hear the Psalmist's expressions of deep sorrow and uncertainty as the result of sin. We could say that the Psalmist is "destitute."
 - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's expressed confidence that God "will regard the prayer of the destitute"?
 - ? How likely is it that "the destitute," especially those whose destitution is a result of their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior, find it difficult to believe that in seeing their plight God will hear their cries for help, and be willing to come to their rescue?
 - ? What can you do when you are faced with similar doubts?
 - ? What can you do and say to help others when they feel such doubts?
 - ? What sorts of things would you want to avoid saying and doing so as not to add to an individual's "destitution"?
 - ? What other scripture passages come to mind as being those that teach this same thing about the character of God as a rescuer?
2. The central story of the Hebrew Bible is the story of God's deliverance of Israel from its Egyptian slavery. Consider the following words from today's reading:

"For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;
To hear the groaning of the prisoner;
to loose those that are appointed to death..."

 - ? How might these words apply to Israel's experience in Egypt?
 - ? How might these words apply to our experience in sin?
 - ? What would you think and how would you feel if we understood these verses to teach that God is constantly looking down upon the earth to see if there are any he can liberate—physically, politically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.? He anxiously hunts for those to help?
 - ? How do you feel about such a God?
 - ? How would such a view of God impact the way you approach him to seek freedom from sin and the insecurities that sin brings with it?
 - ? How do you feel about a God who, rather than being "put out" with you when you present your sin to him, is pleased to have the opportunity to liberate you from your acknowledged sins?
3. The Psalmist says that his testimony concerning Yahweh's gracious willingness to rescue is being

“written for the generation to come” and to inspire “his praise in Jerusalem.

- ? How do you feel about these objectives possessed by the Psalmist?
- ? How closely do they mirror your own desires in bearing testimony of the goodness that God has brought into your own life, especially through his rescuing you from sin and its eternal consequences?

In Ephesians 1, Paul compiles quite a list of the blessings that come into our lives through Jesus and his Atonement. Paul reminds us that one of God’s principal “purposes” in bestowing all these blessings was so that “we should be to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1.¹¹⁻¹²).

- ? How does this relate to and enhance today’s reading?
- ? What can you do during Lent and then over the Easter Season to act as one who causes others to “praise” God?

Psalms 102.¹⁹⁻²⁵

- ¹⁹For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;
- ²⁰To hear the groaning of the prisoner;
to loose those that are appointed to death;
- ²¹To declare the name of the LORD in Zion,
and his praise in Jerusalem;
- ²²When the people are gathered together,
and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.
- ²³He weakened my strength in the way;
he shortened my days.
- ²⁴I said,
“O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days:
thy years are throughout all generations.
- ²⁵Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth:
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.

Questionary

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's is the last of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. While the Jewish Passover is clearly connected to the events surrounding Israel's liberation from their centuries long bondage, Yom Kippur does not possess clear associations with that important and defining event—defining as to the character of God and the obligations of Israel to him. Yet, there may be associations to be made between Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the Day of Atonement, and our deliverance from sin. Consider the following words from today's reading:

“For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;
To hear the groaning of the prisoner;
to loose those that are appointed to death...”

- ? How might these words apply to Israel's experience in Egypt?
 - ? How might these words apply to our experience in sin?
 - ? What would you think and how would you feel if we understood these verses to teach that God is constantly looking down upon the earth to see if there are any he can liberate—physically, politically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.? He anxiously hunts for those to help?
 - ? How do you feel about such a God?
- ? How would such a view of God impact your approaching him to seek freedom from sin and the insecurities that it brings with it?
 - ? How do you feel about a God who, rather than being “put out” with you when you present your sin to him, is pleased to have the opportunity to liberate you from your acknowledged sins?

Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹²—lent

- ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
⁹He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Questionary

Today's reading is our 24th reading for Lent 2024.

1. In verses 8-10, the Psalmist makes several straightforward theological assertions concerning God's character. Then, in verses 11-12, the Psalmist abandons straightforward theological statements for powerful imagery to portray the character of God.
 - ? What assertions does the Psalmist make about God's character in verses 8-10?
 - ? What metaphors does the Psalmist use to portray the character of God?
 - ? How have these divine attributes impacted you in your day-to-day life?
 - ? Is there one attribute of God that the Psalmist mentions with which you have had little experience?
 - ? What could you do to discover and appreciate this heretofore un-experienced divine attribute?
2. The Psalmist testifies that God is not one who is constantly "chiding."
 - ? What does it mean to "chide"?
 - ? How do the following definitions of the Hebrew word used here, *rib*, alter or amplify your understanding and appreciation for this aspect of the divine character?
 - "accuse"
 - "upbraid"
 - "prosecute"
 - "feel adversity with"
 - "feel quarrelsome toward"

Consider this very well-known passage—one that might be thought of as foundational to the LDS Church.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1.⁵).

- ? How does this passage relate to today's reading and the Psalmist's testimony that God does not constantly chide?

Our normal reading of this passage from James, focuses on his testimony that God answers sincere prayers. This strikes me as a fairly ho-hum observation, and one that largely misses James' point. What kind of God would He be if he *did not* answer sincere prayers of the faithful? Not one that would interest me.

- ? But, what about the prayer of one who might be "deserving" of an "upbraiding"? Will God answer their prayers?
- ? What role, do you think, did James' testimony that God "upbraideth not" those who come to Him with a need play in Joseph's determination to pray, as opposed to the simple observation that God answers prayers? (There is strong evidence that Joseph Smith painfully felt unworthy and sinful

at the time of his “First Vision.”)

- ? How do you feel and how does it impact your own prayer life to understand the focus of James’ testimony to be that God “upbraideth not” those who pray to Him in need and weakness rather than the mere fact of God’s answering a prayer of need?

3. Consider this part of the Psalmist’s testimony concerning God’s character.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

- ? How do you feel about God dealing and rewarding us in ways that do not exactly match or reflect our actions?
- ? How does God do this and remain just?
- ? Is this consistent with your conception of and experience with Him?
- ? How has He demonstrated to you that at given moments and after certain erroneous actions you have taken He was not dealing with you as your actions might have “deserved”?

4. One of the great things about poetic imagery is that it allows us to form pictures in our heads.

- ? What pictures come into your mind when you consider the following two images?

“For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.”

And

“As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

Take a few minutes to consider the size and scope of the universe. Feel free to do a quick Google search of “the universe” and look at some of the images.

- ? Just how big is the universe?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the Psalmist’s testimony that God’s mercy is as expansive as the universe is large?
- ? How closely does this match your experience with God?
- ? What do we call the furthest extent of our sight on earth?
- ? How well do you make out objects at the far horizon of your view?
- ? If God symbolically removes your sins as far as your eastern horizon is from your western horizon, what is their impact going to be on you? How well can you “see” them? How much influence should you give them?

The imagery of moving our sins as far away from us as our eastern horizon is from our western horizon is a way of saying that God removes our sins further from us than can be measured, reducing their impact upon us to near nothingness.

- ? How does this square with your experiences with God, His willingness to forgive, and the extent of His forgiveness?

Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹⁴—Atonement

- ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
⁹He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³Like as a father pitieth his children,
so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.
¹⁴For he knoweth our frame;
he remembereth that we are dust.

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement.” *

1. In verses 8-10, the Psalmist makes several straightforward theological assertions concerning God’s character. Then, in verses 11-12, the Psalmist abandons straightforward theological statements for powerful imagery to portray the character of God. Finally, verses 13-14 describe how the divine character directly impacts us.
 - ? What assertions does the Psalmist make about God’s character?
 - ? How do these divine attributes impact human beings? You, in your day-to-day life?
 - ? Is there one attribute of God that the Psalmist mentions with which you have had little experience?
 - ? What could you do to discover and appreciate this heretofore un-experienced divine attribute?
2. The Psalmist testifies that God is not one who is constantly “chiding.”
 - ? What does it mean to “chide.”
 - ? How do the following definitions of the Hebrew word used here, *riḇ*, alter or amplify your understanding and appreciation for this aspect of the divine character?
 - “accuse”
 - “upbraid”
 - “prosecute”
 - “feel adversity with”
 - “feel quarrelsome toward”

Consider this very well-known passage—one that might be thought of as foundational to the LDS Church.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jam. 1.⁵).

- ? How does this passage relate to today’s reading?

Our normal reading of James, focuses on his testimony that God answers sincere prayers. This strikes me as a fairly ho-hum observation, and one that largely misses James’ point. What kind of God would he be if he *did not* answer sincere prayers of the faithful? Not one that would interest me.

- ? But, what about the prayer of one who might be open to an “upbraiding”? Will he answer

them?

- ? What role, do you think, did James' testimony that God "upbraideth not" those who come to him with a need play in Joseph's determination to pray, as opposed to the simple observation that God answers prayers? (There is strong evidence that Joseph Smith painfully felt unworthy and sinful at the time of his "First Vision.")
- ? How do you feel and how does it impact your own prayer life to understand the focus of James' testimony to be that God "upbraideth not" those who pray to him in need rather than the mere fact of God's answering a prayer of need?
- ? What does it mean to you to know that the Lord is not inclined to "chide," or "upbraid," over sin?
- ? Is this consistent with your feelings about and experiences with God? If not, what do you need to know, do, feel, and experience to experience God as the Psalmist did?

3. Consider this part of the Psalmist's testimony concerning God's character as it relates directly to us.

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

- ? How do you feel about God dealing and rewarding us in ways that do not exactly match or reflect our actions?
- ? How does God do this and remain just?
- ? Is this consistent with your conception of and experience with him?
- ? How has he demonstrated to you that at given moments and after certain erroneous actions he was not dealing with you as your actions might have "deserved"?

4. One of the great things about poetic imagery is that it allows us to form pictures in our heads.

- ? What pictures come into your mind when you consider the following two images.

"For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."

And

"As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Take a few minutes to consider the size and scope of the universe. Feel free to do a quick Google search of "the universe" and look at some of the images.

- ? Just how big is the universe?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the Psalmist's testimony that God's mercy is as expansive as the universe is large?
- ? How closely does this match your experience with God?
- ? Have you experienced this extreme, even extravagant generosity?
- ? What does your answer to the previous question suggest about your relationship with God?
- ? What do we call the furthest extent of our sight on earth?
- ? How well do you make out objects at the far horizon of your view?
- ? If God symbolically removes your sins as far as your eastern horizon is from your western horizon, what is their impact going to be on you? How well can you "see" them?

The imagery of moving our sins as far away from us as our eastern horizon is from our western horizon is a way of saying that God removes our sins further from us than can be measured, reducing their impact upon us to near nothingness.

- ? How does this square with your experiences with God, his willingness to forgive, and the extent of his forgiveness?

5. Verse 8 reminded us that God's generosity is due to the divine character of God. He is a

merciful and gracious Being. Verses 13-14 give us another reason that He is so generous with us.

? What is that reason?

God is an amazing Father. That is true. But there is another reason given here. God is not only generous with us because of His character and His divine parentage, but because of who and what we are as well. We “are dust.”

? What does this mean to you?

? How do you feel being thought of as somewhat vulnerable, in need of help, protection, and “pity.” (The Hebrew verb translated as “pity” here comes from the noun for “womb,” and seems to reflect the tender and protective feelings a mother has for her infant.)

? Again, what does it suggest about God and his relationship with us that he is “protective” of us, especially in regard to our sins?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 106.¹⁻²— Atonement

¹Praise ye the LORD.

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good:
for his mercy endureth for ever.

²Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD?
who can shew forth all his praise?

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

1. The Psalmist invites us to “praise” and “give thanks to” God.
? What is the relationship between “praise” and “thanks”?
2. The Psalmist offers this invitation to praise and thanks because God is “good” and “his mercy endureth for ever.”
? To what would you point in your life to confirm God’s goodness and enduring mercy?
3. As further reason for praise, the Psalmist’s suggests that his “mighty acts” are beyond recounting and that it is impossible to praise him as he deserves.
? What do you think and feel when you consider these assertions about God?

Consider the following quotes.

“I testify that He is utterly incomparable in what He *is*, what He *knows*, what He has *accomplished*, and what He has *experienced*.... We can trust, worship, and even adore Him without any reservation! As the only Perfect Person to sojourn on this planet, there is none like Him!”

“In intelligence and performance, He far surpasses the individual and the composite capacities and achievements of all who have lived, live now, and will yet live!” (Neal a. Maxwell, *CR*. October 1981, p. 9)

“God is ‘more intelligent than them all’ (Abraham 3). I believe that this means more than that God is more intelligent than any other one of the intelligences. It means that he is more intelligent than all of the other intelligences combined. His intelligence is greater than that of the mass” (B H. Roberts, Note in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 353).

- ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that Jesus’ powers and capacities are not simply greater than every one of the billions of other individuals who exist among his creations, but that they are greater than those of all the other billions combined?
- ? So, add and combine the spiritual capacities of Russell Nelson, Joseph Smith, Moroni, Alma, Peter, Nephi, Isaiah, Elijah, Moses, Abraham.... and all the rest... they are inferior to God’s alone. Thoughts?

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“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

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“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 106.³— just scripture

Happy are those who sustain proper governance,
and, themselves, act justly at all times (Author's translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

Blessed are they that keep judgment,
and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

Today's reading reminds us that our joy in this life and the next is not only contingent on the private attitudinal and behavioral choices we make in our daily lives. Our joy now and later is also contingent on the public attitudes and behaviors that we adopt and practice.

- ? What do you do to "sustain proper governance"?
- ? What does the current "governance" of your nation suggest for its present and future joy and security?

Psalm 109.³¹— just scripture

For [God] shall stand at the right hand of the poor,
to save him from those that condemn his soul.

Questionary

- ? How do individuals and societies “condemn” the soul of the poor?
- ? What do you do to protect them from such “condemnation”?

Psalm 110.^{1, 4-6}— Atonement

¹The LORD says to my lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

⁴The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:

“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵The Lord is at your right hand;
he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶He will judge the nations,
heaping up the dead
and crushing the rulers of the whole earth (NIV).

Questionary

For those who wish, here is the KJV.

¹The LORD said unto my Lord,
“Sit thou at my right hand,
until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

⁴The LORD hath sworn,
and will not repent,
“Thou art a priest for ever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵The Lord at thy right hand
shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.

⁶He shall judge among the heathen,
he shall fill the places with the dead bodies;
he shall wound the heads over many countries.

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

1. In addition to Jesus’ suffering and death, his atonement also includes his resurrection, his ascension, and his enthronement in heaven.
 - ? What do you learn about his enthronement and the impact his enthronement has in the real world?
 - ? How do you feel about real-politic impact of Jesus’ enthronement?
 - ? Is the defeat and the end of the kingdoms of this world something that seems desirable to you?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do? What is attractive about the kingdoms of this world that it doesn’t seem desirable, or what is unattractive about the kingdoms of this world that it does seem desirable?
2. Verse 1 speaks of making Messiah’s enemies his “footstool.”
 - ? What does this imagery conjure up in your mind?
3. In addition to the real-politic effects of Jesus’ enthronement, the writer of Hebrews lists several others in chapters 7-10. For example, in chapter 7, we read the following.

“(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, ‘The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:’) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Hebrews 7.²¹⁻²⁷).

- ? What additional effects and benefits do you identify in this Hebrews passage?
- ? What attributes does Jesus have as a high priest that earthly high priests do not possess?
- ? What do you think and feel when you are reminded that due to personal flaws, religious leaders lack the effectiveness that their followers need, whereas Jesus, because of his lack of flaws, can devote himself full time and without diversion to the needs of his people?

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"Fall: Our Need of Atonement"

"Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"

"At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"

"Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"

"Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"

"Justification: How We Repent and Change"

"Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"

"Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus' life of Atonement"

"Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"

"The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Psalm 111.²⁻⁴

²The works of the LORD are great,
sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

³His work is honourable and glorious:
and his righteousness endureth for ever.

⁴He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered:
the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

Questionary

- ? The Psalmist testifies that the “works of the LORD” should be “sought out.” How do you search and seek out the “works of the Lord” in your life?
- ? In two parallel lines, the Psalmist speaks of God’s “wonderful works” and the fact that he is “gracious and full of compassion.” What is the relationship between his compassion and his work in individual’s life?

Psalm 113.⁴⁻⁶

⁴The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like unto the LORD our God,
who dwelleth on high,

⁶Who humbleth himself
to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

Questionary

This has always been one of my favorite passages from the Psalms. We humans can become so self-enamored, and self-impressed.

- ? How do you feel when you consider that God has to lower himself so immensely to even observe the comings and goings among mankind and even among the stars, galaxies, galactic super-clusters, etc.?

Psalm 113.⁴⁻⁹—just scripture

⁴The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like unto the LORD our God,
who dwelleth on high,

⁶Who humbleth himself
to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

⁷He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

⁸That he may set him with princes,
even with the princes of his people.

⁹He maketh the barren woman to keep house,
and to be a joyful mother of children.

Questionary

1. In verses 4-6, the Psalmist lauds the greatness of God.
 - ? What image comes to your mind when you read that God “humbleth” or “lowers,” “abases” himself to look upon the universe?
 - ? What does it suggest to your mind that God has to abase himself in order to look upon the expansive universe, the earth, and all the happenings upon earth?
2. In verses 7-9, the Psalmist turns his attention to what God observes when he does abase himself to look upon this world.
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read the Psalmist’s focused testimony that when God does condescend to behold the things on earth, he involves himself intimately and helpfully in the challenges of the vulnerable—specifically mentioning the impoverished and the barren?
 - ? What image comes into your mind when you consider the poor digging through trash heaps? What are they looking for? What does it tell you about the insecurities of their lives?
3. In our “family focused” church today, we might read verse nine as another indication of the importance of the family. Fair enough. However, upon lumping the barren wife together with the vulnerable poor, the Psalmist wishes us to consider her from a “just society” perspective. The barren woman is societally vulnerable.
 - ? How is she vulnerable?
 - ? Consider the plight of women in ancient cultures, and some modern, who do not bear children. They can be divorced, and expelled from their homes. Where do they go then? How do they sustain themselves?
 - ? In light of these cultural tendencies, what are your thoughts when you consider God’s intervention in the plight of barren women?
4. The Psalmist does not just assure us that God assists the poor and needy. Rather, he “raiseth up” and “lifteth” them “that he may set him with “princes.”
 - ? How do you feel about the extravagant way that God intends to compensate the poor and needy for their life of suffering?
 - ? What does it suggest about the Lord’s feelings about inequality?

Psalm 113.⁷⁻⁹— just scripture

⁷He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

⁸That he may set him with princes,
even with the princes of his people.

⁹He maketh the barren woman to keep house,
and to be a joyful mother of children.

Questionary

- ? In the 3 verses before these, the Psalmist lauds the surpassing greatness of God. At the same time, the Psalmist testified, God “condescends” to observe, familiarize, and involve himself in the affairs of men. What, do you think, is the Psalmist up to when, in listing the human affairs in which God involves himself, he mentions and limits himself to God’s advocacy for vulnerable people?
- ? How is a “barren woman” vulnerable? How is her vulnerability similar to that of the poor and needy? How secure was her legal status in ancient days and even in some modern non-western cultures?

Psalm 115.⁴⁻⁸— lent

- ⁴Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of men's hands.
⁵They have mouths, but they speak not:
eyes have they, but they see not:
⁶They have ears, but they hear not:
noses have they, but they smell not:
⁷They have hands, but they handle not:
feet have they, but they walk not:
neither speak they through their throat.
⁸They that make them are like unto them;
so is every one that trusteth in them.

As we have previously discussed, Lent is a time for self-denial and the mortification of the flesh. Our 16th reading for Lent 2024 relates to this aspect of Lent.

1. In today's reading, the Psalmist addresses the senselessness and impotence of idols.

? When you read about idols, what do you see in your mind's eye?

If you think only of a physical object of wood, stone, metal, etc., shift your thinking to their purpose and the human psychology that is behind them.

? What is the purpose of an idol?

? What human psychological needs are idols supposed to address, meet, and improve?

? Idols are made and worship because they are thought to bring some benefit—often material and financial—to the worshipper. How does this understanding of idols shape the way you think of them and the answers to the previous questions?

In Colossians 3.5, Paul defines idolatry as “covetousness.

? What do you think and feel when you ponder the parallelism between idolatry and covetousness?

? How does the parallelism between idolatry and covetous further shape your understanding of what idols and the worshipping of them entails?

? An idol can be a thing, a person, or a place. What sorts of people, places, and things might be thought of as idols in today's world?

? What turns a common person, place or thing into an idol?

? Why is it so spiritually dangerous to place one's trust for happiness and security in people, places, or things rather in God Himself?

? What do you feel when you read the Psalmist's somewhat scornful description of the idol's senselessness and impotence?

? Why do idols deserve our scorn?

2. In the final verse, the Psalmist shifts his observations about idolatry from the idol to the individual who imbues the idol with false powers.

? How do you feel about the Psalmist concluding that individuals who worship idols are no better or any more potent than the worthless idol itself?

? How does an idol make us “senseless” and “impotent”?

? What can you do to expel all idols from your life?

Psalm 118.⁸⁻⁹— just scripture

⁸It is better to trust in the LORD
than to put confidence in man.

⁹It is better to trust in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes.

Questionary

- What does the evil of putting “confidence in man” and “princes” look like?
- ? How do political leaders tempt us to put “confidence” in them?

Psalm 120.¹⁻⁷— just scripture

¹It was YHWH that I, in my anguish, called upon.
How he responded to me!

²“YHWH! Deliver me from deceitful lips;
from a treacherous tongue.

³What will you procure for yourself?
What will you gain for yourself, you with the treacherous tongue?

⁴A hero’s arrows, sharp pointed, burning hot.

⁵I was in despair because I lived, an alien, in Mešek;
I lived a transient life in Qêdâr.

⁶Many a year did I live
among them who distained peaceful coexistence—

⁷though I spoke up for camaraderie,
they remained antagonistic (Author’s translation).

Questionary

The fifteen psalms from 120 through 134 are often referred to as “Songs of Degrees,” “Song of Ascent,” “Songs of Steps,” or “Songs of Pilgrims.” It is thought that Jews utilized them during pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the three Jewish festivals. Some have suggested, further, that Priests and worshippers sang the 15 songs as they ascended the 15 steps that rose from street level to the temple platform.

Given the content of this particular psalm, it seems that this use would have been current during the second temple period after the Jewish return from Babylonian exile.

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

¹In my distress I cried unto the LORD,
and he heard me.
²Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips,
and from a deceitful tongue.
³What shall be given unto thee?
or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?
⁴Sharp arrows of the mighty,
with coals of juniper.
⁵Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech,
that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!
⁶My soul hath long dwelt
with him that hateth peace.
⁷I am for peace:
but when I speak, they are for war.

1. In verse 1, the Psalmist speaks of his “anguish” from which Yahweh delivered him.
? After reading the remaining verses, what do you understand the Psalmist’s “anguish” to be?
2. In verses 2 and 3, the Psalmist speaks of “deceitful lips” and “treacherous tongues.”
? What is it about “lies” and “deceitfulness” that is so evil?
? How are lies “treacherous”?

We must often think of lying in terms of “cognition” and in relation to “facts,” “truth,” “data.” But by connecting deceit with treachery, the Psalmist reminds us that lies inflict harm on much more than “facts.” They show contempt for others and betray relationships.

- ? How do lies harm others—other than leaving them vulnerable to “false data points”?

- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider that the primary evil in lies is found in the fact that they are most often intended to inflict harm on another?
 - ? Consider the current residence of the white house and his habit, nearly instinctual, of lying. If he is not merely abusing “the facts,” but intending harm, what harm/s is he intending?
 - ? Given that lies are not only, or even primarily about “abusing the facts” but about abusing relationships between individuals and between individuals and institutions, what are some effective strategies for resisting lies and the liar?
3. Previously, you read the entire psalm to determine the nature of the Psalmist’s “anguish.” In verses 5-7, we find that the Psalmist’s “anguish” was his status as a refugee/resident alien among a population that would not treat him humanly and justly.
- ? Should the resident alien expect humane and just treatment at the hands of citizens and their government?
 - ? How is your nation doing in regard to the humane and just treatment of refugees/resident aliens?
 - ? How do you feel about the fact that
 - 1) the Psalmist felt, appropriately, the need to report his inhumane and unjust treatment as a refugee to God with the expectation that God would do something about it?
 - 2) God heeded the Psalmist’s complaint and helpfully responded in some fashion, as suggested in verse 1?
 - ? How would you feel about a refugee/resident alien today calling upon God because of their inhumane and/or unjust treatment at the hand of Americans and their government?
 - ? How would you feel about God responding by way of protection or justice for the mistreated refugee or resident alien?
 - ? Would you be deemed a participant in the mistreatment or an advocate for the mistreated? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What role might you play in assisting God as he aids mistreated refugees?
- ? Today’s reading represents a complaint the Psalmist made to God during a period when he lived as a refugee in a foreign nation. How do you feel about the Psalmist presenting a complaint to God about the inhumane and unjust treatment he experiences as a refugee?
 - ? Earlier in the psalm, the Psalmist informed us that God responded to his plea for help. How do you feel about God coming to the aid of the mistreated refugees?
 - ? There have been and are mistreated refugees in and about the U.S. How would you feel about God coming to the aid of those refugees? What form would that aid take?
 - ? What role might you play in assisting God as he aids mistreated refugees?

Psalm 127.¹

Except the LORD build the house,
they labour in vain that build it:
except the LORD keep the city,
the watchman waketh but in vain.

Questionary

- ? What would you do and how would you act upon the Psalmist's testimony of dependence upon God for success in all we do?
- ? What other scriptures come to mind that teach this same principle?
- ? How would Moroni's admonition to "rely alone upon the merits of Christ" relate to the Psalmist's testimony here? (Moroni 6.⁴)

Psalm 130.¹⁻⁸— atonement

¹Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice:
let thine ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications.

³If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who shall stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

⁵I wait for the LORD,
my soul doth wait,
and in his word do I hope.

⁶My soul waiteth for the Lord
more than they that watch for the morning:
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

⁷Let Israel hope in the LORD:
for with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.

⁸And he shall redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement.”*

Psalm 130 is one of the “Psalms of Ascent.” It is also the sixth of seven Penitential Psalms.

1. Psalm 130 might be thought of as a prayer offered in association with a “sin offering.”
 - ? How does this possibility impact how you understand the psalm and the feeling that you get from it?
2. The Psalmist begins his prayer by informing God that his prayer is coming “out of the depths.”
 - ? What do you see when you imagine “depths”?
 - We avoid deep places. Such places are dark and cold. Deep places intimidate us. If we are talking about watery depths, then deep places suffocate and kill.
 - ? As you consider this psalm, what are the “depths” that threaten the Psalmist?
 - ? The depths are a metaphor for the Psalmist’s iniquities— abundant enough to bury, and threaten to snuff out his life. Have you felt your sins to be threatening?
 - ? How were they threatening and what did you do about it?
3. Consider the question posed by the Psalmist: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”
 - ? What do you think about this question?
 - ? What is the answer to the Psalmist’s question?
 - ? What does it mean to “mark” sin?
 - ? Does anyone live without iniquities?
 - ? If we accept the implied answer that no one lives without sin and that no one can stand before God if he marks their sins, who will be able to stand before the Lord?
 - ? What is it that gives anyone the ability to stand before the Lord?
4. The Psalmist’s question suggests that the Lord does not “mark” our sins? To “mark” means to “call to mind,” “acknowledge,” “pay attention.”
 - ? What do you think about the suggestion that the Lord does not “take note” of all our

- iniquities?
- ? What makes it possible for him to “overlook” our iniquities?
 - ? What does this suggest about the character of God?
 - ? How does God’s feelings of at-one-ment—connectedness, attachment, unity—with us influence this willingness to overlook the sin we inevitably commit?
5. In verse 6 the Psalmist says that he “waiteth for the Lord.”
- ? What do you think the Psalmist is waiting for?
- Consider the possibility that the Psalmist is waiting to hear the voice of the Lord come into his mind, as Enos did, that his sins are forgiven, or, in other words, that the Lord refuses to “mark” his “iniquities.”
- ? Have you sensed this willingness on the part of God to not “mark your iniquities”?
 - ? What does it mean to “wait”? What kind of a wait is it? Is it an anxious, uncertain wait? Or is it a hopeful, expectant wait?
- The Hebrew word suggests the latter.
6. Think about the Psalmist’s confession that he waits on the Lord “more than they that watch for the morning.”
- ? How confident and expectant are you that the morning will arrive?
 - ? Do you possess this same degree of expectancy about the Lord’s willingness to forgive you?
 - ? Do you possess this same degree of expectancy that the Lord does and will forgive you?
 - ? What is the basis for the Psalmist’s confidence? How does verse 7 answer this question?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 130.¹⁻⁸— lent

¹Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice:
let thine ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications.

³If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who shall stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

⁵I wait for the LORD,
my soul doth wait,
and in his word do I hope.

⁶My soul waiteth for the Lord
more than they that watch for the morning:
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

⁷Let Israel hope in the LORD:
for with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.

⁸And he shall redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Questionary

Today's reading is our 19th reading for Lent 2024. It is also one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement." It is also one of the "Psalms of Ascent" and the sixth of seven Penitential Psalms. It is, then, a busy Psalm, one frequently represented on this site, and one of my favorites.

1. Psalm 130 might be thought of as a prayer offered in association with a sacrifice offered in hopes of atonement or forgiveness of sin. For example,

"If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev. 1.³⁻⁴).

- ? How does this possibility impact how you understand the psalm and the feeling that you get from it?
2. The Psalmist begins his prayer by informing God that his prayer is coming "out of the depths."
 - ? What do you see when you imagine "depths"?

We avoid deep places. Such places are dark and cold. Deep places intimidate us. They can bring death.

 - ? As you consider this psalm, what are the "depths" that threaten the Psalmist?
 - ? The depths are a metaphor for the Psalmist's iniquities— abundant enough to bury, and threaten to snuff out his life. Have you felt or do you now feel your sins to be threatening? Why?
 - ? How were/ are they threatening and what did/ can you do about it?
3. Consider the question posed by the Psalmist: "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"
 - ? What do you think about this question?
 - ? What is the answer to the Psalmist's question?
 - ? What does it mean to "mark" sin?

- ? Does anyone live without iniquities?
 - ? If we accept the implied answer that no one lives without sin and that no one can stand before God if He marks their sins, who will be able to stand before the Lord?
 - ? What is it that gives anyone the ability to stand before the Lord?
 - ? How can the realization that we are all—from the “best” of us to the “worst” of us—in the same boat serve to unite rather than divide us?
4. The Psalmist’s question suggests that the Lord does not “mark” our sins? To “mark” means to “call to mind,” “acknowledge,” “pay attention.”
- ? What do you think about the suggestion that the Lord does not always “take note of” or “pay attention to all our iniquities?
 - ? What makes it possible for him to not only “forgive,” but “overlook” or “ignore” our iniquities?
 - ? How do you think and feel about the suggestion that God often chooses not so much to forgive sin but to ignore it in the first place?
 - ? What does this suggest about the character of God?
5. In verse 6 the Psalmist says that he “waiteth for the Lord.”
- ? What do you think the Psalmist is waiting for?
- Consider the possibility that the Psalmist is waiting to hear the voice of the Lord come into his mind, as Enos did, that his sins are forgiven, or, in other words, that the Lord refuses to “mark” his “iniquities.”
- ? Have you sensed this willingness on the part of God to not “mark your iniquities”?
 - ? What does it mean to “wait”? What kind of a wait is it? Is it an anxious, uncertain wait? Or is it a hopeful, expectant wait? What is the difference between the two? Why do you answer as you do?
- The Hebrew word, “wait,” suggests the latter.
6. Think about the Psalmist’s confession that he waits on the Lord “more than they that watch for the morning.”
- ? How confident and expectant are you that the morning will arrive?
 - ? Do you possess this same degree of expectancy about the Lord’s willingness to forgive you?
 - ? Do you possess this same degree of expectancy that the Lord does and will forgive you?
 - ? What is the basis for the Psalmist’s confidence?
 - ? How does verse 7 answer this question—with him is plenteous redemption”?
 - ? Does the notion that redemption is “plenteous” with God comport with your own experiences with God? Why do you answer as you do?

Psalm 140.¹²— just scripture

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted,
and the right of the poor.

Questionary

- ? What “rights” do the poor have?
- ? Why is the legal status of the poor so often undermined, thus needing the Lord and his followers to advocate for them?
- ? What do you do as an individual and as a citizen to “maintain the cause” of those whom society humiliates”?

Psalm 143.¹⁻²— Atonement

- ¹Hear my prayer, O LORD,
give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness
answer me, and in thy righteousness.
²And enter not into judgment with thy servant:
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Questionary

Psalm 143 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 142). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. For both Jew and Christian, they have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God.

Today's is the first of five readings from Psalm 143. It also represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Our Need of Atonement." *

1. After pleading three times for God to hear his prayer, the Psalmist offers one plea and declares one very important truth—a truth related to the one plea. We will look first at the asserted truth:

“In thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

To be “justified” is to be thought of as “righteous.” It is to be “innocent,” “blameless,” or “free of guilt.” It is to be “right with God,” or to be “acceptable to God.”

- ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's contention?
- ? Why is his assertion accurate?
- ? Accepting his assertion and granting that it is an accurate description of your position, what do you do about it?
- ? How do you go about being and feeling “acceptable to God”?
- ? How do the following passages add light to the Psalmist's assertion?

“And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2.⁵).

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:²⁰⁻²⁶).

2. We now turn to the Psalmist's plea:

“Enter not into judgment with thy servant.”

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? How is it possible for God to “not enter into judgment” with someone? Isn't God a God of judgment? Isn't it necessary for him to “judge” us? What is the Psalmist after, if not the impossible?

Consider the following words, part of another prayer—this one offered by the prophet Zenos.

“And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.’

“And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: ‘Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son’” (Alma 33.¹¹⁻¹³).

- ? Does this prayer shed any light on the Psalmist plea? If so, how and what?
- ? Based on the insights you have gleaned from the Psalmist’s plea and assertion, along with the other passages reviewed above, can you, in good conscience and with a lively expectation of having your request granted, ask today that God “not enter into judgment with you”?
- ? If not, why not? What seems to you to be missing?
- ? If yes... what are you waiting for? For, as always, the “Day of Atonement” is upon us!

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 143.³⁻⁷

³For the enemy hath persecuted my soul;
he hath smitten my life down to the ground;
he hath made me to dwell in darkness,
as those that have been long dead.
⁴Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me;
my heart within me is desolate.
⁵I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all thy works;
I muse on the work of thy hands.
⁶I stretch forth my hands unto thee:
my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.
⁷Hear me speedily, O LORD:
my spirit faileth:
hide not thy face from me,
lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.

Q

uestionary

Psalm 143 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's is the second of three readings from Psalm 143, and represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Our Need of Atonement." *

Because of the nature of today's thoughts and questions, it seems appropriate to remind the reader of the following suggestions shared in previous readings from the Psalms.

Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, psalms attributed to David are often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l^e-david* may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. We have, by now, grown accustomed to the Psalmist's use of extreme imagery in the penitential psalms. Here is some of the imagery from Psalm 102.
 - The Psalmist feels that his life is "smitten...down to the ground"
 - The Psalmist feels that he is "made...to dwell in darkness"
 - The Psalmist feels "like unto them that go down into the pit"
- ? What do you make of the following statements?
? How do you feel about them?

- ? What do they have in common?
 - ? Could you agree with the statement that the Psalmist, because of the accusation of sin, feels threatened by more than just “physical death, but by the spiritual experience we call “hell”?
 - ? What does it mean to experience “hell”?
2. Now, again, forget about this being David. Others, whom we consider very good people, have also felt threatened by “hell.” Consider the following passages.

“But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1.¹⁵)

“I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 33.⁶).

It would seem strange for these two men, Lehi and Nephi, to feel gratitude for a “redemption” from a horror that was never actually likely. Thus, it seems that we must consider that Lehi and Nephi thought of their suffering in hell as a real possibility.

- ? How do you feel about this?
- ? Given who they were, how could they have considered such a possibility?
- ? Have you felt, or do you feel now that you are in danger of suffering “hell”?
- ? Should you have? Should you now?
- ? If not, why?
- ? Do you have a sense that you have been in any sense redeemed from hell?

Psalm 143.⁸⁻¹²

⁸Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;
for in thee do I trust:
cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;
for I lift up my soul unto thee.

⁹Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies:
I flee unto thee to hide me.

¹⁰Teach me to do thy will;
for thou art my God:
thy spirit is good;
lead me into the land of uprightness.

¹¹Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake:
for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

¹²And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies,
and destroy all them that afflict my soul:
for I am thy servant.

Questionary

Psalm 143 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Today's is the last of three readings from Psalm 143, and represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Our Need of Atonement." *

1. In requesting that Yahweh act in his life, the Psalmist uses seven verbs for the divine actions for which he hopes.

Cause me to hear...
Cause me to know...
Deliver me...
Teach me...
Lead me...
Quicken me...
Bring me out...

- ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's expectation that God will act so dynamically in his life?
- ? Have you found God to act so dynamically in your life?
- ? If so, why has he done so? If not, why not?
- ? If he has acted in a way that is reflected by one or more of these verbs, take a moment to reflect upon your experience, what you learned and how you felt about the assistance.

2. The Psalmist confesses, "I flee unto thee to hide me."

- ? What do you see in your mind when you consider this imagery of God "hiding" someone?
- ? How does this relate to the Psalmist's sins?
- ? What would it mean for God to hide someone from their sins and their consequences?
- ? Does this seem an appropriate role for God?

Psalm 143.^{1-2, 4, 6-9}— lent

¹Hear my prayer, O LORD,
give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness
answer me, and in thy righteousness.

²And enter not into judgment with thy servant:
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

⁴Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me;
my heart within me is desolate.

⁶I stretch forth my hands unto thee:
my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.

⁷Hear me speedily, O LORD:
my spirit faileth:

hide not thy face from me,
lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.

⁸Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;
for in thee do I trust:

cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;
for I lift up my soul unto thee...

⁹I flee unto thee to hide me.

Questionary

In today's reading, the 27th for Lent 2024, we return to the Penitential psalms, so appropriate to the season.

1. In requesting that God hear his plea, the Psalmist makes appeal to two of God's attributes.
 - ? What are those two attributes?
 - ? What is the significance of the Psalmist appealing to God's "faithfulness" and "righteousness" as he seeks to be heard?
 - ? What do you understand God's "faithfulness" and "righteousness" to be?
 - ? How do you feel about God's "faithfulness" if we define it as "fidelity"?
2. The Psalmist confesses that "in thy sight shall no man living be justified."
 - ? What does it mean to be "justified"?
 - ? What does it mean to you that no one can "be justified" or "thought right" in God's eyes?
 - ? How does this relate to the Psalmist's appeal to God's "faithfulness" and "righteousness" rather than his own?

Verse 2 and the sentiments it expresses became central to Paul doctrine of justification by faith. For example, in Romans 3, after quoting several passages from the Psalms, Paul concludes,

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law *there shall no flesh be justified in his sight*: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (verses 19-20).

- ? Why is it impossible for individuals to be viewed as innocent, right, and not-guilty in the sight of God through their individual spiritual efforts?
3. Because of his failure and sin the Psalmist confesses to feeling overwhelmed, desolate, thirsty (spiritually), and failing.
 - ? Can you relate to such feelings?
 - ? If so, what direction does the Psalmist provide in today's reading that might lead to a release from such feelings?

4. The Psalmist pleads,

“Hide not thy face from me,
lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.”

? What does the Psalmist mean by “the pit”?

The “pit” can refer to the world of the dead in general, or to “hell” more narrowly. Some understand the Psalm to have been written by David and that David was in danger of going to hell for his murder. However, this reading of the text is dubious for a number of reasons and is, anyway, far too narrow. The fact is everyone is in danger of going to hell.

Consider Lehi and Nephi of Book of Mormon fame—pretty “good” people. Lehi prays,

“But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.”

His son, Nephi, prays,

“May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite!”

Elsewhere, Nephi speaks of “death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit” (2 Ne. 9.¹⁰). Moreover, Nephi speaks of “that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment” (2 Ne. 9.¹⁹).

It seems clear that “hell” is something more than the death of the body and an eternal grave. It is a torment to the spirit as well. Both men view hell as a very real, tormenting, ongoing, and eternal threat to their very being.

? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that individuals such as Lehi and Nephi felt threatened by hell and gratitude for having been delivered from it?

? Have you ever felt so threatened?

? How do the words of the Psalmist in today’s reading, comfort you as you contemplate your sins and the threat they pose to your happiness and final destiny?

Psalm 145.³⁻¹³ — **Atonement**

- ³Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
and his greatness is unsearchable.
- ⁴One generation shall praise thy works to another,
and shall declare thy mighty acts.
- ⁵I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,
and of thy wondrous works.
- ⁶And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts:
and I will declare thy greatness.
- ⁷They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness,
and shall sing of thy righteousness.
- ⁸The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion;
slow to anger, and of great mercy.
- ⁹The LORD is good to all:
and his tender mercies are over all his works.
- ¹⁰All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD;
and thy saints shall bless thee.
- ¹¹They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and talk of thy power;
- ¹²To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts,
and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.
- ¹³Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

1. In today’s Psalm, the Psalmist makes quite a list of God’s qualities and excellencies that make Him worthy of praise.
 - ? What divine qualities and excellencies do you find?
 - ? Consider each of them. How do you feel about them?
 2. The Psalmist utilizes a good deal of repetition as he speaks of “thy works,” “thy mighty acts,” “thy wondrous works,” and “thy terrible acts.”
 - ? Why do you feel he utilizes such repetition?
 - ? How do you feel after this repetition?
 - ? What mighty and wondrous acts has God performed in your life?
 3. In speaking about the greatness of God, the Psalmist and others “praise,” “declare,” “speak,” “utter,” “sing,” “bless,” and “talk.”
 - ? Do these all mean essentially the same thing, or is there significance to this variety of speech?
- ? How strongly do you share in the Psalmist’s feelings of praise for God?
- ? How could you encourage and enhance appreciation of God in other’s life, as the Psalmist hopes to do in the life of his readers?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
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“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 146.³— just scripture

Put not your trust in princes,
nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

Questionary

? In what ways is “there no help” in government institutions or officers?

Psalm 146.⁵⁻⁹— just scripture

⁵Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,
whose hope is in the LORD his God:

⁶Which made heaven, and earth,
the sea, and all that therein is:

which keepeth truth for ever:

⁷Which executeth judgment for the oppressed:
which giveth food to the hungry.

⁸The LORD looseth the prisoners:

The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind:

the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down:

the LORD loveth the righteous:

⁹The LORD preserveth the strangers;

he relieveth the fatherless and widow:

but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

Questionary

- ? What would the Psalmist have you consider when he testifies that the one who you have as a help is the creator of all things?
- ? In today's reading the "oppressed," "hungry," "prisoner," "blind," "bowed," "stranger," "fatherless," and "widow"—all of whom God looks after according to their various needs-- are all opposed by "the wicked," whom God therefore opposes. How do you feel about all those who oppose and refuse to help these various vulnerable classes being thought of as "wicked"?
- ? How are you and your society doing caring for these same vulnerable classes?

Psalm 147.¹

Praise ye the LORD:
for it is good to sing praises unto our God;
for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.

Questionary

- ? Certainly, we praise God best by our actions. However, he also cares much about our words of praise. In what manner, how often, and to what degree do you praise God?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that such praise “pleases” God and is viewed as “comely”?

Psalm 147.¹⁰⁻¹¹

¹⁰He delighteth not in the strength of the horse:
he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.

¹¹The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him,
in those that hope in his mercy.

Questionary

1. We sometimes read of the pre-mortal existence's "noble and great ones" who were "chosen" because "they were good" (Abraham 3.²²⁻²³) and feel our heart sink, wondering if our "spiritual skill set" is sufficient for the challenges of the present world and the glories of the world to come. I am not sure what this passage means for us to understand about these "noble and great ones," but I am sure that if it has this negative affect upon us we have likely misunderstood the nature of these "great ones" and certainly underappreciated our God's willingness and ability to act in our lives.

? How does today's reading serve to address and correct any such misperceptions and to increase our confident expectations of God's willingness and ability to make us up to any need, and prepare us for the greatest of glories?

2. Think about the imagery of this passage. Imagine the powerful muscles of a running horse. Picture the force and speed of a swift runner. These are metaphors for spiritual strength and capacity.

? Why are such "natural" strengths so unimpressive and unimportant as God considers working in our lives?

3. God cares little about our strengths or the lack thereof. He is not limited by our abilities. Strength and success flow from a source other than these.

? What is that source according to verse 11?

4. Strength and success comes to those who rely upon God and live in expectation of His continued and continuous fidelity and commitment to them and their success. Consider Ephesians 1.¹⁹⁻²⁰, in which Paul expresses his hope that the saints will understand

"what is the exceeding greatness of [God's] power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

Consider, also, that two chapters later, Paul speaks of God as one who

"is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (3.²⁰⁻²¹).

? How do Paul's expressions of faith in God and His willingness and ability to act in our weak lives relate to today's reading?

Psalm 148.¹³

Let them praise the name of the LORD:
for his name alone is excellent;
his glory is above the earth and heaven.

Questionary

- ? The Psalmist's, "his name ALONE is excellent," reminds one of the hymnist's sentiments: "Redeemer of Israel, our ONLY delight." Of who else's name could the same be said?
- ? Who else could possibly be our "Only delight"?
- ? Do you share these poetic sentiments?
- ? How are these sentiments reflected in your daily life?

Psalm 149.^{2, 4-6}

²Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:
let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

⁴For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people:
he will beautify the meek with salvation.

⁵Let the saints be joyful in glory:
let them sing aloud upon their beds.

⁶Let the high praises of God be in their mouth...

Questionary

- ? What comes to your mind when you read the Psalmist's admonition, "Let the high praises of God be in [your] mouth"?
- ? What is a "high praise"?
- ? How do you and your fellow congregants express "high praises" with the "mouth"?

Psalm 150.¹⁻⁶— **Atonement**

¹Praise ye the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary:
praise him in the firmament of his power.

²Praise him for his mighty acts:
praise him according to his excellent greatness.

³Praise him with the sound of the trumpet:
praise him with the psaltery and harp.

⁴Praise him with the timbrel and dance:
praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

⁵Praise him upon the loud cymbals:
praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

⁶Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.
Praise ye the LORD.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

1. In this reading, the Book of Psalm’s final psalm, we are told where to praise God, why to praise God, and how to praise God.

? Where, why, and how does the Psalmist say to praise God?

Different cultures have different ways of praising. Some are quite and somber, others are louder and more enthusiastic. As we read this psalm’ exuberant form of praise, with its inclusion of dance, we might think of the man healed by Peter who “entered...into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3.⁸).

? How do you feel about louder, more exuberant form of praise that is called for here?

2. As we have said before, one praises God through acts and through words.

? How would you characterize your praise of God through words?

? What can you do to possess and exhibit a greater degree of praise?

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