



*Wisdom  
for Waiting*

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PSALMS OF EXILE

A Study for the Season of Advent

Dr. Tom Smiley, Senior Pastor



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Lakewood Press  
Dr. Tom Smiley, Senior Pastor

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## *Pastor's Letter*

*M*ERRY CHRISTMAS! I love Christmas. It's not all the "secular stuff" but rather the thought of "GOD WITH US!" This is big. Christmas is an annual reminder: God is with us, and he will never leave us and never forsake us.

We prepare for Christmas through the season of Advent. In this season, we remember Jesus's birth and look forward to his return. Advent helps prepare us for Christmas by making us wait. As we wait to celebrate the joy of Christmas, we remember how God's people waited for the birth of his Son. As we wait for Christmas, we also recognize that we live in a time of waiting as we look for Jesus to return.

As a kid, all you seem to do at Christmas is wait. We have to wait until after dinner to eat dessert. We have to wait until Christmas to open presents. I remember one year I was determined to wait at the fireplace all night to see St. Nick come down that chimney. I fell asleep and "missed" him. Even now, it's difficult to wait this time of year.

As Christ followers, we live with the joy of God with us now even as we wait with hope to live with him forever. We need wisdom to wait well. We need God's wisdom to wait in a manner that honors him. We find God's wisdom in his Word, and so this season, we turn to the psalms to hear about how God's people waited in exile for him to act. As we remember Jesus's birth and wait for his return, I pray that these psalms confirm our sure hope in God and his faithfulness. May God give us his wisdom for waiting well.

I hope you'll join me in reading the pages of this devotional as we prepare our hearts for Advent!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal stroke above the letters.

Dr. Tom Smiley  
Senior Pastor  
Lakewood Baptist Church



Advent looks back to the first coming of Christ and looks forward to his second coming. Both of these comings fill us with hope as we remember that the Son of God has come and we wait for his coming again. As we long for Christ's return, we can sense that we are not at home in this world. Scripture describes our lives as Christians between Jesus's first and second comings as exile. We know that this world is not our home, that we are longing for a city whose builder and architect is God. We long for the return of Jesus Christ who will make all things new.

In the Old Testament, God's people also found themselves in exile. They had been conquered and taken from their homeland. Psalms 73-89 are known as the "exilic psalms" because they describe Israel's life in exile. In exile, they looked back, remembering what God had done in the past to redeem them from Egypt and deliver them into the Promised Land. They also looked forward, hoping and praying that God would deliver them again. These psalms deal with the struggles and suffering of living in a place that is not your home, but these psalms are also filled with hope as God's people long for him to act.

Unlike in the Old Testament exile, our hope is not that we will be taken from the land of our exile. Our hope is not that we would escape from this world. Rather, our hope is that God will transform the land of our exile into his new creation, our promised land, our true and better home. The world is not our home, but God will transform this world into our home through the work of Jesus Christ. Even now, we catch a glimpse of that new creation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we trust in him by faith, we are made new and will one day be raised with resurrection bodies to enjoy the new creation in the light of his glorious presence. In that day, he will have made all things new, and "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

We look to these seventeen psalms to remind us of the hope that can only be found in Christ. We ask that the Lord would free us from the idols of this life and find our strength and our portion in him. We look to these psalms for wisdom while waiting in exile as we long for the completion of our redemption when Christ returns.

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Whom have I in HEAVEN but you?  
And there is nothing on EARTH that I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail, but

*God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever.*

**PSALM 73:25-26**

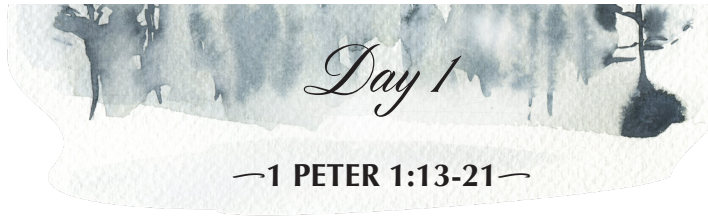




*Advent*

WEEK ONE





## **You are in exile.**

This statement is true of you if you are a Christian and are presently living on this earth. Living in exile is a terrifying reality. You are far from home, too far to see the familiar sights that have long comforted you. You are far from your loved ones, distant from those who have cared for you and whom you have loved. You are surrounded by strangers, and yet you are the one who is the stranger among others. You speak a different language; you have different customs; you are utterly out of place and unfamiliar. This is life as an exile.

The New Testament, especially Peter, uses the language of exile and stranger to describe the Christian life. In the same way as, for example, a Jewish Christian living in first-century Jerusalem may have been forced out of home and resigned to live in Cappadocia, so too Christians are living in a place that is not our true and eternal home. This means there are sure to be elements of life in this present world that make us uncomfortable, uncertain, and unsettled.

Yet, in the midst of this frightful reality, Peter says, “If you call on God as Father. . . conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1 Pet 1:17). Surprisingly, of course, he does not mean you should be scared to make your way through life in exile, but that in the midst of this dangerous exile you should be more mindful of the God you call Father and less anxious of the trials you are sure to face in a foreign country behind enemy lines.

As Christians, we must know that we are distinct from the rest of the world. Peter knew this to be true. He even quoted from Leviticus 11:44, “For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy” (see 1 Pet 1:16). We (Christians) should appear distinct from the world because we have a God who alone is holy and has created his people to be holy as he is.

And the best part? To rescue us from our exile, God himself came down to save us. Jesus Christ—the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us—came to seek and to save that which was lost, namely, God’s people. He ransomed us, not with gold or silver, and not even with the most brilliant wonders of the universe that he himself created. God ransomed us “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19). The one who was “foreknown before the foundation of the world,” Jesus Christ, has come into the world for our sake and “was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God” (1 Pet 1:20). This Jesus, who gave himself to death on a cross for the sake of God’s people, was raised from the dead and has received the



glory of the Father so that when you believe in Jesus “your faith and hope are in God” (1 Pet 1:21).

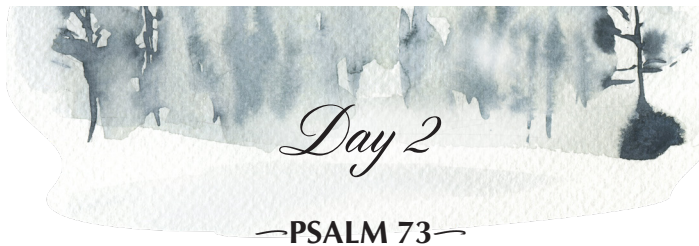
This is good news for the homesick—the one who sees and knows that the world is not as it should be. And this is God’s wisdom for those who are waiting for Christ to return and renew all things. Even in your waiting, know that your hope is in God, and he who has saved you will never fail you; he who has come to rescue you will not ever forsake you.

As we journey through this advent season, let’s set our hope upon the God who saves.

—BY DR. TYLER SMILEY

*as he who called you is*  
**HOLY,**  
*you also be*  
**HOLY**





*W*hy do good things happen to bad people? The wicked prosper while those who seek the Lord suffer. The wicked—those who reject God and his ways—have their health and their wealth. They prosper even though their lives are marked by pride, violence, and hatred. They curse God and live as though he does not see them. “Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches” (Ps 73:12). Something is wrong with the way the world works.

Psalm 73 wrestles with this reality, and if we dare to be honest with ourselves, so do we. We struggle to understand how God can be good and just, and yet those who have rejected him experience ease, health, and prosperity. Our sense of injustice, and even despair, can be heightened this time of year. How can they afford those gifts for their kids? Lord, should I, too, be dishonest so I can lead the team in sales? So I could win more bids? So I could get the bonus? How can their home be so perfectly decorated? How is that person surrounded by so many family and friends when I am alone this season?

Surely, something is not quite right with the world, but these questions reveal that there is also something not quite right with my heart. “I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . my soul was embittered” (Ps 73:3, 21). Jealousy and bitterness overwhelm contentment and joy.

Such feelings reveal that we still need to grasp more fully the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the good news that God has come for us, we find the hope we need to live in a broken world.

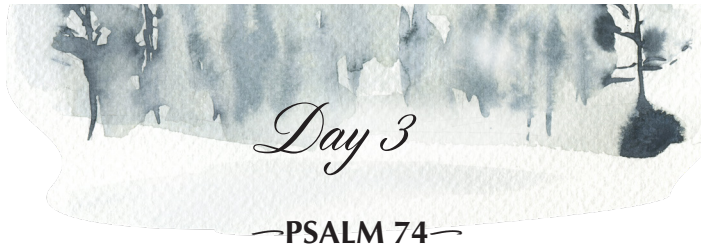
The gospel gives us future hope (Ps 73:16-22). It changes our perspective. Jesus’s good news enables us to live with eternity in mind. God’s goodness and justice is not limited to this age but will be perfectly fulfilled when Christ comes again. We long for the second coming of Christ when all will be made right.

The gospel gives us hope for today (Ps 73:23-28). It reminds us that God has already drawn near to us, and that in Jesus, he has given us more than we could ask or imagine.

He has given us himself. God is our portion and our strength. With the first coming of Christ, he has drawn near to us in order that we could share in the life of our Trinity and so “be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19).

This world is not our home. Yet, God in Christ has come to us, so that we might now be at home with him by his Spirit.

—DR. JOHN D. MORRISON



I am writing this devotional on September 11, the anniversary of a most devastating day in the history of America. I well remember watching it unfold with hourly reports of planes going down, the towers falling, and lives literally ending in front of our eyes. We, as a nation watched helplessly it seemed, as terrorists attacked our country. It left us all shaken to the core and looking to God with broken hearts and big questions.

This is where we find the nation of Israel in Psalm 74. Jerusalem had been attacked by the Babylonians, and the temple, the most holy place, had been desecrated and ransacked. 2 Kings 25 describes the terrible invasion, and it reads like a blow by blow account with each report increasing in horrific devastation. Finally, verse 21 states, "So Judah went into captivity, away from her land." They were marched away to serve another king in another land, broken hearted with big questions. Reread verses 1-11 of Psalm 74 and hear the desperation of their cries of "Remember us?" "See what they did?" "Why?" "How long?" Verse 11 reveals the only answer they can come to since they can see no miraculous signs and hear no words from the prophets who speak for God. It seems that God must have his mighty hand in his pocket. They cry out to him to "DO SOMETHING!"

2020 has been some kind of year. It has felt like an invasion of sorts that has prompted my own big questions to rise to the surface, and I just want God to do something to bring all this turmoil to an end. It has me longing for him to reveal himself to this world. I want him to show the world that he is real and sovereign. I want him to finally make right all that sin has marred. There would be 70 more years for the Israelites to live in exile in Babylon. We could have that many years or more in front of us before God sends Jesus to make this broken world new again.

So how do we live in the meantime? We take our cue from Psalm 74: 12, "But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth." These words are an indication to me of the hopeful faith in the hearts of those who belong to God. No matter the circumstances, the Spirit within us reminds of us of an unchanging truth: God brings salvation upon the earth. As we begin this season of Advent, let us lift our eyes to him in hopeful faith with assurance that salvation has come in Christ and that salvation will come when Christ returns.

—DAWN SMITH



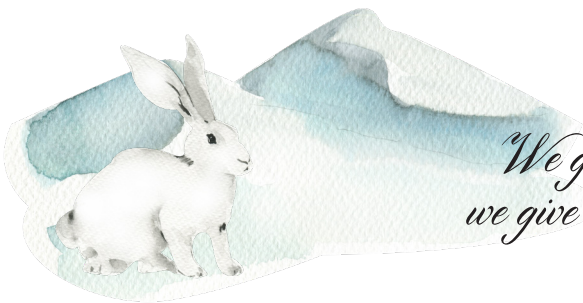


As Christians, we are a group of sojourners and strangers, wandering the earth and longing for the day when Christ will come and make all things new again. But while we sojourn, our journey is challenging, and we are reminded that all has not been made right at this present time. As 2020 makes its final turn into December, we eagerly await its conclusion. The social and political tension in our country has caused many to search to make sense of the world and for a way forward. The outcries from across the country and across the political spectrum demonstrate that there is an underlying desire for justice in this world—even when there is not agreement on what justice is. Psalm 75 reminds us that God’s perfect justice ultimately will prevail. As Christians, we have a certain hope that our unrest will cease and that God’s peace will reign.

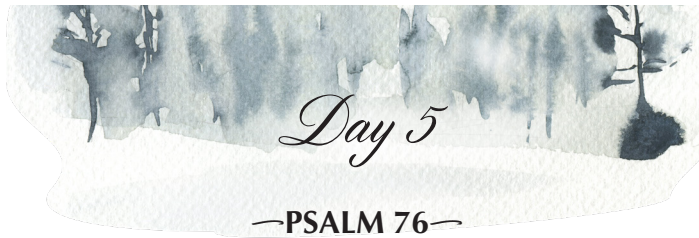
Our hope is in Christ alone, the one, true judge, who will bring perfect justice in his timing and make all things right. While we watch and read the news wondering, “Where is God?” we are reminded that he is always present and will act in his perfect timing. And until he does make all things right, he keeps the earth spinning (Ps 75:2-3). While we might be tempted to put our hope in various organizations or leaders, we are reminded that it is God alone who executes justice, and leaders rise and fall as his agents of justice (Ps 75:6-7). His righteousness generates our praise of King Jesus. There is already in his hand, a cup of perfect justice, ready to be poured out and consumed by the wicked until there is no more (Ps 75:8).

Therefore, since we have this certain hope that God will execute perfect justice in his perfect time, we can join Asaph and praise God. We are called to praise God because of what he has done and will do on our behalf and for his glory. This is why we celebrate the coming of Christ. He is the promised One who has come to save the world of her sins. He invites all of us who know him as Lord to rest in the certain hope that he will vindicate all who are weary and oppressed through his perfect judgement, making all things new again.

—KIP WRIGHT



*We give THANKS to you, O GOD;  
we give THANKS for your NAME is near.*



## Day 5

### —PSALM 76—

This psalm is a song of Asaph. It is most likely a song of victory recalling the judgement God brought upon the armies of Sennecherib (2 Kgs 19). This psalm begins with the simple phrase, “In Judah, God is known; his name is great in Israel” (Ps 76:1). Israel at this time was a divided kingdom—Israel to the north and Judah to south. Much like our country today, there was great division within Israel. Yet, what could be agreed upon in the divided kingdom was that God could be known, and his name was great.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said by a plurality in our country today. There is violence, vitriol, anger, and hatred. There seems to be little to no consensus on any topic, much less on the knowledge of God and the greatness of his name.

A closer look at Psalm 76 gives us a glimpse into the fear that had come over Judah to the south as the King of Assyria threatened them (2 Kgs 19; Isa 37). King Hezekiah, king of Judah, prayed this prayer of deliverance, “O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. . . . save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone” (2 Kgs 19:15-19).

As a nation, we know division and fear. What is the solution? Is it political? Is it legislative? Is it educational? Is it economic? Is it cultural? Is it medical? Many are convinced some combination of these solutions would cure our nation’s ills. They may provide some semblance of temporary relief for our problems, but the relief is not likely to be long-lasting. Those were not the solutions for ancient Israel, and they will not be the solutions for us today.

As the Body of Christ, what are we then to do? How are we to face fear and division? As we wait with hope for the advent of Christ, what is the prescription for relief of the ills that befall us nationally? We face fear and division today by continually making God known and proclaiming the greatness of his name. Only in Christ do we have hope. Only in him can we truly be united.

—W. SCOTT SMITH







*Advent*

WEEK TWO



# Day 1

## —HEBREWS 11:8-16—

Throughout Scripture, Abraham is recognized as a man of faith. Abraham “believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Abraham’s faith was an active faith. He put his faith into action. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that it was by faith that Abraham obeyed God. By faith, he left his home, not knowing where he was going, and he wandered in a foreign land, living in tents (Heb 11:8-9).

Abraham left his home and all that he knew because his faith elevated his vision to see his true and better home. Notice how Hebrews 11:10 begins, “For.” The author is about to explain the why of Abraham’s actions: “For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and architect is God” (Heb 11:10). His faith gave him an eternal perspective that pointed beyond this world.

The Old Testament people of God shared Abraham’s faith. They did not receive what the Lord promised, but they saw them “and greeted them from afar,” and it was such faith that led them to see themselves as “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb 11:13). They understood that this world was not their home, but instead, they were seeking a better homeland. “They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb 11:16). Their faith helped them see beyond this world to their true home with God.

What was promised in the Old Testament, we have begun to see fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He has come as the way to this better home, to our true home with our Father (Jn 14:6). The way of faith, the way to the Father beckons us to leave the comfort of our current homes. Jesus tells us, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34).

Abraham left his home without knowing where he was going. He lived in tents in a strange and foreign land. What is God calling on you to leave in order to follow his Son? Such a journey of faith is not easy as we sojourn through this world as aliens and strangers, longing for our true and better home.

We have hope in such homesickness because Christ has come and will come again. We have hope because Christ came and took on flesh to blaze the trail to our true home. We have hope because Christ will come again to bring us home.

—DR. JOHN D. MORRISON





—PSALM 77—

The season from Thanksgiving to Christmas is one usually filled with love and family, but it can often become one of the loneliest times for many of us. It is easy to become overwhelmed during this time of year and to begin to feel lonely and even forgotten.

As difficult as the loneliness of holidays can be, there's an even deeper sense of loneliness and isolation we find in this psalm. It is the feeling of separation from God. Have you ever felt as though God has forgotten you? Does it feel like he has forgotten to be gracious to you? Are you wondering where God is with all that is going on in your life?

Such feelings can overwhelm us, but this psalm shows us how we can respond in faith. Our faith must lead us, not our feelings. Our belief in God must guide and correct our emotions. This psalm teaches us to remember God and to cry out to him.

We must remember God. "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes I will remember your wonders of old" (Ps 77:11). We remember God's goodness even in the midst of overwhelming doubt. We remember the deeds of the Lord and ponder his great works. We meditate on his mighty deeds. He is the God who works wonders. We remember that he is the God who has so loved us that he sent his Son to rescue us.

We also can cry out to him. "I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me" (Ps 77:1). Praying doesn't always look or sound the same. It isn't about being eloquent. God doesn't care how it sounds. He knows our hearts, and even when we are so troubled that we cannot speak Jesus will intercede for us. He hears us.

Whenever you feel forgotten, remember and ponder all of God's great works.

Remember that he has not forgotten you but sent his Son for you. That is the hope we have in Jesus. God remembers us and hears our cries. We can rest in him.

—ALLIE WEAVER





—PSALM 78—

*W*hat are some of your favorite Christmas memories? What are some experiences with loved ones that you never want to forget? Perhaps, it's Christmas dinner with the whole family, celebrating with our church family at believers' baptism each Christmas Eve, or reading Luke's gospel account of the birth of Christ with the kids on Christmas morning.

While we love these memories, we are often so forgetful. How quickly these memories and many other things slip from our minds! How easy it is for us to forget the true purpose of Christmas and be overcome with distractions as the hustle and bustle of the season fight for our attention.

The Israelites were also forgetful. They were prone to forget the Lord and his work to redeem them from slavery to be his chosen people for his possession. "They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them. . . . They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe" (Ps 78:11, 42). They forgot, and they felt the consequences of their forgetfulness.

Wisdom is not forgetful. Christians who strive to live wisely cannot afford to forget the one for whom we wait. We cannot afford to forget his work through the cross to save us from our sins. We cannot afford to forget his power over death and the grave. We cannot afford to forget the redemption that we have through Christ. In Christ Jesus, we find true hope for the homesick: that we who are alive in Christ will be gathered together with all the saints and praise with one voice the Lamb who was slain, our King who reigns forever.

We cannot afford to forget these truths ourselves, and we must teach the generations to come. Dr. Tyler Smiley once observed, "Just as the gospel must go forth geographically, it must also be passed down generationally".

Scripture calls us to pass down the testimony of what God has done: "We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done" (Ps 78:4). God has given us his Word, "which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps 78:5-7).

This is how we wait wisely on the Lord. We proclaim his glory to the ends of the earth and to all generations. Consider this season how you can wait well on Christ Jesus our Lord. Remember his faithfulness and proclaim the hope we have in Christ to each generation.

—STEPHEN JACKSON



—PSALM 79—

*H*elp us, O God of our salvation!" It was the period of the Chaldean invasion. This cry of horror arose from the heart of God's people, who had presumed that their temple and way of life were indestructible. They could not believe this invasion. They did not want to believe that God might allow them to be defeated by their enemies. They prayed for deliverance from God's anger and promised thankfulness to him in return.

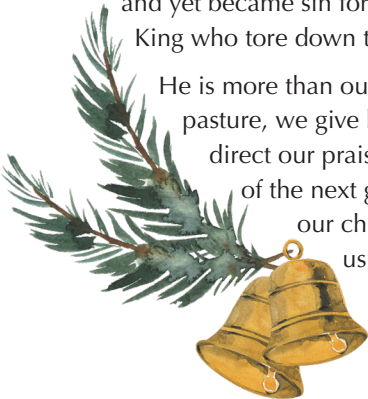
Have you ever felt as if God were angry with you? Has the brokenness of this world forced its way into the inner city of your heart? Are you "brought very low" with the feeling of guilt and shame?

Reread verse 8-9. Has God moved from you or have you moved from God? Consider whether the sense of alienated homesickness you feel might have come from your own sin. Confess it and put it away. Turn to the Father with a free and glad faith. Ask for his mercy and that his Spirit would comfort you for his Name's sake.

Now flip a few pages to Psalm 103. Remember Christ's work on the cross. He separated you from your sin as far as the east is from the west. If you started traveling west, you would hit California, then Hawaii, Australia, Africa, Gainesville, then California again and so on. You can travel west for the rest of your life, and you will still be traveling west. It is infinite! So is God's steadfast love toward those who love him. Out of his abundant compassion and grace, he does not keep a running tally of your wrongs or rights (Ps 79:8). Through your faith in Christ Jesus you are delivered. You are atoned. You are redeemed. You are loved (Ps 79:9).

In this season, remember that we are awaiting the King of kings. The King who knew no sin and yet became sin for us so that we may live in the hope of righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). The King who tore down the wall of hostility (Eph 2:14) and invited us into himself.

He is more than our King; he is also our Good Shepherd (Jn 10). As the sheep of his pasture, we give him thanks and praise his name forever and ever (Ps 79:13). We direct our praise and thanksgiving to God, but we intentionally do so in the hearing of the next generation. Let us consider how we can use this time of year to teach our children about what God has done in Christ. As the psalmist directs, let us tell the next generation about the goodness of our God and give him praise forever and ever. Amen.



—KEVIN STRADLEY



—PSALM 80—

As a shepherd guides his sheep, the Lord led his people, the Israelites, out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night (Ps 80:1). He is also seen as a gardener, who took a vine (his people) out of slavery in Egypt and into freedom in the promised land (Ps 80:8-11). He cleared ground, planted the vine, tended it, and caused it to take root and fill the land.

Israel was to be a vine that blossomed with fruit for the Lord, but they failed. They continuously turned from the Lord and worshiped false gods. They now found themselves divided, taken captive by Assyria, removed from their homeland, and in exile. They had become a fruitless vine because the hand of the Lord was no longer upon them.

We see the psalmist Asaph crying out to the Lord on behalf of his people. He pleads with God to go before the Israelites in all his might as he did before to rescue them and then to restore them to their former fellowship with the Lord. They felt helpless and hopeless as they were attacked and mocked by their enemies.

This has been a challenging season for the church. Many are wondering where the Lord is and when he will act. We live in a fallen world where it seems that sin and the enemy are prevailing while Christians suffer ridicule and attack. We see where our own sin leads us astray and turns our hearts from the Lord.

Yet, we know that we have Jesus who has restored us and put us in right relationship with God for eternity through his sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand. Through Christ, the Lord's face shines upon us and we have been saved. We now await Christ's return where our restoration will be made complete.

In the midst of it all, as we wait for Christ to return we are still called to bear fruit for the Lord. As believers in Christ, we have been grafted into the vine (Rom 11:17). Left on our own, we would fail miserably and become a fruitless vine just like Israel. But we are not on our own. God himself is still the gardener, Jesus is the true vine (Jn 15:1), and he abides in us and we in him. Only when we abide in him can we bear good fruit (Jn 15:4), for it is by his Spirit that he bears fruit in our lives (Gal 5:22-23).

Jesus calls on us to abide in him. To abide means to keep in fellowship with Christ, and we do that through reading and hearing God's Word, confessing our sin, and being obedient to the Lord. As we abide in Jesus, fruit will be produced for God's glory through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

—JESSICA HART



*Advent*

WEEK THREE



## —REVELATION 21:1-8—

*F*or the Christian, this world is not our home. We are strangers and exiles on earth. Like Abraham, we are “looking toward a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). In Revelation 21, John gives us a glimpse of that city, our true and better home.

The new city, which John calls the new Jerusalem, is nothing short of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1-2). The vision is not merely of a single metropolitan area. Rather, our future hope is that the entire creation will be redeemed and made new (Rom 8:18-25). Jesus will return, make all things new, and raise us to share in resurrected and glorified bodies like his (1 Cor 15:12-28). Our future hope is a glorified, physical existence in the new creation.

This new city, which is the new earth, will be filled with God’s glorious presence (Rev 21:3). His glorious presence that filled the temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11) and is revealed in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:3) will cover the whole new creation. As Habbkuk prophesied, so it will be: “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14). The particular and glorious presence of our triune God will fill the earth, and our God will dwell with us forever.

This new creation where we will dwell with God is the home for which we were made. Consider how John describes it: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). This is our new and better home where all hopelessness and homesickness have given way to the joy of being with our God.

We possess a sure confidence in our future home because God himself promises it (Rev 21:5). From his throne, God who reigns over all declares that he will make all things new. His word is trustworthy and true. By his first coming, Christ has made the way so that when he comes again, God through Christ and by his Spirit freely will give life everlasting (Rev 21:6).

Our hope of life with God in the new creation gives endurance to our faith (Rev 21:7-8). This future hope spurs us to live in a manner worthy of our calling. John wrote Revelation to the first-century church who faced a myriad of persecutions and temptations to compromise or even reject their faith. John’s vision of the sovereign Christ orchestrating all things to bring about this new creation has given God’s people hope throughout the ages. Today, this same vision should inspire us to overcome the world by the Spirit for the glory of God in Christ.

—DR. JOHN D. MORRISON





—PSALM 81—

Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it (Ps 89:10). Last spring, a bird built its nest on top of a gutter outside of our porch. After many days of watching and waiting, we finally had a front row seat as baby birds hatched and began life in the nest. Every morning as I served my children breakfast, I could hear the squawks and squeals, telling me that mama bird was feeding her babies as well. The awkward chicks stretched their necks out, opening their mouths as wide as they could as the mama filled them. These day-old baby birds were totally dependent on their mama; they could not fly or feed themselves. All they could do was open their mouths wide and wait to be filled.

Psalm 81 highlights our good Father who knows what we need and desires to be the only source of our satisfaction. Our role in this relationship is simple: we are the dependent baby birds who must simply turn to our Father and allow him to provide. Yet, like the forgetful Israelites, we often forsake our God and Father and turn to foreign gods who cannot satisfy.

How strange would it have been if the baby birds had looked to anything other than their mother to feed them? They knew the satisfaction of their hunger would not come from a butterfly or a cloud—it came from their maker. Yet, the Israelites forsook the God who rescued them from Egypt and turned to pretend gods instead. In the same way, we turn to pretend gods when we chase after success, perfection, relationships, or even food to find contentment. Charles Spurgeon comments on our fickleness, “How sad a thing it is for a child of God to sell himself into captivity to sin, and bring his soul into a state of famine by following after another god. O Lord, forever bind us to thyself alone, and keep us faithful unto the end.”

Our God is the God who “opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing” (Ps 145:16). The satisfaction he offers is not merely temporary or external, but eternal. He rescued the Israelites from temporary, earthly slavery, but he rescues us from eternal slavery to sin and death, granting us redemption through the cross of Christ. In Christ, we have all that we need. He gives us “living water at no cost” (Rev 21:6). What more can we ask for? What better thing can anyone else provide for us than life and freedom?

Having this hope, we should never forsake our God. Yet, our homesick hearts need continual reminding. One commentary notes, “It is important to renew God’s past grace periodically and regularly, because recalling his faithfulness will challenge his people to remain faithful to him.” We must commit to remembering intentionally God’s faithfulness and satisfaction in our lives! Pray and ask God often to remind you of his faithfulness and to reveal any areas of your life



that you may be wrongfully seeking satisfaction. Journaling, scripture memory, and sharing with others what God has done are a few effective ways to remember God's faithfulness daily in our lives. Like baby birds opening their mouths wide, may we long for the Lord to fill our hearts with a greater desire for him alone!

—HANNAH THOMAS

*He would FEED YOU with the  
finest of WHEAT,  
and with HONEY from the rock  
I will SATISFY YOU.*





## Day 3

### —PSALM 82—

Are we there yet?" is the inevitable question that comes from the back of the car on a long trip. These trips have made me very thankful for DVD's and travel games. With these activities, my children's question has changed. Now, there are times when we arrive at our destination only to hear, "Can we sit here and finish our game?"

Waiting can be one of the hardest things to do. In a world where we look around and see strife and destruction, we want to cry out, "Come Jesus come! Are we not there yet?" But like the good Father he is, God has not left us on this earth to twiddle our thumbs and wait in the darkness. He has called us to work while we wait.

It is easier to sit back and judge this world for the sin we see around us. It is tempting to look around and say "they" should be doing better. But God has called us to more than that. He has called us, as we see in Psalm 82, to "give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps 82:3-4). God is the ultimate Judge, and he alone can judge justly. He has relieved us of this burden and called us instead to serve one another in order to shine the light of Jesus to those we encounter.

As we sit between the time of Christ's resurrection and his return, I encourage you to look around and ask yourself, "Who can I serve today? Who needs to see the love of Christ?" The beauty of this calling is that as we serve others, showing them who Christ is and what he has done, we also become closer to him ourselves. It reminds us of the love the Father has for us, the comfort that he alone can bring. Even as we see the broken in this world, Christ sees us.

One day we will arrive at our final destination, but in the meantime my prayer is like that of John Waller, "I will move ahead, bold and confident, taking every step in obedience. While I'm waiting, I will serve you. While I'm waiting, I will worship. While I'm waiting, I will not faint. I'll be running the race even while I wait."

—ERIN CALDWELL





—PSALM 83—

In this psalm, Asaph prays that God would act on behalf of God's people, Israel, as they faced great opposition from surrounding enemy nations. This psalm is a national lament concerning the presence of evil in which Asaph prays that God would not remain silent or be still. Asaph prays that God would intervene by confounding the plans of their enemies and putting them to shame.

In the face of opposition, Asaph and Israel hoped in God to deliver them. Such hope is a great example for us today. In the same way that Israel faced great opposition from real enemies, as the church today, we also face great opposition. As followers of Christ, we face daily opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. When we are tempted to lose hope in the midst of such resistance, Psalm 83 reminds us that we can cry out in hope to God. We pray for him to work on our behalf. In fact, we know that he already has worked on our behalf through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ himself has acted on our behalf by delivering us from sin and death—a work that we could not do ourselves. Jesus overcame our worst enemies and now sits victoriously at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Not only so, but the Holy Spirit himself indwells us, and so we eagerly await the redemption of our bodies. The Holy Spirit reminds us of all that Jesus has said, including the promise of his final return. So just as Israel cried out to God and waited in hope for deliverance from their enemies, we too cry out and wait in hope for a final deliverance from this fallen world and into his glorious presence.

During this season of advent, we remind ourselves of all that God has done for us in Christ. We rejoice in the promise of Christ's final return. We wait with patient joy while we are still in this world. We set our hearts and minds on our home with him in heaven. And we spend our days in the pursuit of bringing others with us.

—EMILY LAVENDER

*...that they may know that you alone,*  
**WHOSE NAME IS THE LORD,**  
*are the Most High*  
**OVER ALL THE EARTH.**





## —PSALMS 84-85—

Psalm 84 begins with a pilgrim expressing his passion for God’s house: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. . . . Blessed are those who dwell in your house” (84:1-2, 4).

In verses 5-8 the pilgrim then makes his pilgrimage to God’s house along the “highways to Zion” and “through the valley of Baca.” As the pilgrim enters God’s house, he begins his praise. The “shield” in verse 9 speaks of the protection of God. The pilgrim’s presence for a day in the courts of God is better to him than “a thousand elsewhere” (84:10).

The pilgrim concludes the psalm with the provision of God, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly” (84:11).

- How does your passion for God’s house compare to that of the pilgrim?
- How much effort do you put into your own personal pilgrimage to God’s house?
- Do you view praise of God in his courts as something more for you or for God?
- How has God provided for you as of late? How might you praise him for his provision?

Psalm 85 recalls the deeds of God in the past, reflects on the distress of the present, and concludes with the reassurance of God’s deliverance in the future.

Verses 1-3 focus on how God demonstrated his favor, restoration, forgiveness, covering of sin, withdrawal of fury, and turning away of anger. Read these three verses again. Take a moment to thank God for how he has demonstrated at least two of these actions toward you.

Verses 4-7 begin with a request for God’s restoration and a cessation of his indignation. The psalmist then moves into questions about God’s anger. Afterward, he asks for God’s revival and lovingkindness.

- How have you personally experienced the restoration of God?
- When God has shown his indignation and anger towards his people? What was the purpose of his anger?
- Remember a time when you experienced either a revival from God or the lovingkindness of God. What does that tell you about the character of God?

Verse 8 reminds us that when God speaks, he speaks “peace to his people.” The voice of God is filled with hope, peace, joy, and love. Conversely, the voice of the enemy is always filled with guilt, shame, condemnation, and accusation.

- Which voice have you been hearing most lately? Why?

Verse 9 reminds us that the salvation of the Lord is both a present reality, as well as a future reality.

- Have you experienced the salvation of the Lord? If so, what difference has it made in your present reality? What difference do you hope it will make in your future reality?

Finally, verses 10-13 point us to the hope that is to come in the advent of our soon coming King! Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus! What would it look like to live in anticipation of the coming of the Lord?

—W. SCOTT SMITH



SURELY HIS *salvation* IS NEAR  
TO THOSE WHO FEAR HIM,  
THAT *glory* MAY DWELL IN OUR LAND.  
STEADFAST *love* AND  
*faithfulness* MEET;  
*righteousness* AND *peace*  
KISS EACH OTHER.







—JEREMIAH 29:1-9—

*W*hen we come to see that we as followers of Jesus are strangers and aliens on this earth, we can be tempted to withdraw. We are tempted to separate from the world and to embrace a bunker mentality. We put up walls and content ourselves to live inside a Christian bubble.

Such withdrawal stands opposed to the gospel. As Jesus was sent into the world, so he now sends us, his people, into the world (Jn 20:21). Our Savior was sent into the world to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). He served through his words and actions, and now, he empowers us by his Holy Spirit and sends us into the world to serve in both word and deed.

We are exiles and strangers in this world, but we also have been sent purposefully by Jesus on his mission. We live as sent exiles. When the Old Testament people of God were sent into exile, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to tell them how to live in a place that was not their home. They were not to retreat and to wait passively for God to act. Instead, the Lord called upon them to wait actively by pursuing remarkably ordinary lives: “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease” (Jer 29:5-6).

Such ordinary pursuits were not to become an excuse for self-centered living in exile. In their waiting, God’s people were also to work for the good of those into whose land they had been sent: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer 29:7).

Today, we as believers are exiles and strangers on this earth. We wait with patient urgency for Christ to come again and make all things new. As we wait, we wait as those who have been sent into this world. We have been sent to live ordinary lives in ordinary places, and yet Christ has sent us with an extraordinary purpose: to serve the world by speaking and showing the love of Jesus to those around us. We are sent to work for their good and for the glory of God.

The risen and ascended Christ has sent each one of us where we find ourselves today. We do not have to wait to be sent. We are already sent. Jesus has sent us to our communities, neighborhoods, schools, jobs, or wherever we find ourselves today.

How, even today, will we work for the welfare of the community where Jesus has sent us? How will we serve with words and deeds the people into whose lives God has sent us?

—DR. JOHN D. MORRISON



## Day 2

### —PSALM 86—

As believers in Christ, we know that we have been given hope beyond what we see and experience in this daily, earthly life. But how do we continually live like we believe that hope is real? During this season of struggle in 2020, I have never been more thankful for the hope that we have. However, at times we forget and need to be reminded again just like David in Psalm 86. He is honest with the Lord about his thoughts and feelings of being in need of what only God can provide him. David reminds himself of his need for God's mercy, strength, wisdom, and comfort. David also cries out to God to help him remember that it is God who can help and that David on his own cannot make these things happen. Acknowledging our dependence on the Lord is a key part of getting our minds and hearts in the right place daily so that we live out of the hope of Christ.

David asks God in Psalm 86:11 to give him an undivided mind to fear his name and to teach him his ways and truth. When we live with a divided mind, we are focused on earthly answers and God's ways at the same time. Such division makes us unstable according to James 1:8. God wants our minds to be focused on his ways and his truth.

Only with that focus can we live in the hope of Christ. When we set our minds on things above we will be able to focus rightly on living the way God designed us to live. The Holy Spirit works through Scripture to lift our minds to things above. When we think on things above continually and listen to the Holy Spirit, then we believe the truth. Out of such belief, we begin to feel differently, and then we choose to act based on God's truth and not the lies this world tells us. We form new habits that help us obey the Lord and grow in bearing fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

David is reminded as he talks to God that his hope is not in himself but in the one that holds all things. He is the one who rescues David's life from the depths. In Christ, we have been rescued and we can live in the hope that he knows how to rescue us eternally. Daily, he also rescues us from our own fleshly battles as we depend on him and let our minds focus on him. May we allow Jesus our Redeemer to remind us of the hope we can live in today and of what is to come for those who love him.

—BETH EVERETT



I GIVE *thanks to you,*  
O LORD MY GOD...  
I WILL *glorify your name*  
FOREVER.



—PSALM 87—

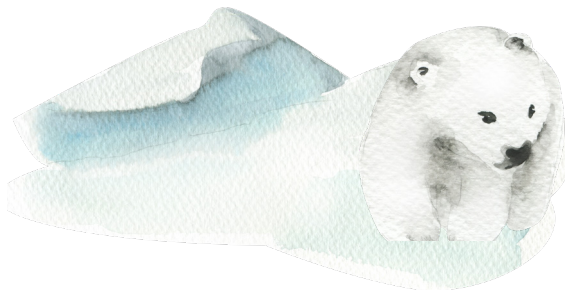
*T*hink what it would be like to be a son or daughter of Queen Elizabeth. Being born into a royal family brings with it a certain degree of honor and privilege. You are considered special just because of the circumstances of your birth. In a similar way, where you are born can also give you certain rights and privileges. In ancient Israel, it would have been a great honor to be born in Jerusalem. The real honor, however, was not the location; it was that God had established this city above all others on the earth as his own. This was his holy mountain, his royal city. To be in this city was to be at home with God.

The greatest honor you can have in your life is to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. When you are born again you become a child of God, an heir to his kingdom. Advent reminds us that even when we feel far from home, God has drawn near to us. God has come near to us, and he knows us. Three times the psalmist repeats, “This one was born here,” which reminds us that the Lord will recognize each one of us by name. He has redeemed us through the blood of his Son, and Jesus himself marks us with his name: “I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name” (Rev 3:12). To be forgiven through the work of Christ means that we are now citizens of Zion, the new Jerusalem.

Citizenship in the new Jerusalem depends on our knowing God. In verse 4 the psalmist speaks about those “who know me.” This is a translation of the Hebrew verb *yadah*. James Boice notes that this word “has a rich variety of meanings,” but in this context, “it means more than merely admitting there is such a God as Jehovah or even acknowledging him as the one true God. It means coming to him in a saving relationship, bowing before him, and seeking to know him better.” As Jesus tells us, “This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). To know God in Christ is to have eternal life with him in his new creation which is the new Jerusalem.

If you have never known the joy of knowing God and belonging to him, I pray that this might be the day when his mercy finds you and draws you to himself. May you find the joy of knowing Jesus, bowing to him as your Lord and King, and becoming a citizen of his kingdom.

—LISA ELLIOTT





## Day 4

### —PSALM 88—

*M*y soul is full of troubles” (Ps 88:3) is a true statement, isn’t it? How clearly we see the effects of sin in our own lives and in the world. Some of us have sleepless nights, deep anxiety, and habits that damage our bodies and souls. We feel as if we live in darkness. Psalm 88 echoes our own feelings: “I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more” (Ps 88:4-5). Have you felt this way? I’d say all of us, if we are honest, have been there at some point in time. There is a difference, however, between feeling and fact.

The writer is crying out to God because the world is not as it should be. The writer vents to God about all of the ways in which he feels distant from him. Clearly, he feels separated. He pleads with God to be heard and begs for God to respond. Tension is evident within the writer from the start of the chapter, “O Lord, God of my salvation; I cry out day and night before you” (Ps 88:1). Later he continues, “Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me” (Ps 88:15). He knows the God to whom he is praying offers salvation. The psalmist knows that he cannot save himself.

God is not bothered by prayers like this. Psalm 88 helps us to rest in the fact that if we have had thoughts like this, that it is okay. Yet, when we read the Bible as a whole we see that we do not have to remain in these feelings for every long. The fact is that God has acted.

God hears our cries and has done something about this darkness. The death of Jesus on the cross gives us hope to pray prayers like this one! Jesus took the “wrath that swept over” us (Ps 88:16) and has brought us near to God to have full “access with confidence” (Eph 3:12). He has brought us out of the “regions of dark and deep” (Ps 88:6) and “into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9) in Christ. In the cross of Jesus, we see that God does not hide his face from us (Ps 88:14), but God came down to lift up our faces and say, “You are mine, and I have bought you through the blood of my Son.”

The fact of God’s love for us poured out in his Son must overrule my feelings. I know now where I stand with God because of the finished work of Christ. I can trust the fact that Jesus came to make us into a “dwelling place for God” (Eph 2:22, 3:17) and has made us “one in Christ” (Eph 2:16). I am saved through Jesus’s work by the “God of my salvation” (Ps 88:1).

—MARK THOMAS

## Day 5

### —PSALM 89—

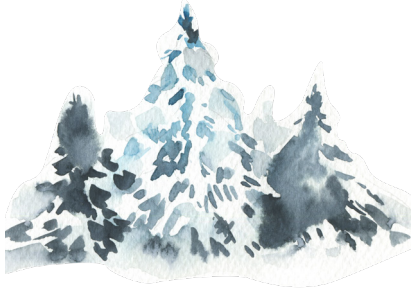
In the opening line of his September 17, 1876 sermon, Charles Spurgeon praised, “When the soul is perfectly reconciled to God and comes to delight in him, it rejoices in all his attributes.” He was preaching on Psalm 89, and he was right. There is so much to celebrate and enjoy about God’s character as laid out in this Psalm: God has steadfast love (v. 1), he is faithful (v. 1), he is unique in his being and attributes (vv. 6–7), he is mighty (vv. 8, 13), he created the heavens and the earth (v. 11), he rules over all creation and all nations of the earth (vv. 9–10, 27, 49–51), he is righteous and just by his nature and in all his actions (v. 14), he protects his people (v. 18), he keeps his promises (v. 34), and he is holy (v. 35), just to name a few. Because of who God is and what he has already done for his people (especially for us now in Christ), God is worthy of all our praise and adoration.

At the same time, just like the author of this song, Ethan the Ezrahite, we also know that God has not yet made all things new. We are still waiting for him to bring to completion what he has promised to David: “My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens” (Ps 89:28–29). We are still waiting for him to bring his kingdom to this earth in all its fullness. Especially when we face trials or difficulties, we can find ourselves asking with the psalmist, “Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” We know that God will one day make all things new, and we long for that day.

Our homesickness for heaven is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign that our desires are being shaped by what God has begun to accomplish on this earth—“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). Also, our homesickness is not filled with hopelessness. We trust in the steadfast love of the Lord, and we believe that he is making all things new. Ethan the Ezrahite believed this too, and he gives us the words on which to fix our minds whenever we find ourselves longing for the return of Jesus Christ: “Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen” (Ps 89:52). Even in our waiting, we praise the Lord, for this is good and very good! His love endures forever, and he will do what he has promised. This is the wisdom of God.

—DR. TYLER H. SMILEY





Advent looks back to the first coming of Christ and looks forward to his second coming. As we long for Christ's return, we can sense that we are not at home in this world. Scripture describes our lives as Christians between Jesus's first and second comings as exile. In Psalms 73-89, we hear from Israel during their exile, and we find wisdom for waiting patiently for the Lord. This Advent, we reflect on these seventeen psalms to remind us that this world is not our home and that our true hope can be found in Christ alone.



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