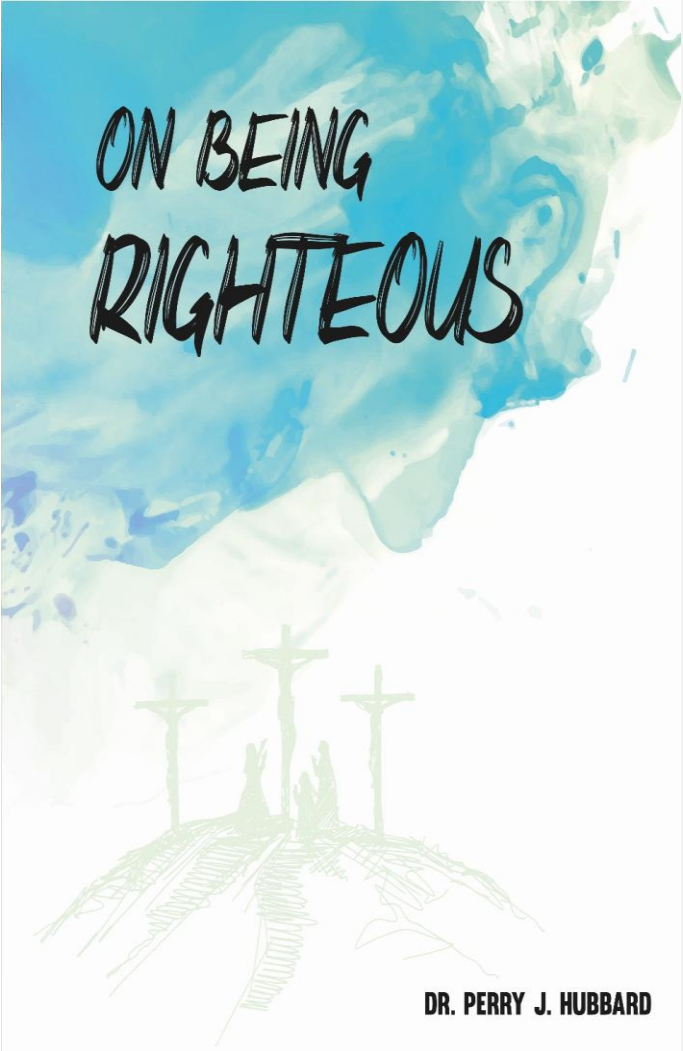
ON BEING RIGHTEOUS



DR. PERRY J. HUBBARD

On Being Righteous

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Day 1 Ge 6:19

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

There were two things in the life of Noah that defined who he was and why God chose to speak to him. This also allowed God to give directions for him to follow. Noah was blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

The idea of being blameless among the people gives us a sense of the decisions Noah had to make. Decisions that would set him apart from those around him. Decisions that would make it possible for the second aspect of his life, he walked with God. Noah chose to live in a manner that allowed people to decide that he was blameless. He chose not to be the cause of sin in the lives of those around him. A significant choice. That is what blameless means. I am not at fault when people look at their choices and those who have influenced them in making those choices.

This choice made it possible for Noah to walk with God. He saw the difference it made when he considered acting like everyone else or choosing to follow a different path. A path that allowed him to encounter God and so begin a journey that permitted him to meet with God and to know God.

Being righteous involves these two choices. Choosing to live a life that is blameless, which then allows us to choose to walk with God.

Day 2 Ge 7:1

The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation."

Can you imagine the emotions of this moment? Of hearing God's pronouncement, not of your innocence, but that you are worthy of his attention. Of hearing God say I have seen your life and the way you behave, and I have found you to be a righteous person. Of hearing God say I have chosen to save you and your family, because you walk with me and do not follow the way of the world.

Can you imagine the emotions of this moment? Of seeing the ark you have built, ready to depart. Of seeing all the animals that are within. Of seeing the rain fall in torrents and being glad for shelter. Of seeing all the people who will not be allowed into the ark. Of realizing how important it was for you to choose to follow God and not the counsel of man.

Can you imagine the blessing of the moment? Of being blessed by God's presence and guidance in all the struggle you dealt with to obey his direction. Of being blessed with a family who chose to listen to you and join you in the work. Of being blessed with the knowledge that you chose the right path, and God has approved your actions.

Can you imagine what it would feel like to be declared a righteous person by God? What will you do to convince God? What ark will you need to build?

Day 3 Ge 18:23

Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

Abraham approaches God to talk to him about the judgment about to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah. He is concerned about the fact that Lot and his family live in one of those cities. He wants to save them somehow and begins the process by using the only point that he feels will move God to listen. He asks how God will treat the righteous. Will they be destroyed as well?

We know the story. He starts by asking if God will destroy them if there are 50 righteous and works his way down to 10 righteous. Would that be enough to cause God to spare the city? God agrees to Abraham's request. He will not destroy the cities if there are at least 10 righteous people residing there.

There aren't, and the cities are destroyed. But in response to Abraham's concern, which is not stated, God provides for Lot and his family to be rescued from the destruction. Sadder still is the fact that Lot understands, but only his wife and daughters heed the warning.

Here we get a glimpse of the inner workings of a righteous man. That is what this passage is about. A righteous man is deeply concerned for others. Concerned enough to query God about his plans and judgment. Concerned enough to risk being reprimanded by God for what appears to be interference in God's plans. God doesn't reprimand but listens and responds.

We have this opportunity. We can speak to God about anything. The key is that we, too, must be righteous before God.

Day 4 Gen 38:26

Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

There is so much going on in this story and little of it is right. Judah goes looking for a prostitute to satisfy a desire that should be dealt with at home. Except for the fact that his wife has just died. But that is no excuse for his action. He knows this and chooses not to pursue making payment. Tamar plays the part of a prostitute in order to satisfy her cultural and emotional need to have a child. Judah has denied her this right by refusing to give her in marriage to his youngest son.

At first, he is outraged, but when he learns he is the father, he is caught in a trap of his own making, both of his own lust and having forced his daughter-in-law into such a position. But how does this make her more righteous? Both have played fast and loose with morals and ethics. Each has committed a serious offense to the other. So, what makes one more righteous than the other?

According to ritual law, Tamar is, because the basis of her action was not lust but fulfillment of a natural desire for a child, and the cultural law that should have provided her with that means. But is this not just playing with words?

The real question is, what do we use as the basis for calling a person righteous? Is it by comparison to another person or to God? Only one can result in God’s approval. Take note that nowhere in the text is there approval of either person’s behavior.

Day 5 Ex 23:8

"Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous."

Do we understand how serious a bribe can be? How it can affect our lives and what we communicate to others? Do we know how much will be lost by giving in just once?

Bribery is not just about money received to look away or alter truth. It can be in personal favors done for us, a change in status with the person involved. There are so many forms a bribe can take, but they all have the same impact. They alter the reliability of who we are and what we say and do. If we can be caused to deviate from the truth in even a small way, then we have opened the way for so much more. Even if we never accept another bribe, that one moment of yielding will taint everything else we may hope to do.

This warning must be given, and it must be repeated over and over in our hearts and minds. It is something to be meditated on. Once a bribe is allowed, it will be used to twist even our firmest convictions. There can never be an 'if you allow this…. then I will do this,' in any area of our life that relates to God's truth. If you do, it will blind those who desperately need the truth and will allow others to twist who you are and what you say into a knotted mess. A knot no one will be able to undo to find the truth.

Day 6 Num 23:10

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like theirs!"

Balaam has been called on to curse Israel. God has warned him not to do so. Over and over, Balak attempts to create situations where Balaam would be willing to speak a curse, but God does not allow it. Instead, each time Balaam is given a blessing to pronounce, to the total frustration of Balak, who wants the Israelites cursed and brought to ruin, so he can defeat them. This is the closing phrase of one of those attempts that results in a blessing. “Let me die the death of the righteous.”

God is watching over us and protecting us. He wants us to know this so that we will be encouraged to continue to be a righteous person. He wants us to know that no matter what people attempt to do to harm us, curse us, and defeat us, He is there protecting our relationship with him. He does this so that we can live in peace with him and find peace with him, even at the end of life.

God has our back, as the phrase goes. So, no matter what the world is trying to do, be assured that God is protecting your relationship with him and will bring you to his house when you enter eternity.

Day 7 Deut 4:8

And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Moses is reviewing the history of Israel and all that God has done. In this passage, he reminds them of the law they have been given and exhorts them to be careful in observing and obeying it. Then he makes this comment. In question form, he is telling them they have a unique privilege that no other nation has had or ever will have. They have been chosen to know God, and the law is the evidence of this choice. God has decided to be a part of their world.

We, too, have been chosen for this unique blessing. We have been given a new law and a new status. The law is in the form of a new covenant established by Jesus and his sacrifice. God has chosen to be a part of our life. He has chosen to make you a member of his family. This new law opens the way for redemption, renewal, and restoration so that we are not simply acceptable, but so that God can dwell in our lives. This was the purpose of the law, so that God could be present and reveal himself to the nation of Israel.

God wants to reveal himself, and he does so by revealing his righteous law in Jesus, so we can choose the path that leads back to him.

Day 8 Deut 16:19-20

Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

A bribe is a powerful thing. We don't realize just how far-reaching its effect can be. And how it affects everything that will follow after it. This is because it is never just one bribe. Once a bribe has been accepted, then it will be expected again and again. To look away once is to discover you will never be able to see clearly again.

You cannot keep such an action secret, and you cannot hide from what you have done. It is always there in your memory and will affect all future actions and judgement on your part. It is insidious in how it works. And once it is learned that you accepted a bribe, people will no longer trust your judgment or your advice. They will always wonder if someone has gotten to you and that your words and counsel are somehow twisted to accommodate the position and desire of someone else willing to bribe you, because it is known you will accept something in return for a favorable response.

Have you ever crumpled up a piece of aluminum foil and then tried to remove the creases? Can't be done without sending it back to where it was produced. That is what happens when a bribe is accepted. The person, their words, and their life are now altered, and truth is lost.

We are called to be righteous and to speak the truth. It is a privilege and honor that must be cared for moment by moment.

Day 9 Deut 24:13

Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God.

How often do we get caught up in thinking that being righteous is a complicated goal to attain? So often, the focus is on the things one should *not* do and less on what one *might* do, in order to help them understand and demonstrate what being righteous really means.

In this passage, we get a glimpse of what this means. Here we have a simple act that reveals how righteousness works and is expressed. The righteous person sees the need of another person and places that need ahead of their own wants and needs. It is about not protecting myself to the point that my actions will harm others and put them at a place of risk.

Here the example is related to a man giving his cloak as a guarantee. A significant action for a poor person, since it is probably their only cloak, which doubles as outer clothing during the day and blanket in the night. The need must be great for them to offer it as a guarantee.

The choice is simple and yet critical. Do I keep the coat, because I need it to ensure that I get what I deserve, or do I give it back in an act of kindness and, more importantly, faith? Faith, not related to getting what I deserve from another person, but faith that God will work in our lives and provide much more than the cloak…a relationship. So how is your faith today?

Day 10 Deut 33:21

When the heads of the people assembled, he carried out the Lord's righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel.

Gad was one of the smallest of the tribes of Israel. But this did not affect their choices or decisions. They chose to carry out the will of God, the righteous will of God, and they chose to carry out the judgement involved in this decision.

They could have let the others carry the burden of conquest, citing their limited size and strength, but they did not. They could have allowed others to take the lead, again using the idea of being smaller in number and not strong enough to lead or be involved in the decisions involved.

How often do we, in a sense, leave the work to the leaders, the people who are, in our eyes, stronger and better qualified? Unfortunately, it is often what happens. Doing what is righteous, leading others, and establishing what is God's will is the responsibility of those who we believe are better qualified, and stronger. But that is a false concept. Doing God's will and being righteous are not about how great we are in ability or any other area. It is about knowing what God wants and doing it.

In this we are all on equal footing. We all must share in the work of carrying out the Lord's righteous will. We all must live as God has directed from the least to the greatest. Always remembering that in God's kingdom there is no least to the greatest, for we are all equal as his children.

Day 11 Judg 5:11

The voice of the singers at the watering places. They recite the righteous acts of the Lord, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel.

When it is time to sit and talk about life and what is happening, what do you fill the time talking about? What is the focus of your everyday conversation, when there is a pause in your day? The kind of pauses that happen at mealtimes, as you relax after a long day of work, or as you ready yourself for bed.

The singers at the watering places represent a place of conversation. It was a place where the latest news and information could be shared. You know, who is getting married, what is happening in the next village, town, or country. The information that tells you about how business is going in the area and what to expect from the leaders, and on the list goes.

In this case, the focus was on the righteous acts of God and those who served him, those who fought evil in his name. I hope you are not dealing with war as they were in this passage, but in a real sense, we are in a battle against the enemies of righteousness every day. And like the singers in this passage, we need to be sure there are those who are reminding us of the righteous acts of God, of what God is doing in our lives. We need to be sure that God has a place in our daily conversation, and that we remind ourselves of all he has done so we can live in peace with him.

Day 12 1 Sam 12:7

Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your fathers.

I can think of two good reasons for a farewell speech. The one is to say thank you for a great time together and remember in a small way a few of the events and people that have made our time together one of joy and blessing.

The other is to remind people of where we have been and present a challenge to use that information and knowledge to make wise decisions. A chance to remind others of what has been done to give them a foundation and resources to continue to benefit from the past, live in the present, and shape the future.

This is what Samuel does here. He explains the righteous nature of God, the purpose of his anger, and the motive of those actions on the part of God. They will either listen to what he has taught them during his ministry, or they will ignore it. Either way, those righteous acts will be the basis of their receiving the blessing of God or chastisement of God.

We have been given this same blessing and opportunity. It is called God's Word, and we can choose to read and hear it or not read it and ignore all the benefits and value found in knowing a righteous God and choosing to hear his words, which help us learn to walk with him.

Day 13 1 Sam 24:17

"You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly."

David is running from Saul and hides in a cave not far from Saul's camp. So close that Saul uses the cave to relieve himself. David's men want him to kill Saul and be done with the running. David only cuts a piece off the robe. And even that creates conflict in his soul for mistreating God's chosen king.

They have a discussion and in the end, Saul declares David more righteous than he is.

Our actions have consequences. And, while it may appear to be right to us and those around us, not all reactions or responses are righteous in nature. Even when they appear to be provided, even suggested by the events and circumstances that are involved.

Situations should not be allowed to guide our decisions. Instead, we are to seek a deeper source of guidance in what we choose to do in responding to those who consciously oppose who we are as those called by God to live a righteous life. We need to thoughtfully consider the consequences of our choices, not basing them on whether they will ease our struggle. That will not work in the long run, but how they represent our relationship to God.

David knew that God was in control, and I imagine this decision to do what was right, not just convenient, would bear fruit later. And that is the point, choosing what God wants, not what we want, will reveal what is righteous and allow our lives to bear wholesome fruit in the correct time.

Day 14 1 Kings 3:6

"You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart."

So, do you know what your children, family, and friends think about you and how you have lived? Do they see evidence of a relationship with God and how it has affected your life?

These are critical questions that should be considered by each of us. It is about feedback that helps us see if our words and our life are in agreement. It is not about being perfect. It is about honesty. Honesty, because we will make mistakes, and we will fail. That is our life as human beings. Honesty, because we are willing to admit all of the above and seek forgiveness. We are not proud and arrogant or hypocritical.

Solomon's father was not a perfect man. David made some serious mistakes and sinned. Solomon saw all of that, but also saw the humility and honesty of his father. David was faithful in his commitment to follow God and was willing to confess his sin and repent before God and others. Solomon knew the true nature of his father's heart and the deep love for God that lived in that heart. A love that made it possible for David to remain faithful and righteous.

This is what we need to hear from others. We need to hear that they see our true heart, and that in that heart dwells an honest and righteous love for God above all else.

Day 15 Ezra 9:15

O Lord, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it, not one of us can stand in your presence.

Ezra has felt the weight of the sin of himself and the people. He has spent the day in prayer. The people see and hear his confession, and they are affected by it. They too begin to realize the enormity of their sin and the kindness, the mercy of God that has allowed them to return. They see the righteous nature of God and sense the profoundness of their guilt and join Ezra in committing themselves to submit to God.

We are not Israel, and we are not bound by the law in the same way as they were. But we are bound to God and his love for us. And we like them are guilty. We too, stand before a righteous God and must choose. Will we confess our sin and guilt? Will we do this in a way that God can use to reach the hearts and minds of others? Will our confession contain the honesty and sincerity of true confession? Only this will make it possible for others to respond.

If we truly understand what it means to stand before a righteous God and examine our lives, we will see clearly our guilt in the light of God's mercy. If we truly understand God's righteousness, then our confession will draw others to God as well.

Day 16 Neh 9:8

You have kept your promise because you are righteous.

The people of Israel have been keeping one of the great feasts required them by God. During this feast, they have been reading the law and learning about all God has done and how often they have failed. This leads them to a time of fasting and confession. On the last day, the leaders stand before the people and offer a prayer. The central feature of this prayer is this statement about how God has kept his promises because he is righteous.

The center point is about why God has kept his promises. This should guide us in thinking about why we keep our promises. The people failed and disobeyed over and over. Yet God, because he was righteous, kept his promises. His decision was not based on their worthiness for forgiveness, or their worthiness to receive what was promised. It was based on his righteousness, his nature, which meant keeping his promises because of the deeper purpose involved. A purpose that would be finally revealed. What Paul called the mystery of God.

We need to live and act in this manner. We need to fulfill our promises. A central one being to love others the way God has loved us. We need to do this not because people are worthy, but because we are a reflection of God's righteousness that is visible to others. Because we hope, as God did, that one day those who receive the benefits of the promise will one day understand and come to God and be restored.

Day 17 Job 4:17

Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?

This is a good question, and each of us must consider it and answer it. The obvious answer is no. We cannot even come close to being righteous like God or pure in any sense of the word. And yet, in this conversation, Job's friend Eliphaz suggests that man can be righteous. Maybe not at the level of God, but at a level that would protect him from the pain and suffering of life in this fallen world.

It is the only way Eliphaz can explain the dire situation in which Job finds himself. It is his lack of righteousness that has brought about all that has happened. So confess and be restored. Yet Job maintains that he has done nothing that would cause such calamity. Nothing that would warrant such punishment.

Do we think of righteousness as a shield to keep us from harm, from sin and its consequences? What then if it does not function? And yet even God, as truly righteous, must deal with the impact of sin. It separated us from him and every day he deals with the loss and cost of sin.

Or do we think of it as a door to a relationship with God and the means to help others to do the same?

Job never lost his relationship with God. He only lost things. He learned that being righteous may not protect us from what happens in a sinful world, but it will protect our relationship with God. We cannot be righteous like God, but by seeking righteousness we can find God.

Day 18 Job 9:2

Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God?

Here is the heart of the issue for us. We want to believe we could be good enough to pass inspection. We want to believe that the good we have done, are doing, and will do, will be enough to obscure the bad thoughts and actions we have also committed. And if the only gauge we have available to measure our goodness is our self, then we might be able to convince someone that maybe, in fact, we are good enough to pass muster with God.

But if you keep reading the scriptures, you will encounter the comments and reaction of three men who were considered to be righteous men.

Isaiah is considered the greatest of the prophets, but on the day he stood before God, he fell to the ground crying that he was a man of unclean lips.

Daniel is considered one of the most faithful servants of God, but he spent three weeks in confession of his sin and the sins of his people.

John is called the one whom Jesus loved, but when he stood before the Lord in his vision in Revelation, he fell at his feet as though dead.

If these people of faith saw no value in their righteous acts, then we should know the answer. We cannot be righteous in our own actions. Therefore, we cannot stand before God. Thankfully, it does not depend solely on us, but on our faith in God's love and forgiveness. In Christ, we <u>can</u> stand before God and be declared righteous.

Day 19 Job 12:4

I *have become a laughingstock to my friends, though I called upon God and he answered — a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless!*

This is the fear we all have. We are afraid to be laughed at for being moral and doing what is right, even when everyone else isn't. And what causes even more fear is doing what is right and then suffering some kind of struggle. The kind of struggle that, in the mind of everyone else, we should not be experiencing if, in fact, we are doing what is right.

This is the predicament of Job. In his mind, and up until the moment when everything started to go wrong, he was a righteous man. At least in his eyes and in the eyes of everyone else. And when it all goes bad, he is at a loss to explain what has happened.

Now is when the real test of character comes. Will he hold to all that he believes in the face of the attacks of his friends and the mocking laughter of his enemies? The mocking that says if you are such a righteous person, then explain why you are suffering, while my life is just great.

But here is the point. If we are seeking to be righteous, then the only evaluation that matters is that of God. Note that Job did call on God, and God answered him, while the people continued to mock and laugh. This is the real test. We know that before God, we have done the right. And we will hold to that truth no matter what people say or do.

Day 20 Job 15:11

What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous?

Job's friend is trying to defeat him in their debate about why Job is suffering. Job defends himself, and the friends attack. But the attack is weak and filled with cliché type thinking and the obvious. Man is not pure. He is sinful. He can never be truly righteous. Everyone knows this. Even Job does not debate this.

In fact, Job has asked a similar question, but from a different perspective. What is man that God has such interest in what is happening in his life (7:17)? David picks up this phrase in Ps 8:4, wondering about God's interest in man. What is man that you even think about him? What is man that you would create him to be just a little lower than the angels?

And this is the issue. It is not really about what has happened. Over and over, people suffer from disaster and disease and so on, both the good and the evil. The issue is that God cares what is happening to us. The issue is that we were created to be righteous, and God cares about how we are doing in being what he intended us to be. The issue is that no matter what may be happening, we can have a relationship with our creator.

What is man? That is the right question. And yes, we cannot be righteous as intended by our own strength, but in God we can become what he desires and know what being righteous means.

Day 21 Job 17:9

Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.

We are now about halfway through the debate between Job and his friends. Job is sitting on the ash heap and probably cannot believe what is happening. He is suffering from the boils, and he is suffering from the attacks of his friends. Both are relentless. Boils are like that. You cannot get comfortable. And the friends are acting like boils. They are making it almost impossible for Job to be comfortable.

Then Job utters this phrase and reveals a key to being righteous: conviction. Conviction is the absolute certainty that what I believe, and therefore what I do, is right. It doesn't matter what happens to me or what you think and say. I know I am right and in the right. In the end, you will see the truth of what I am saying and doing.

Those with conviction do not weaken. The truth is that the attacks of others often strengthen them in their belief and commitment to continue living according to what they believe. And while it is true that people can make mistakes and be wrong in their convictions, the attacks of others do not deter them. And if they are shown their error and accept it, they will then be as completely committed to what they have learned as they were before. Paul is a great example of this.

The righteous do not have to worry about living a mistake like some. Their conviction is based in an eternal, unchangeable, perfect God.

Day 22 Job 22:3

What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless?

Eliphaz asks a great question here. Then he descends back into another round of accusations, trying to tell Job why he is suffering and not a source of pleasure, along with another attempt to justify his understanding of why people suffer. Sadly, he does not return to the heart of the question, and we often don't consider it as well.

The truth is, that if we are righteous, it is a source of great joy to God. He created us to be righteous, people capable of understanding their creator and able to walk with him in the Garden. And he would gain one thing from us, fellowship. So, when we are living a righteous life, it will bring God pleasure.

Because we have the beauty of hindsight, we see just how valuable and precious this is to God. He sacrificed his Son so that we could be restored and once again walk with him. It is no longer pleasant walks in a physical garden, but indeed when one walks in righteousness with God, the garden can exist wherever we are.

And what would God gain? The restoration of his intended purpose for our existence. So, our desire to be righteous and live accordingly is, in fact, a great source of pleasure. And while it is true that God gains nothing of material worth, he does gain our honor and evidence of what happens when a person truly walks with God. Something he desires greatly.

So are we a source of joy?

Day 23 Job 22:19

"The righteous see their ruin and rejoice;

Eliphaz is on a roll and is berating Job for not being righteous, not confessing, and so on. Then he inserts this phrase, and I am left in shock. Here is a friend who is supposed to be consoling his friend in his loss and misery, and then he mocks him. I wonder if he realizes what he is saying to Job. Job, I laugh at you and how you think you are righteous. In fact, I rejoice in what is happening to you. You have lived a wicked life; I know it, and you need to confess it. I am glad that this has happened, so you can admit the hidden sin in your life and be restored. This is what always happens to the wicked, and you are the proof of it today.

Is this how we are to treat others? Are we to desire their ruin? Are we to pray to God asking that he destroy a wicked person so that I can be free of them? Would it not be better to pray that they would see the error of what they are doing? Does God truly desire to bring to ruin and suffering, all who are unrighteous?

If that were true, then every one of us should be experiencing the ruining of our lives for our sin, for our evil. Instead of desiring their ruin, we should be seeking their restoration. Because if, in fact, God is judging them for their evil, then what they are about to lose will be so much more than just the things of this world. This should not be a source of rejoicing.

We should never rejoice in the destruction of anyone. Instead we should mourn for them and seek their restoration. That is a true act of righteousness.

Day 24 Job 25:4

How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?

One more time this question reappears, but Bildad is not thinking about his words, or he really doesn't understand what he is saying. Think about it: no one can be righteous before God, which means every one of us should be suffering disaster and judgment. There should be no hope of escape from such events. And we don't. Our lives are filled with uncertainty and risk, the reality that anything can happen.

Even if the worst possible doesn't happen, then we all suffer one painful reality: our separation from fellowship with God. In this fact, we all are defined as evil, and we all have to deal with the same reality, something will eventually cause our death.

But if there were no hope, then God would have no interest in our lives, and we could neither find nor know God. But God does take interest, and all of this debate with Job is proof that there is the possibility of living in a way that will allow us to know God and reveals to us that God desires to be known.

By stating the question, Bildad reveals this belief…that there is a way for a person to live that allows them to find God and experience the blessing of God's presence in their lives. Even to the point of being able to walk with God, as did Enoch and, later, Noah, who were considered righteous.

Can a person be righteous? No. Can a person live in a way that God approves of? Yes.

Day 25 Job 27:17

What he lays up, the righteous will wear, and the innocent will divide his silver.

These words are somewhat unexpected from Job. We have heard him talk about how the wicked do not suffer. How they live long and enjoy their wealth. But in this passage, he talks about how they will be judged and will lose everything they have enjoyed. And yet, there is truth in what he says.

The wicked build their lives on the suffering of others. They think their lives are untouchable and they are safe. This is far from the truth. In this sense, Job agrees with his friends. A day will come when the wicked will reap what they have sown. They will one day lose it all. It cannot protect them from their final end, and so others will enjoy what they have accumulated, and even the righteous will have a share in that wealth.

As Job continues, he describes a search for all forms of wealth. The desire to have more drives man deep underground to find it and to a faraway place. The desire to have power causes a man to be blind to what he really needs, wisdom. The one thing that cannot be gained through greater wealth and power, and the one thing that cannot be lost, once gained.

Especially if that wisdom brings us to God and our need to place our lives in his hands. But this only comes to those, like Job, who seek God above all else. Those who have no interest in the wealth of others. There is only one thing of true value, and that is knowing God.

Day 26 Job 32:1

So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

At least that was their interpretation of Job's defense of himself and the events. He could see no reason for all that happened, at least that would be as punishment for living a deceitful life in order to cover up his wickedness.

He was righteous in his own eyes. What does this mean? How can this be explained? Are there ways to understand what this word means? Do we dare think this way? But this is their interpretation of his actions and attitudes.

His friends had attacked him and sought to reveal that Job was not righteous. Their arguments were flawed, based on the concept that we get what we deserve. If you are righteous, then nothing bad happens and if you are wicked, you will suffer. They could not prove this. Job contended that he had done nothing in his understanding that warranted what had happened. And if their point of view had been correct, then he hadn't.

Job had not committed great sin. He had not cursed God. He had not abused others to advance his status. But they believed he had, and that is how the world thinks. The world wants, needs this, in order to have control. It needs a visible way to measure how well they are doing and is more than willing to alter, hide, and deny the truth, in order to maintain it.

So they need to say that Job was righteous in his own eyes in order to maintain their point of view.

And we will have to depend on God for the strength to live in the face of such denial of reality.

Day 27 Job 33:26

He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state.

Elihu is simply repeating what has already been said, with a new twist. He implies that Job was righteous but has sinned and was punished, as a result. The solution is to confess, pray and be restored to what he was before all the trouble began. He includes an intermediary in the process, who comes and speaks on our behalf. Someone who will come and speak to God on Job's behalf, but this only works if Job admits that he did something to cause all of what has happened.

While his premise and interpretation are still flawed, he does reflect what God will actually do for us in the future. The true premise is that no one is righteous before God. Those who understand this and seek to be righteous will have an advocate. This advocate is Jesus. We will have to confess the truth of our sin, and Jesus will, by his sacrifice, be able to intercede for us.

But this only explains the general reality of sin and its impact on our lives. Even the most righteous, based on earthly standards, will still suffer in one key area. They are separated from God and unable to do anything to restore the lost relationship. We need the help of another for this to be possible. And Job realizes this when he talks about a redeemer in Job 19:25. Someone who will make it possible for him to once more stand before God.

Day 28 Job 35:7

If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand?

The rest of this passage talks about how nothing we do that is good or bad has any impact on God. Being wicked or righteous only affects the people around us. And to repeat, nothing I do affects God.

In one way this is true. Nothing we do alters who God is, alters his plans, and his relationship to us. He is God, eternal, unchangeable. But for many people, especially theists, God is no longer active or concerned about what is happening here. He simply started things in motion and tweaks things as needed to keep it moving.

But if that were true, then why bother with this conversation? Why be concerned about why Job is suffering? Why talk about wickedness and righteousness? Since God is not affected, then why should I even be thinking that he is behind my suffering or involved in what is happening?

The very fact that we are having this conversation implies that God is involved. And while it does not impact who God is, it does impact our relationship with God. Something he desires and seeks to encourage and foster. The attempts of the friends are based on this belief. And though they are making many errors and assumptions, they believe that we do, in fact, provide something that God desires, our love and obedience. Both of which allow us to have a relationship with him, which is the focus of the discussion.

Day 29 Job 36:7

He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever.

The first part of this statement by Elihu is correct. God does not ignore the righteous. But the second part is not true. If it were true, then the righteous person would lose a key focus of why they are righteous and the evidence of it.

Being enthroned in honor in this world was one of the temptations of Satan for Jesus. Bow to me, and you can have it all, power and honor over the kingdoms. Jesus rejected it and gained the watchful care of his father in heaven. And he was never given a place among the rulers and leaders of the world. In fact, they were responsible for his crucifixion.

The righteous have little interest in the power and honor of this world. Their focus is on the honor of knowing God and being able to enter his presence. Jesus received, on a couple of occasions, the verbal approval of his father, 'this is my Son in whom I am well pleased.'

We all would love to sit on a throne or in a place of honor, but the moment we seek that or expect it, we have misplaced our focus and loyalty. The evidence of righteousness and the true place of honor is not on a throne, but on our knees before God. It is in a life of humility and dependence on our creator. It is there that we will be seen by our creator and be able to see him. Not from a throne based on this world.

Day 30 Ps 1:5-6

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

These two verses are the outcome of what the psalmist defines as the approved behavior of a righteous person. It is broken down into three areas: what the righteous avoid doing, what they commit their lives to, and why they produce a life of fruitful living.

When one follows the directions given, they will be validated in the judgment, included in a unique assembly of people who have been given the right to be in God's presence, and most important experience the blessing of God's presence and guidance as they journey in this life.

In this there is a key truth to keep in mind. God is watching. He is searching. He wants to find and bless those who choose to live a righteous life. He desires to bless them and be a part of their life. He wants to meet and encourage those who are able to stand firmly in their belief in His word and are able to not just survive the challenges the world presents them but thrive in their desire to know and follow God's word.

These people have found the way of the righteous, a path that brings them into God's way of living and under his protection and care.

Day 31 Ps 4:1

Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

This psalm reveals an important concept about prayer and one's relationship with God. When we come before God, we need to keep this clearly in mind. God is righteous. This reality will define several things as we come to him in prayer.

First, it defines the manner in which we come before God. While God desires our fellowship, he also expects us to respect and honor who he is. You don't talk to God as if he were your servant, one who is to do your bidding. Or as one who has a contract with you. Once you fulfill certain conditions, then it is expected, even required, that God should answer and give us what we want.

God is righteous and we must approach him in this manner with the proper respect and attitude.

At the same time, we do not need to come in fear. He loves us and is concerned about what is happening in our lives. He has invited us to come, and so we need not fear being punished or attacked for coming to him in prayer.

One more thing to keep in mind. As we come before God, we need to make sure that what we seek will bring honor to him and reveal him as righteous to others through our words and actions. This needs to be the focus of what we seek. It is what God asks of us, that we seek to bring honor to him.

Day 32 Ps 5:12

For surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

What is the greatest blessing that is available to us from God? God's presence and protection of that relationship. What is the most basic definition of righteous? Those who seek to live in a way that reveals their desire for God's presence above all else.

This desire is what God seeks and will protect. He will surround the person with his protection so that this desire will be able to flourish. He will protect this person from the evil that surrounds them and seeks to destroy this relationship. He will make it possible for this to grow and understand how to walk in the path that leads to God.

A righteous person knows all of this and knows that God can provide the peace and safety needed to continue following the path of righteousness. A righteous person knows they are not perfect. This is not possible. But they know that God listens to those who are humble and truly seek him. They can come into his presence and so experience God's mercy and protection.

What is the greatest blessing from God? I will repeat it. God's presence and protection of my relationship with him. May I never stop seeking his presence. May I never cease to know his protection of our relationship. May I never fail to love him above all else.

Day 33 Ps 7:9, 11

O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure. … God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

Is the end of the violence of the wicked and security of the righteous related? Does the security of the righteous depend on the wicked being judged?

At one level, yes. The knowledge that at some point in time God will judge the wicked, and that they will not escape the consequences of their actions, provides assurance and strength to continue to walk with God.

At another level, no. What happens to the wicked is unrelated to what provides security for the righteous. True security is not about what is happening in the world around me and its impact on my comfort levels. With or without the wicked, we live in a fallen world, and there will always be struggles.

True security is found in the knowledge that I can know God's love and experience his presence. I can come before him if what I desire more than anything is to be approved by him and so have his protection of what is most important: my relationship with him.

This allows me to take refuge in him and know that I am safe from the wrath of God, which is a far more serious danger than anything the wicked may do or conceive of. And I know that one day the wicked will come to an end, and I will remain secure in God, because I chose to trust in God.

Day 34 Ps 11:3

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?

This is a sad reality in the world we live in. The wicked work constantly to undermine all that is good and honorable. They are relentless in their attack on truth and those who seek to follow the truth and the God who is the source of this truth.

It is not hard to feel overwhelmed and wonder what can be done, to wonder if anything can be done.

The rest of this Psalm provides words of encouragement to those in the midst of this struggle. First, that God examines the righteous and hates the wicked. Only what is valuable is worth the time to examine and care for. What has no value is treated with disdain. Be encouraged. God considers you of great value and gladly gives of his time to make you part of his world.

Second, that God is righteous and so loves justice. This means that of the two groups, the righteous and the wicked, only the upright will see his face and have access to a relationship with God. The wicked will be judged and prevented from knowing God in any way other than his fierce judgement in response to their wickedness.

The wicked may think they are winning and undermining all that is righteous, but it is a fabrication that will fall into ruins the moment it encounters God. The true foundation, which is God, cannot be undermined or altered and the righteous can overcome all the evil around them with this knowledge.

We have a foundation that cannot be destroyed.

Day 35 Ps 14:5

There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous.

This psalm starts out with the fool who says there is no God and then how God is looking down from heaven to see if there is anyone who seeks him. It is a discouraging view of the world we live in. A world where the wicked seem to be in control, and man's main activity in life is to corrupt everything that is good.

Then comes the shift and the question. Will those who do evil never learn? They may say there is no God, but just saying it will not make it true. The day is coming when they will come face to face with that truth and be overcome with dread. It is like the image of a child being chased and attacked by a gang of bullies, who are not paying attention. When suddenly an adult takes one by the arm, and the bully screams, realizing it has been caught in the act. The others turn and, in fear, they run away, leaving the caught one to its fate.

A day will come when the wicked will finally be dealt with, and there will be nowhere to run from God. They will learn of his presence and see that he stands with the righteous. The righteous will be the ones who are honored and restored.

Do I believe this? Do I see that oneday God will save me from what awaits the wicked? Do I allow this knowledge to help me keep my eyes on him when all seems dark? The plans of the wicked will fail, and I will be standing before God.

Day 36 Ps 15:2

He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart.

There are two parts of this psalm that are important to consider. The first is a description of how a person needs to live, if they hope to dwell in God's presence. It contains a list of things this person needs to do and begins with the above passage. The other items on the list would be actions that are a natural result of living in a blameless manner, doing what is righteous and speaking the truth.

This person does what is right even when doing so may cause them pain. The pain becomes irrelevant in comparison to being granted access to God's presence.

The second item relates to what the person receives as a result of living according to the guidelines of the list. This person will never be shaken. They will never have to tremble in fear for their life in God's presence. This truth also provides them the strength to continue to live according to the guidelines given.

Each time a right choice or action is carried out, the righteous receive encouragement and strength to make the next choice and take the next action. In doing so, they are able to grow in their relationship with God which further strengthens them. This experience and knowledge gives them the ability to stand firm in all situations, because they know they now live in God's presence.

Day 37 Ps 17:1

Hear, O Lord, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer — it does not rise from deceitful lips.

The author believes he has access to God and that the cry of his heart will be acceptable to God and worthy of a response. He believes this, based on four key actions he has kept as a focus of his life.

- He has planned no evil deceitful action.
- He has decided that he will not lie or transgress with his words.
- He has kept himself from the violent ways of others.
- And he has actively chosen to follow the path set before him by God.

His plea contains four key elements.

- He seeks to be shown the wonders of God's love.
- He desires that God would keep him in the center of his loving attention.
- He wants to be hidden in the shadow of God's presence.
- He asks that his vindication come from God, not from man.

Now to consider my own attitude as I come before God in prayer. This is a powerful, sobering list of qualities to consider. Keeping even one of them all the time, without God's active involvement in our lives, would be impossible. And while that is the reality, it is clear that the preferred focus and goal is that these would be true, and that God would see the desires of our heart and grant the others, too.

The key in this is to ask that God would vindicate my plea because of my desire to know and follow God. So how am I doing today in presenting a righteous cry before God? Do I have the right focus?

Day 38 Ps 19:9

The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.

This Psalm opens with the heavens declaring God's glory and closes with the desire that all of the words expressed would be pleasing to God. In between these two great bookend comments, we have a discussion of God's law.

It starts with the incredible value of the guidance of God and how, as they carry a warning, they also bring great reward and blessing to life. They also make it possible to enjoy the wonder of God's creation and the wisdom to choose words that will be pleasing to God.

They do this by providing the needed information to see one's faults and seek forgiveness. This information helps one avoid the willful sin that can so easily rule over one's life and blind them to the glory above and the pleasing words below. Together, this knowledge, that brings forgiveness and guides life, provides a person the means to live a blameless life and to be innocent of great transgression.

God's creation opens the door, so we can know God and know that his law is dependable and can guide us. This truth brings us a precious and wondrous blessing to guide our thoughts and actions, which then gives us the tools and skills to do and say what is pleasing in God's sight.

Yes, the heavens declare and so make it possible for us to learn to declare the wonder of knowing God.

Day 39 Ps 31:18

Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

There is a reality in this world that creates fear and anguish. The reality is that the wicked are arrogant and lie to maintain their status and control. And part of this reality is that they attack, without remorse, those who are righteous. The reason is obvious, the righteous know the truth and are unafraid to declare it.

The psalmist is one who is suffering the attacks of the wicked and could easily be overcome by the devastating nature of these attacks and their impact on friends and family, who choose to abandon him in fear of being attacked as well. He could focus on this. Instead, he focuses on the knowledge he has gained of the faithfulness and goodness of God.

He has learned through experience that God will not abandon him, and that God has stored up for him blessings and honor to be received in times of struggle. He has learned that God truly loves him and can be trusted with his life in all situations. He has learned that, while others dread to be near him, God is always present and always remembers his name and his needs.

He has learned that by trusting in God, even when attacked, he will be able to rejoice and commit it all to God's capable hands. He knows that in the end he will dwell in God's presence and know the rewards of hope.

There is hope for all who choose to follow the path God places before them.

Day 40 Ps 32:11

Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

This psalm gives several reasons why the righteous can sing and be glad. It opens by talking about the blessing of being forgiven and fully covered by God. This happens when the person acknowledges their sin and confesses it to God.

They are ones who know they can pray to God and know that God can be found. This knowledge brings protection and so much more. It is the door to being instructed by God. When the righteous person comes to God, God agrees to instruct but not by force. God wants to counsel and watch over them, helping the person to see the correct way and choose to follow.

These two choices are what makes it possible to rejoice in the Lord. They have received two incredible gifts. The forgiveness of God is the first, and it opens the way to being in God's presence so that the second gift can be given, God's instruction.

For this to be a true blessing one cannot be willful and stubborn, like a horse or a mule. They do not choose but must be controlled and guided. We can behave that way or choose to know what is right and do it, instead of making the process of growing difficult. God's desire is that we hear and choose to follow the path set before us, because we understand what God desires. That is where the real rejoicing can occur.

Day 41 Ps 33:1

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

I must admit that like most other people the focus of much of my prayer is on my needs, concerns, and struggles and of those who are nearest to me. I also pray for others but again the focus is most often on this same list.

This psalm is a reminder that the righteous also spend time focusing on all the blessings God provides. God is faithful in all he does. Because of this I can bring my needs to him knowing that he will respond.

God loves righteousness. Because of this, I know I will be treated fairly, and he will forgive me when I repent.

God's word is firm. Because of this, I can live in confidence knowing that he will keep his promises.

God is almighty. Because of this, I know that I have the power to live according to his law and I do not need a mighty army to defeat the enemy of my soul.

God is watching. Because of this, I know he understands what is happening in my life and will know the best way to provide what I need.

God is always prepared. Because of this, I have hope, knowing that he will guide me and protect me in every situation.

God is eternal. Because of this, I know that death cannot defeat him or the plans he has for me to be with him.

Therefore, I can sing joyfully before the Lord.

Day 42 Ps 34:15, 17, 19, 21

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are

Verse 17 declares that the Lord hears the cry of the righteous. Verse 19 that the Lord delivers the righteous. Verse 21 that the foes of the righteous are condemned.

The focus of this psalm is on why one can expect the Lord to pay attention and rescue the righteous.

Seek – The righteous are those who actively seek out the Lord. More than that, they know where to find the one they seek.

Call and be heard – The righteous are those who call out with the belief that they will be heard. They know that the Lord is listening for those who call from an honest heart.

Taste and see – The righteous position themselves and live so that they will be in a place where they can meet the Lord. They know from personal experience the goodness of the Lord

Fear – The righteous are not arrogant and proud so that God will be willing to respond to what they desire. They know the Lord desires humility above all else.

Avoid evil – The righteous know that the Lord does not tolerate or respond to those whose purpose is evil; whose purpose is selfish.

Extol and honor – The righteous know what they receive and from whom they receive the blessings and security they enjoy. They lift their voice in words of thanksgiving and proclaim openly in whom they have placed their trust. They choose to live a life that honors the source of their refuge and life.

Day 43 Ps 37:16-17

Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; 17 for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.

What is the wealth of the wicked? As one reads, there are several things that the wicked depend on to define their wealth. The most obvious is financial wealth. They possess a lot of material goods on which they depend to give the appearance of a wonderful life. It provides them with comfort and luxury.

The second wealth is the control they exert over others. To have material wealth implies control. They are not able to produce the one without the other, so they need to have control over others, often many others, a wealth that allows them to protect, care for, and increase what they have.

The last wealth is the level of harm they bring to others. The first two wealths are based on harming others by either abusing them to get what is desired and/or ignoring the needs of others. They take as much as they can and give as little as possible. This thinking will result in harming others.

And so the psalmist rightly states that this is how the wicked gain and maintain their wealth; and that it is better to have little and be at peace with the world around me and with God. Because it is a certainty that at some point God will respond, and the wicked will discover, to their sorrow, that the one thing their wealth could not gain is the approval of God. And they will be cast aside in favor of the righteous.

Day 44 Ps 37:25

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

This is not about not being in need. Even the righteous will be affected by disease, famine, war and a host of other struggles that are just part of life. This is not about being lost, abandoned, or forgotten. These are common events in our world. Everyday people fall through the cracks in the system and in even their most cherished relationships. All too often, one will hear the phrases ‘I had no idea’ or ‘I have been so busy’ as explanations about why that has happened.

The point of this is that, while in the world we may suffer and be forgotten, none of that is hidden from God. The righteous are never forsaken by God. He knows in intimate detail what is happening and what needs to be done to help the righteous flourish in the midst of the pain suffering and isolation that is the constant portion of everyone who lives on this planet.

The righteous know this and are able to wait patiently for God’s provision for their soul and their relationship with God. This ability allows them to be generous with their most important possession, their relationship with God. They are aware that God is pleased with this way of living and will strengthen them and protect them. They will never lose God’s active presence in their lives.

They will be blessed and are able to bless others. No need to beg here.

Day 45 Ps 51:19

Then there will be righteous sacrifices,

This is a psalm of confession and has been quoted many times to remind people of the real nature of sin and the need to bring ourselves to God as the only true sacrifice. For it is not our sacrifice that delights God but a broken and contrite heart (17).

We need to learn what the psalmist learned, as he contemplated the nature of his sin and realized that, though it affected others, his sin was, at its heart, actions that were in violation of God's purposes and intent. He declares it "against you, you only, have I sinned." (4) The more he thought on this, the more he realized the truth that he was sinful in his whole being.

This led him to cry in confession of his need to know truth and to learn wisdom from God. It was only in this way could he be able to ask God to cleanse him. In this way he would be washed and be whiter than snow (7). This action would allow God to create in him a pure heart and a steadfast spirit and so regain the joy of God's salvation.

His final plea is to be granted a willing spirit to give him the strength to continue to walk in God's ways, teach others the truth he has learned to gain the ability to give a true sacrifice: a broken spirit and a contrite heart. These would be the acceptable sacrifice, which only a righteous person is capable of bringing. A person made righteous by God's actions made possible by honest confession of sin.

Day 46 Ps 52:6

The righteous will see and fear;

The righteous take note of what happens to the wicked. Especially what will happen. They see the fear of the wicked. The fear they live with every day. A fear that makes them dangerous to those near them. A fear that robs them of sleep and peace. A fear with very little pause to relax and enjoy the beauty that surrounds them. A fear that tells them their life is built on falsehoods and threats.

The righteous also note that whatever the wicked enjoy now will be of no value, when they stand before God. The righteous know that whether the punishment of the wicked occurs in this life or in eternity, all they have and have done will mean nothing when God judges. There is no life in them and they will die.

The author says the righteous will laugh at them. That seems harsh. And yet, do we not rejoice when evil is vanquished? That release of the tension, the struggle involved in opposing evil, does result in a release, a return of joy, and so we laugh. Vindication brings joy, and joy brings laughter. Evil has failed, and we have been released from its shackles, and that release allows the joy to well up so one cannot help but laugh.

The wicked have been foolish. The righteous, who have sunk their roots and hope deep into God now flourish. All will be put right, and we can know joy and express it in all its forms and fullness.

Day 47 Ps 55:22

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

What frightens you?

There are so many ways to answer this question. There are so many reasons for a person to be frightened. Life is filled with uncertainty, despair, and fear. We are but a breath, no, a mere wisp of smoke in the scope of all that exists. And it takes so little to unsettle us, so little to threaten our tenuous hold on life. And so we are easily frightened.

We are under constant attack. Attack by those who do so in the hope that by attacking others they can give more meaning, more control, and more hope to their own lives. That by crushing others they will somehow reduce their own fear. It doesn't work, because it does not change the reality.

We are under constant attack. Attack by those who want to destroy our relationship with God. They do so in the hope that by eliminating God they may gain power over their lives. It doesn't work, because they remain what they are.

We are under attack. Attack by our own fears. We attack ourselves hoping that by doing so we may overcome our fears and create a better me. It doesn't work. Instead it reveals the depth of who we really are.

There is only one option available and that is what is found in this psalm. Call on the Lord. Seek his path and follow it. Cast all your fear at his feet. For only those who are righteous, those who call on the Lord from an honest heart, will find peace.

Day 48 Ps 58:10 , 11

The righteous will be glad when they are avenged,

Then men will say, "Surely the righteous still are rewarded;

I must admit I struggle with the psalms that seek the punishment of the wicked. It is hard, in light of Jesus' command to love our enemies, to read these and realize that I am quicker to seek the judgment and destruction of the wicked than to pray for them.

There is one part of this cry for their destruction that is correct, bringing an end to the wicked. That is to place it in God's hands, for he can see what must be done and the best way to accomplish it. So what should be the focus of my prayer…their destruction or their salvation? Both involve praying for them, but one is based on payback and the other on love.

The question is what is the best way for this to be accomplished? What will have the greatest impact and proclaim God's rule? The destruction of the person will bring an end to evil. But the salvation of the person will do the same. Both are best accomplished through God's action. God knows who will repent and who will not. I do not know this.

What I do know is that I must pray for the wicked. And the best way to pray is for their salvation. Then my heart is free of anger and hate. Something to be avoided at all cost.

Day 49 Ps 64:10

Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!

There are two ways we can choose to live. We can become focused on the evil and all that is happening around us. Or we can choose to look at the wonders of God around us.

The first is a very discouraging way to look at life. It creates in a person a constant struggle, because it will create the belief or focus that something is always wrong. It creates not just doubt about whether anything is good or beneficial, but it creates suspicion about the actions of everyone around you. It creates a paranoia that will cripple your ability to see anything good.

Now switch to looking at the wonders that God has created. He has provided us with an incredible place to live. He has created us with an amazing ability to think and interact with the world that he created for us. He has given us the opportunity to know him and experience a relationship with the creator of everything we see and know. He has created us so that we can be a blessing and source of wonder to those around us.

The first creates fear and isolation. The second creates hope and relationship. The first prevents us from seeing anything good. The second opens our eyes to the possibility of good in a person and the possibility of that good being restored as one meets God. The righteous know this and rejoice.

Day 50 Ps 68:3

But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

There is one thing the righteous always have in abundance, access to God. And it is not based on their status in the world. The outcasts, defenseless, poor, and even prisoners have the same access as anyone else.

In fact, they may have more right than those who think they are eligible for this. And the moment a person thinks they are eligible, they reveal the reason why they are lower on the list of people God responds to. It is because they think they have done something to gain the right to have access to God, to be in his presence, and expect something.

The fatherless, the widow, the lowly, and the prisoner already know that, according to the world's concept of value and eligibility, they are almost void of rights. This makes it possible for them to see their need. This opens the way for humility and dependence on God. Those who think they are eligible are depending on themselves, believing they have in some way become authorized to receive from God. This pride is the very thing that will prevent them from being able to come before God and receive his care.

The others, in humility, seek God out, knowing they have no right to come before God, no right to expect anything. And it is this attitude that God responds to and provides the one thing of true value, himself. He becomes father, defender, family, and liberator to the lowly, and they are able to rejoice.

Day 51 Ps 69:28

May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

The psalmist is once again dealing with the struggle of being mistreated by the wicked. He prays that his struggle and behavior will not discourage others who are seeking to follow God. He prays that those who hope in God will not be disgraced or experience shame either for their association with David or their desire to follow a path that leads to righteousness and God.

At the same time, he includes words of praise and thankfulness to God. He knows that he can call on God in those times of need, because he knows of God's love and mercy.

In the midst of the cry brought on by the struggles. In the midst of his desire for God to deal with the wicked. In the midst of his words of hope and thanks, appears the phrase 'the book of life.' And it could be easy to lose sight of that phrase, because it is bracketed by words of judgment and a dire warning. The warning could cause us to miss the hope to be found, something to be sought after, being very careful not to lose sight of it.

There is a book of life, and only those who are righteous, who truly seek God, will be listed in that book. The verse contains this hope. God cares for the righteous, for those who avoid evil and have a consuming zeal of all things pertaining to God.

Day 52 Ps 71:74

My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long,

What is the focus of our words? Do we follow the pattern of the world and complain, find fault, and cry about everything? Do we quickly forget what good there is and focus on all that is wrong?

This is a fairly normal pattern. We are quick to see what is wrong and make it the focus of our life and words.

Not so the psalmist. Though life has been difficult, and his enemies have attacked him, he chooses to focus on his relationship with God. He reminds himself that God has been his hope in all that has happened. So instead of becoming bogged down in complaining, he chooses to fill his mouth with praise for the blessings he has received and all that God has done.

This allows him to realize that, no matter what happens, he will always have hope. God has proven himself faithful and so he will praise God more and more and will focus on proclaiming the righteousness and salvation of God. And while his enemies have sought to harm him, he has seen how God has faithfully responded to him, so he will proclaim the mighty acts of God for all to hear.

This truth has so filled his heart that he cannot help but sing praise to God, to shout for joy, because God has been faithful and redeemed him. And so his focus will be to use his tongue to tell of the righteous acts of God all day long. Again, all day long.

Day 53Ps 72:7

In his days the righteous will flourish;

This psalm is a prayer for the king. A prayer that he will be one who follows the Lord and will be blessed and so bless others. The goal is that the king will allow God to lead, and that this leadership will allow the righteous to flourish.

None of us are kings. And yet all of us are royalty as the children of God. We should be people who know God and are able to establish a place where those who truly seek God can grow and abound in that relationship.

We should be those who seek the wisdom of God and are able to judge rightly those we meet, and in that act help them to come closer to God. We are those whose faith never waivers and can provide refreshment and renewal to all, like a rain that provides life to the dry and thirsty.

We should be those who seek out those in need of truth. Yes, those who not only speak about truth but live it and are willing to do so among the people, not from some isolated mountain top. We are those who feed the hungry and provide hope, because we know God and live in his presence.

Our lives and activities are a beacon for others to see and find their way to the knowledge of God, and by that, encounter God. We are the evidence of what God can do, when we are faithful and seek to be righteous and do so for all to see.

Day 54 Ps 75:10

I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.

There is one characteristic of the righteous that stands out for all to see, which is highlighted here in this passage. It has to do with the metaphor of horns. In verse 5, there is a description of the wicked lifting their horns against heaven. It is based on the image of a horned animal who lifts its horns to display them to the rest of the herd and especially other males to establish its dominance over them. The wicked are warned not to use this posture in relationship to God.

In verse 10, this image is used once again to show God's attitude towards this action regarding those who are righteous. The righteous lower their horns in respect of God and his authority over them. The wicked do not. They are proud and will have the symbol of their pride removed for all to see and consider.

In contrast to this, the righteous, who are humble, will have theirs lifted up by God. They will be honored instead of shamed. The righteous understand that true honor and respect cannot be gained through their own power but only in allowing God to have control of their lives.

They are the ones who hear God, receive his blessing and sing his praise for all to hear. And so they will be honored by God.

Day 55 Ps 88:12

Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

How often do we find ourselves at this place in life? We are struggling with disaster, illness, and loss at one level or another. We feel like all is dark, and we are forgotten. No one cares about us, and no one understands the pain we are suffering.

We look to the stars and wonder. We wonder if there is such a thing as a good God. We wonder if everything, in fact, is just an accident so that our life has no meaning, no purpose? We wonder if there is any reason to live.

These are the questions being posed here. I am in a dark place and want to know, God, if all your greatness and power can reach me? Can I see them and be encouraged? I am in a place of oblivion where all that is good is being sucked out of life, and I want to know if a righteous God sees what is happening and can respond to my need? Can good come out of all the pain and confusion and give me hope?

The writer does not answer these questions. But the very fact that it is possible to ask them is encouraging. It lets us know that God is not afraid of our deep fears and pain. God is not afraid to allow us to come before him and ask. God is willing to listen to me, even in my deepest pain and struggle, and not reject me.

Day 56 Ps 92:12

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,

There is a very good reason this is true. They know God and live in his presence. The next verse makes this clear. They are planted in the house of the Lord. This is a reflection of Psalm 1 where it talks about those who are blessed. They are those who are planted by a good source of water and can draw on this resource to be productive and filled with life.

The righteous flourish not because of what is, or what is not, happening around them. They flourish because of where they sink their roots. They have chosen to live in God's presence and draw on all the resources of God to live. This means that no matter what is happening in the world around them they have joy and peace.

And when others fade or fail, they continue to grow and enrich the lives of those around them. They do not wither under the assault and attacks of the wicked. They do not waver when life is difficult and even appears impossible. They do not swoon when it appears there is no end in sight to the struggles of life. Instead they flourish, they produce fruit, and they are fresh and vibrant.

People will wonder how this is possible. The answer is simple. They dwell in the presence of God and are fed daily by this relationship. A relationship that allows them to flourish even in the advance of years.

Day 57 Ps 94:21

They band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.

Do you ever feel like the deck is stacked against you, stacked to guarantee you will lose? Well the truth is, it is. This world is filled with wicked people and they have one goal in mind, to make their life better, easier, and under their control. That means they will stack the deck in their favor, so they can guarantee winning… not just winning, but winning big.

The easiest target for this is the righteous. People who are not interested in promoting themselves or getting more than they need in this world. People who are not aggressively attacking the world to gain more and to have control. They are easy targets, because they focus on doing what is right and in the right way.

Sounds depressing. And it could easily take us down that road, except for one critical truth. God is on the side of the righteous, and what they lack in this world he makes up for in other ways that are far more valuable. When the wicked are struggling, they have only other wicked people to turn to,and that is a frightening thought.

When the righteous are struggling they have a refuge in God, which is a fortress that can withstand any onslaught of this world, and more. Further, they have the knowledge that when all this life has passed they will spend eternity with God. As a result, these momentary struggles fade into nothing in the presence of God and the hope he provides now and into eternity.

Day 58 Ps 97:11-12

Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. 12 Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous,

One of the things that worries us most is whether or not we are doing what is right and following the correct path. We want to see what lies ahead and be able to enjoy the journey as we travel to our destination.

Now consider this. All of us at one time or another have been in a room with no light. It creates fear and uncertainty. Even when we know the general layout of the room, when we can't see, we lose all sense of distance and spatial reality. We hold out our hand. We move forward an inch at a time. And every move is filled with doubt and the fear that we will trip, run into a wall, or not find what we are looking for, which most of the time is a light switch or some source of light to drive away the darkness, so we can return to our sense of direction and certainty about what surrounds us. This often results in more than just a sense of relief, but joy as well.

In life we face the same uncertainty, the same loss of orientation, and fear that we will not find the correct path to our destination. But if we are righteous and walk with the Lord, we are told that light will be provided, and it will bring us the joy of seeing the path and seeing the one who provides the light.

Day 59 Ps 112:4

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.

A righteous man can see when all others are blind. Not blind in the physical sense, but blind to the truth, blind to the consequences of one's actions, and blind to the presence of God, as well as how he is working in and through events and people.

The wicked are the truly blind. Blind in two ways. They are blind in that they cannot see what is really happening around them. They see only what they want to see. People allow them to continue because of fear. Once fear is removed.

They are blind, because they refuse to believe they will answer for their actions. There will be consequences, which cannot be escaped. More guards, more control, and more money will not prevent this from happening. They create darkness, and light is not allowed to enter.

The righteous will never lack for light. They always know the truth about the world around them. They can see the evil but know that, in the end, it has no power over what has true value, their relationship with God. Even when all seems dark, they know that this light can penetrate even the darkest moments.

The righteous will always have light. They know which actions will open the way for more light to shine in their world and through them to others. Because they depend on God, they can be a beacon of light for others to see and find their way to truth.

Day 60 Ps 112:6

Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever.

To be remembered. This is something we all desire. Even when we are alive, we want to be remembered by friends and family. We see this in the announcements of birthdays, anniversaries, and special days set aside each year for the purpose of remembering key people in our lives.

But to be remembered forever is far beyond the scope of such activities. This brings us to the concept of inheritance and legacy. To remember someone like my grandfather, who served in WW1, or my great-grandfather, who was a circuit preacher in Nebraska.

We have special days for this type of remembrance, Presidents Day, Memorial Day, and others. And we dream of being included in this type of remembrance, but only the famous or infamous reach this level of recognition.

But here we are told that the righteous will be remembered forever. That is only possible if God is the one who is doing the remembering. And we are told in other places in the Bible that there is a book of life, a book of remembering. Those identified by God as worthy have their names written in it and will be remembered forever.

To be remembered by family is based on relationship. To be remembered in history is based on some unique action that was notable. To be remembered by God is not based on our family history or our great deeds, but on our trust in God, which allows us to be and do what is defined as righteous. And this is the person that will be remembered forever.

Day 61 Ps 116:5

The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

The author has cried to the Lord in a time of need and he has responded. He has asked the Lord to save him from deep despair, and the Lord has given him peace and rest.

What is it we seek when life has been difficult, impossible to bear? What do we need to help us face the pain that life gives us? How do we once again find rest for our weary soul?

It is the knowledge that is shared in this comment which comes after a cry for help. The Lord is gracious. The Lord is sensitive to our needs and provides more than we deserve or could hope for. He provides the space we need to see what he is doing and realize the good that is available for us in every situation.

The Lord is righteous. He will respond to us in a way that helps us grow and become more like him in every situation. What he provides reveals his presence and guides us to him and his light, so that we can see and be freed from fear and receive what is given.

The Lord is compassionate. The Lord understands our limits, our weaknesses, and our failings. We are precious to him and so he comes in tenderness and patience to lead us out of the suffering and into his love. He picks us up when we fall. He protects us when we are attacked. He levels the path so we will not stumble as we walk before him.

He is gracious, righteous, and compassionate.

Day 62 Ps 118:15

Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous:

It is a theme repeated over and over in the psalms. If a person chooses to make God his refuge, then he will not simply survive but be victorious. This victory is not about what one gains in the world but what is gained by putting one's trust in God.

Too often we seek the power of the world, the help of the powerful, and the best path to follow based on the evidence before us. All of these have one critical limitation, the reality of life. Life is not a predictable path. So many things can change and make all of the above useless. Life is filled with shifts, surprises, and more.

The power of the world cannot deal with this constant change in what is and will be. How many times do we fail because of the unexpected? Or the fact that the world shifted and we were left behind?

The help of the powerful is inadequate. They are in the same dilemma: life, with all of its unpredictability. How often does the person of power become the outcast tomorrow because of a shift in fortunes? How often are they unable to provide all they promise?

Seeking the best path is hopeless as well. It is based on a false concept of knowledge. And how often do we discover we don't know enough and become lost?

No, the only source of hope is in God, and the righteous know this. This alone brings salvation and rejoicing into their world, which they have made to be a temple to God.

Day 63 Ps 119:7

I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

Here is the difference between legalism and freedom. I praise God for the law and find freedom in it, not bondage. I am not learning a list of dos and don'ts but a way of living that will draw me closer to God with a heart that is tuned to his desires for me.

A legalistic understanding of the law will press me into a mold shaped by the thoughts and ideas of those around me. But if my heart is upright, and my desire is to know God and walk with him, the law opens my heart to be cleansed and set right so that the law brings life, not oppression.

If it says to not do something, I don't see the limitations, but I see all that I am given permission to do. I see how not doing something, actually allows me to do so much more. It, in fact, frees me from a bondage I would not have seen, except for the guidance I gain from desiring to follow the law of God and seeing how they are righteous in their purpose and goal.

Its purpose is not to bind me but to free me to know God, so that I can praise him for all he has given and the path he has provided to purify my heart and thoughts, so that I will know how to praise him and enter his presence.

Day 64 Ps 119:62

At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.

I find it hard to imagine getting up in the middle of the night to thank God for the law he has given us to guide our lives and relationship with him. To be honest I find it difficult to do so at any time. I do not think of the law as a blessing but more of a task master, whose function is to keep me in line and obedient. This concept carries with it a constant reminder of the potential of punishment for disobedience.

But here the author says he is thankful for the law even more than that he sees the law as righteous. As something that brings benefit and hope into his life. Earlier in the passage he talks about considering his ways and turning his steps to follow these laws. And shortly after, he talks about how the earth is filled with God's love, which creates in him a desire to be taught this law.

The author sees the law as a guide to living in the right way. Even more that the law is the proof of God's love and a guide that will bring us an awareness of that love in all of the earth. This is a very different approach to the law. Not as a means for punishment and judgment but as a means to know God and his love. Truthfully, God does not do things to harm us but to lead us to him and his love.

Day 65 Ps 119:75

I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Do we understand what is being said here? It is not something we want to hear or consider. The law of God will judge us, and to us it will appear as affliction. It will appear as punishment, but it is so much more and so much less.

The rest of this passage talks about two critical ideas that help us understand this concept. The first is the blessing of being able to understand the law and follow its directions. Further, how this blessing reveals the unfailing love and comfort that is contained within the law. This means that whatever affliction or correction that is imposed on us by this law, and God's use of the law, is meant to help us grow and, over time, become blameless in our thought and actions.

The second idea is found in verse 80. Here it talks about how all that happens will not put us to shame. This is a key issue. In the world so often punishment, affliction, and judgment are carried out in a way to shame a person. It is not just that the person deserves their punishment. People want them to suffer and be shamed in the process. This is not God's intent. He wants us to see the compassion in what happens. How it will help us learn and grow and come to delight, not in the punishment, but in what is learned and gained because of the love that is expressed in the process.

A loving father corrects the child he loves without causing shame.

Day 66 Ps 119:106

"I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow Your righteous laws."

This passage is about the commitment involved in developing a true relationship with God and enjoying the blessing that comes with knowing the truth. This starts with a clear understanding that there is only one path to follow and that there is only one source of light to reveal that path. This is found in verse 105 which is well-known. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

With this knowledge in hand, the next step is one of commitment. The writer uses two key phrases:

The first is that of taking an oath. This binding promise must be fulfilled no matter what the cost is if the person is to receive what is included in the promise. It is what a marriage vow is and is part of the dedication vows that parents make when presenting a child for dedication to the Lord. We bind ourselves to a set of actions to receive help and blessing as we fulfill the oath taken.

Soldiers do the same when they enter their chosen service. An oath to protect and preserve their country with the expectation that the country will honor their commitment and provide the resources needed to carry out this oath. These types of oaths set a person on a particular path.

The second key phrase is "My heart is set on keeping Your decrees to the very end." (verse 112) Taking the vow is not enough. It must become the total focus of all our desires and plans. That is critical to following the righteous path.

Day 67 Ps 119:121

"I have done what is righteous and just;"

What does this mean? What does one expect to gain from doing what is righteous and just?

As I read through this section of the psalm, I see the reason for this choice. The author believes that by living this kind of life he will find salvation. He also believes that this choice will open the way for discernment and understanding. And finally, the belief that because of this choice, the Lord will protect him and act on his behalf.

But it is not just the act of doing what is righteous and just. It is also the reason for this choice. He is so intent on finding God and understanding the promise contained in his choice that he commits a great deal of time and effort in the process. He considers the knowledge of God's precepts as more valuable than gold, even purified gold. And as a result, he has chosen to not simply follow the commands of God but to learn to love them.

This is a critical decision because it is more common for us to hate the rules and regulations that are established. We don't like giving others control of our life and decisions. But that is the whole focus of this. I not only have chosen to learn the law of God, not only chosen to follow this law, but have chosen to learn to love it.

This makes it possible for me to understand my relationship with God at a personal level and therein lies the salvation and promise that is contained in the law.

Day 68 Ps 119:160

"All Your words are true; all Your righteous laws are eternal. "

In this world that is constantly changing with a different set of rules for every culture and even every person there is one thing that is unchanging and always true. The words of God. They are eternal. This makes sense since they are the outward expression of who God is. So, they are both eternal and true.

So, no matter which group I am with, or what culture I am part of, I can depend on this reality. That God's words are true in every place and they are righteous. They apply to every context and allow any person anywhere to know what is true, right, and just.

This is so important because our world is incredibly unstable and unreliable in the area of truth and what is right. Every person wants to define it according to what they desire and expect. Every leader wants to establish a system that benefits them and those they lead, if he is not selfish, as so many are. Every nation, tribe, and people do the same thing. They create their own systems of truth and justice. As a result, there is constant conflict between peoples, groups and nations.

But in God we have something that is stable and reliable. And those words are not adequate to define them. So, the author repeats several times in this psalm this concept that with God we have something that is eternally reliable and true. It is why we, from many tribes and nations, can come together in peace and love. God's laws are righteous, eternal, and true for all.

Day 69 Ps 119:164

“Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. “

When life is difficult where do you turn? When the world is hateful and attacking what do you depend on? This was the answer of the psalmist. Whenever something is happening, I praise God for His law.

But what was the law to the author?

To the Jew, the first five books of the bible are called the Torah, or the Law. What is interesting is that these five books are not a legal text. Yes, they contain law but they also contain so much more. They reveal the presence of the law in all aspects of life. They reveal how God was making His law known to different people at different times so that they would all learn that no matter what was happening they had somewhere to go for answers. They had an anchor that could keep them connected and immovable in the wildest of storms.

The righteous law of God is not a list of dos and don’ts but a revelation of who God is and how to learn to live in His world. It is not an escape from what is happening but access to a relationship that gives us power over all that is happening.

This reality brings peace and the knowledge that no matter what happens my feet are on a sure foundation and nothing can make me stumble.

So, take time to praise the Lord all through the day. Praise and thank Him for His great love revealed to us in His law which permeates all of life.

Day 70 Ps 119:172

May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.

Jesus summed up the law in one great command, to love the Lord with all your mind, heart, body, and soul. This law does not contain dos and don'ts. It contains one thing: a definition of what it means to know and love God. All of the rest of the law falls into place and become simple outgrowths of this one law. If I understand this, then loving my neighbor is a consequence of the first law, and not a law unto itself.

This is where we have so many problems. And the reason we cannot sing and rejoice in the law of the Lord. We attempt to fulfill the law without a profound relationship with God, thinking that by doing so we will somehow gain the first via fulfillment of everything else. This is the path that leads to legalism, the keeping of law in order to gain access or approval of God. This does not work.

There is nothing we can do that will ever make this possible. Let me correct that statement, if we don't love God first completely then nothing we can do or think we can do will make a relationship with God possible. And the law will never become a delight but always a harsh taskmaster. One that will punish us and leave us empty and void.

The author saw this and said he had strayed. He knew the only way to return was to regain the joy of knowing God's law by first knowing God. Then the law becomes a delight and a source of rejoicing.

Day 71 Ps 125:3

“The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil. “

How much struggle, pain, and suffering can you endure? Is there a breaking point even for the righteous?

Of course, there is. If there is no hope, no outside source of encouragement and strength then, in the end, even the strongest will fail. Not a single one of us can maintain our beliefs if they are only based on our ideas of what is right and wrong, what justice and injustice are, and what is or isn’t possible in the way of having hope.

Here is the truth. The righteous have One who surrounds and protects their inner being. One who is known and in being known provides the foundation and strength to avoid falling into evil if they were to gain the same power as the wicked.

The righteous know that, no matter what is happening, there will be a reckoning at some point and the rule of the wicked will come to an end. They know that the One they have placed their hope in will not fail and they will be able to maintain their faith in Him and remain righteous in their thoughts and deeds.

They will not be tempted to seek power and seek to force the world to do what they believe is right. They know that force cannot make people righteous. Only the loving care of God can accomplish this and so they seek God and not power.

Day 72 Ps 129:4

“But the Lord is righteous; He has cut me free from the cords of the wicked.”

How often do we feel bound, and trapped by the evil around us? How often do we feel like our hands are tied; our tongues frozen, unable to do anything to confront the evil we encounter?

This is an all too common feeling. But we do not have to allow it to become the norm. The writer reminds us that the Lord is righteous. He sees the struggle we have to free ourselves from the aspiration of the wicked. For if they can succeed in silencing those who serve the Lord and seek righteousness, then the world will slide into a pit of despair and hopelessness.

He sees this and he cuts the cords of those who seek to destroy hope and submit the world to their brand of life. He breaks the chains that the wicked forge with the hope of preventing the truth from being known.

God sees and frees those who seek Him and desire to serve him. And while we may feel bound, trapped, and surrounded by those who are evil, they cannot bind, alter, or even twist the truth because of the freedom and protection that God gives to those who serve Him. God frees. And the life and the freedom it reveals will allow others to see the truth the wicked try to eliminate.

There is hope. There is freedom. There is life. And God always protects those who choose to follow His path over the path of the wicked.

Day 73 Ps 140:13

"Surely the righteous will praise Your name and the upright will live before you."

The world is filled with the wickedness of man. We know this because every one of us contributes to this reality in some way. We may not like to admit it, but we do. If we are not actively contributing, we do so by our silence or inaction.

But that should never be allowed to be the focus or take center stage in our lives. We should always be seeking out the evidence of God's presence and examples of the truth in our lives and those around us. That is the point of his comment. The writer has listed several things the wicked do and then expressed his desire for God to judge them.

This would be the normal attitude for every one of us. But as he closes his comments, he realizes there needs to be a different focus. He realizes that God is searching for those who are righteous. He realizes that it is not in identifying all the ways people are wicked and mistreat the truth that he will gain anything. It is by praising God and seeking His presence.

This action will reveal whom they serve and lead them to live correctly before God. It is not in crying out against evil. That only highlights it and changes nothing. It is by honoring God and praising Him. It is by searching and then seeing what God is doing and declaring it that will make a difference. Praising God will change us and impact others.

Day 74 Ps 141:5

"Let a righteous man strike me — it is a kindness; let him rebuke me — it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it, …"

Do you like being rebuked? Do you enjoy being punished? I didn't think so, and neither do I. But there is truth in what is being said here. How well we receive a rebuke and punishment will depend on several factors.

The primary one is whether we believe we deserve to be rebuked and/or punished. Do we believe that we have done something that deserves such a response?

The second is who is rebuking us. Do they have the right and authority to do so? Are they in a position to determine that what we did was wrong?

The last is the attitude of the person rebuking and punishing us. Are they doing so in love or out of disdain? The former is out of concern for what we are doing and what it could result in. The latter is done with no regard for use and our needs, simply that it provides the opportunity for the person to dominate another.

And this is the point being made. If I have done wrong and am approached by a righteous person, then I will respond graciously to what they have to say and recommend. I will have seen their life and know that their primary focus is to help me understand what I have done and to know how to deal with my actions, attitude, and their consequences. In fact, I will be glad that they are the ones helping me.

Day 75 Ps 142:7

"Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me."

What will bring those who are righteous together? What will give them a reason to praise God and reveal themselves to the world? It is another righteous person.

Each righteous person has the same desire as the person in this psalm, to be free from the attack of those who oppose them. At times it seems like an impossible goal. At times it looks like there is no place to turn for respite or refuge.

Yet, there is one place of refuge that is always available and that is the Lord. This frees them from the prison of fear, allows them to face those who pursue them, and lifts their voice in praise of God. This act may be misunderstood by those who do not know the Lord and do not have this place of refuge, but those who are righteous will know, see, and hear.

When my cry for mercy and refuge in the Lord is expressed, I will discover that I am not alone in my desire to walk with God. It will allow me to hear and see others who have the same desire, and it will allow us to gather and enjoy together the goodness of God to each of us.

We will become more than a single voice, but a choir of voices united in praise to God for his goodness. It will be glorious and we, like Elijah, will learn we are not alone in seeking to follow God. All we need to do is lift our voices in praise of God and we will know.

Day 76 Ps 143:2

"Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before You."

And it all comes crashing down. The reality of my real state before God. No matter how hard I try I will never be righteous before God. But does this mean that I should give up on even trying? So few have been called truly righteous, Enoch, Noah, Moses, and Samuel come to mind. But I think of them as the exception and not the rule.

Even they could not be considered in the same category as righteous when placed alongside God. Their lives would seem pale almost transparent, barely visible in the presence of the glory of God. Only two people lived and didn't die, Enoch and Elijah. But they are only a brief blip of light compared to the eternal glory of God.

But that is not the point of being righteous. We cannot be like God because we are not God. Even in an unfallen sinful state we still could not be righteous as God. We are only the reflection, the image, of what He is. And that is what we need to focus on. Making it possible for others to see at least a reflection of who God is in our lives.

When we come before God with our prayers, our cries for safety and protection, this is what we need to cry for. That we will be formed into a perfect mirror so that others can see Him in our actions, words, and attitude. Yes Lord, watch over me today so that they will see whom I trust in and so see you.

Day 77 Ps 145:17

“The Lord is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made.”

This is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving. God is worthy of our praise and adoration, and we should celebrate that truth. And a key aspect of who God is is that He is righteous. His response to our cries, our struggles, our hopes, and our failures is always correct.

This fact means that He is trustworthy, He is always near to those who call on Him, He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him, and He watches over those who love Him.

But what is the value of all that if no one proclaims these truths? What will people see if those who know the Lord do not share their knowledge with others?

The truth is that if those of us who know these truths are silent there are still other witnesses. In other places, we learn that the universe declares God’s glory. Jesus said the rocks would cry out if all others remained silent. And earlier in this psalm the writer declares that the saints, those who walk with God will praise God.

When one knows God, truly knows God, that person cannot be silent. For even in the darkest places they see God and know all that He has provided and will provide for those who are His creation. And so, my mouth will speak the praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise His name.

Join creation in praising God and know that He is worthy of that praise.

Day 78 Ps 146:8

"…, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous."

This psalm lists several actions of the Lord that He carries out concerning those in need. It starts by telling the reader why the Lord is able to do this. He is the maker of heaven and earth. He remains faithful forever. It closes with the fact that the Lord reigns forever.

But in the middle of this is one phrase that stands out, the Lord loves the righteous.

There is a reason for all that the Lord does for us. He truly loves us. He makes it a point to know what is happening in our world and provide what we need when we need it. Note I didn't say what I want. Something he may do. But clearly, he supplies what we need.

He frees us to know him. He opens our eyes to see Him at work. He lifts us so we can grasp the bigger picture of His activity and purpose. He provides for our sustenance to keep us going and focused. And He is faithful forever and, as God, there is no end to any of these. They will take us right into eternity with Him.

My Lord loves me and wants me to walk with Him. When I seek Him, serve Him, and love Him, I will understand what this statement means. He loves the righteous. And I will lift my voice in praise.

Day 79 Pr 2:20

“Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous.”

In every age, there are those who say there is no clear path to follow, nothing to guide our steps in how to live. They will say that morality is relative and defined by what man thinks is best for man. When this becomes the norm, then indeed life will be perilous and anyone who tries to say there is a path will be ridiculed.

But those who seek wisdom will realize that man is not able to declare himself as the source of knowledge and truth. The wise know there is a greater presence at work behind all that is happening and that there is a source on which he can rely to help define the right path to follow.

It is those who are wise and know the limits of man and seek the source of his creation that will discover that there is a path - a way to live that is good and will bring true benefit to all who follow that path. That path is the path of the righteous, of all those who seek wisdom and find its source.

Wisdom is what each of us needs, and if we truly seek it, we will find its source and we will walk in the paths of the righteous - of all those who have found the creator and learned what is good. It is not a hidden path for those who are wise. To those who know they cannot live without truth gained by knowing the source of that truth, God.

Day 80 Pr 3:33

“The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous.”

As you read through this chapter several ideas are presented that help us to understand what it means to have God bless the house of the righteous.

The first on the list is that this house will not fear what happens in life. Even sudden disaster is not feared. There is a knowledge that no matter what happens God is in control and watches over His house and those within.

The second is the idea that the members of a righteous house will not stumble. There are so many things in life that have as their sole function to cause a person to stumble and lose their balance. They are designed to cause one to lose sight of the path and focus on the trouble of the moment instead of the goal that lies ahead. Those that live in the home of the righteous have learned that as they learn wisdom and depend on God they know He will remove the obstacles and level the path.

This leads to the third item of sweet sleep. When there is no fear of what tomorrow brings and no fear of stumbling and being hindered in reaching their goal, they can sleep in peace and awake refreshed.

The last is that they will receive that which is good and the greatest good is the presence of God. For it is this knowledge that removes fear, gives guidance, and allows for peace in their life. When one walks with God these are the blessings that await that household.

Day 81 Pr 4:18

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

The dark of night slowly fades away as the sun rises. Dark becomes dusk and then the sun appears. Moment by moment its light grows, and it provides warmth to all it touches until once fully risen all is clearly visible, even what lies in shadow.

This is what it means to follow truth and seek the path of the righteous. Once it is found it step by step brings illumination to the truth it contains and provides so that each step is clearer and so reveals the next step until one sees clearly the truth. This path and the illumination it provides will lead to the knowledge of God's presence in everything it touches.

It is like a building that block by block grows until what is being built is clearly seen and the purpose of what is being built becomes clear to all. But it all begins with laying the first block and for the building to be constructed properly that block must be placed correctly or all else will be out of position and result in a building that is flawed.

This is why we must seek the true path of the righteous. Why we need its light and ability to reveal God's truth. For without its guidance, we will build our life in a way that will allow errors in its development and this will cause there to be flaws in what we do.

This is the purpose of wisdom to help us see clearly the path and then stay on it.

Day 82 Pr 9:9

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.

One of the greatest dangers we face as individuals is an inflated or inaccurate image of ourselves. We want to believe we are better that we really are in some way. We want others to see us as worthy of honor and respect. And so we often blind ourselves to our weaknesses and limitations.

But a righteous person realizes this and seeks to be taught and grow through the insights and help of others. They know they cannot see their weaknesses and areas where they need help and need to grow. This knowledge makes them willing to submit to the authority of God and those God brings into their lives to help them overcome those areas of limitations and weakness.

As a result, instead of fearing the authority of God and others they have a peace that allows them to be freed from their own pride and ego. They realize they have nothing to prove and that their true value is based in pursuing the instruction of others and of the fact that their real worth is to be found in building a relationship with God.

They see that the instruction of others frees them from fear, frees them from a fear of the future, and frees them to be able to live before God because the teaching they receive comes not with the purpose of judging them but providing security and protection so that they can grow in a healthy fear of the Lord.

Day 83 Pr 10:3

The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

This passage contains two critical words that need to be kept in mind as one things through what the writer is trying to communicate. They are hungry and craving. Let us consider the first, craving.

What does this word mean, craving? It suggests an uncontrolled desire for an object. in terms of hunger it is the desire for something even when the hunger of the person is being satisfied. As a result the person is not able to enjoy even what they have. There is a constant desire for more or something else.

A glutton craves more and more food, no matter how harmful it may be. A connoisseur always desires the best and can never be satisfied. They are rarely impressed because in their mind there is always something better or other. And then there is the picky person who craves only what they like. It matters little the time, effort or cost involved in the preparation of what is served. Only what they like is acceptable.

This can be applied to many different areas of life, food, clothing, education, friendships, jobs, and on the list can got. These people always crave more than what is offered.

Now let us look at the word hungry. A person who is hungry and honest will not think about more, better, or different. They will think about what is needed and be satisfied. No they will be content in knowing they have what is needed. The Lord always provides what is needed to this person.

Day 84 Pr 10:11

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,

In this chapter are a number of references that state that the righteous person is a source of life and wisdom. Vs 20 the tongue of the righteous is choice sliver, vs 21 Lips of righteous nourish man. Vs 31 from mouth of righteous comes wisdom and vs 32 the lips of the righteous finish fear.

Along side these is a second them that the righteous will stand firm and never be uprooted, vs 25 and 30.

The righteous are those who are known to have a deeper knowledge of what truly lasts and is source of life that can endure and overcome all that happens in this world. Their words satisfy the needs of themselves and of others. They have what gives them peace and they can supply what others need to find peace and life.

What makes this possible is that they have an anchor in their life. They know God and know that this anchor cannot be uprooted or damaged. This relationship provides them confidence to share what they know with others. It also gives them a vantage point to see the path of the Lord and the refuge it provides for the journey ahead.

We need to be anchored in the Lord so that we can be a source of wisdom and hope to those around us struggling to find their way in the storms of life. We need to be firm in our commitment so that others will find in us the path to God and the peace we have that nourishes us in all aspects of life.

Day 85 Prov 12:3

"A man cannot be established through wickedness, but the righteous cannot be uprooted."

Do we really understand what is being said here?

The wicked depend on fear, greed, and manipulation to maintain their place in the world. They live in fear of being betrayed and attacked. Maintaining their place involves using power to frighten and control others. To do this they bribe, threaten, and deceive all those who are in their world. The moment they fail to maintain any aspect of this they will be destroyed.

Unlike them, the righteous cannot be uprooted. They are dependent on truth which never deceives. They need no access to power to defend themselves. They build their lives on caring for and helping others with no intent to deceive or control. They do not require remuneration or any form of gifts to motivate their actions. As a result, they neither bribe nor can be influenced by bribery.

They have no desire to deceive anyone which means all who know them can depend on them for the truth and an honest response to any question or situation.

Their presence is desired not avoided. Their words are considered valuable not dangerous and destructive. This is possible because they are anchored in the source of power outside of themselves and their actions. As a result, they are free from fear and a need to control.

What they are and what they build cannot be changed, altered, or denied.

Day 86 Prov 12:5

"The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful."

The advice of the wicked always has ulterior motives. The main one is maintaining their control and possessions. Their advice may seem good, but this undercurrent is always there. It is designed to bring them benefits and expand their influence and power. Merely by seeking their advice, you obligate yourself to them and they will extract payment either at that moment or at some point.

A righteous person has no such inclination. They know what is right and it is not based on who benefits from what is done or said. It is based on what is right and what God expects us to do. This allows the righteous to give what they have freely, with no hidden charges for what they share. This allows the righteous to be free from innuendo and obfuscation, with no ulterior or hidden motives.

You cannot trust what the wicked say or give. You can trust what the righteous say or give. The key is that one is dependent on the goals and purposes of a person, and the other is dependent on the goals and purposes of God.

The wicked only give what they feel will benefit themselves. The righteous give what will benefit others. The wicked will withhold key information to gain control. The righteous give what is needed and when it is needed at the correct time so the person will grow and trust God.

Day 87 Prov 12:7

"Wicked men are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous stands firm."

The wicked have no permanent dwelling. No one wants to maintain the name and place of the wicked. The wicked are often one generation deep and their successor often does not want to be linked to the one that they succeed. They either tear the past down or alter it so that it becomes clearly theirs in the eyes of others.

But the house of the righteous is multigenerational. The righteous want to be known as part of the history of those who have gone before. The righteous want to build on what has been received not destroy and replace. The righteous see the value of the work done and want to benefit from it and make it available to others.

The goal of the wicked is to overthrow whoever is in power and replace them. The goal of the righteous is to extend and expand what already exists and share it with others.

The wicked live in fear of those who threaten their world and distrust everyone. The righteous search for a reason to trust others and so experience an inner peace the wicked will never know or obtain. When one talks about the wicked, it is about the destruction and pain they have created. When one talks about the righteous, it is about the blessing and growth they have made possible.

Jesus made the difference so clear - one builds on sand, and the other builds on solid rock. The key is the presence and activity of God.

Day 88 Prov 12:10

"A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel."

Such a contrast. The impact of the life of a righteous person reaches his animals as well. If you want to know the heart of a person, watch how they treat both the people and the animals that are part of their life. When the heart is true and understands what is right, then all within their sphere of activity are impacted. And if either of the two is excluded, then there is reason to question them and what they are in the depth of their life. You cannot mistreat one while giving the appearance of caring for the other. A truly righteous life affects everything we do.

In contrast, even the kindest act of the wicked is cruel. Why? Because its focus is on benefiting from the life of the other person. It may appear kind at the moment, but its purpose is far from kind. It is about creating debt that at some time will be collected - no matter what damage will be done in the process of collecting the debt.

This is a key difference between the wicked and the righteous. The acts of the wicked will bring trouble and pain at some point, but the acts of the righteous extend themselves. You can see this in how they treat the people around them, the animals around them, and even the property around them. Nothing is excluded from their life and all are considered viable as a recipient of a kind act.

Day 89 Prov 12:12

"The wicked desire the plunder of evil men, but the root of the righteous flourishes."

Why do the wicked desire more than they already have? Why are they plagued with a need for more and more? Why are they never satisfied with what they have? There is never enough.

In contrast are the righteous, who seem to live in contentment. Why are they satisfied with what they have? Why don't they struggle with a need to have more?

There is one key difference - access. The wicked don't have it and the righteous do. What is the focus of this word, access. It is access to God.

The wicked lack this, and so must fill it with something else. Anything else in the hope that by some means they will finally be able to replace or bury this hole in their lives. This lack of access leaves them unsatisfied with what they have and the incessant demand for more, which only reveals how empty their lives are.

The righteous, in contrast, have free access to God. This freedom reveals how much they lack, how much they need to grow, and how much they need to learn. This lack is not a burden because there is free access to all that is needed all of the time. They flourish and, instead of the need for more, they become a well of blessing to all those they touch.

Day 90 Prov 12:13

"An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk, but a righteous man escapes trouble."

This truth is so obvious it is painful and yet over and over we attempt to alter the truth. Why? We are afraid to face ourselves, what we have done, and deal with the consequences. And when we alter the truth (lie), we will find ourselves having to lie about the lie, and on it goes until the lies trap us because we can't remember what we have said.

The lies grow until the truth is forgotten, but only to the one who lies. The truth remains and will be revealed to the dismay of the one who lied.

The righteous man escapes this trap by focusing on the truth. It may be painful at times to speak and live the truth because so often the truth involves confessing our failures and limitations. It is always easier to remember the truth, and once the confession is made, moving forward is possible. The truth brings freedom to live and to enjoy the key blessing of knowing God.

Let's be honest, the goal of telling the truth is much the same as telling lies, that is, to escape trouble. The difference is that in telling the truth, you may not escape the trouble caused by your actions and the response of others, but you will escape judgment and punishment from God. In contrast, the evil man only escapes the trouble he seeks to avoid temporarily, and will never escape the judgment and punishment waiting for him for his evil behavior.

Day 91 Prov 12:21

"No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble."

This statement would appear to be a contradiction of other statements about how the wicked attack the righteous and make their life difficult. This is a reality. The focus is not on the attack, but on how such attacks affect a righteous person and what the word 'harm' means.

There is also the idea of having a life filled with trouble.

The key is not the attacks of the wicked or the trouble created by the wicked for the righteous. The issue is how those attacks affect the righteous. What are the results?

The righteous may face trouble, but it does not alter who they are. It does not harm their focus on God and doing what is right. It does not harm their relationship with God. It does not harm their faith in God and what He is doing in their life.

In contrast, the wicked do not have this focus. When trouble comes, it unsettles them and opens the way for more trouble. They cannot escape the cycle of fear and uncertainty that trouble brings. What is worse, they have no hope of escaping because they depend on themselves and will attack others, believing they are not the source of the trouble they experience.

The righteous know exactly where the trouble comes from and know where to go to get the help they need to deal with their areas of weakness, the struggles that are part of life, and, of course, the attacks of the wicked. Because of this, the righteous have access to a joy the wicked will never know.

Day 92 Prov 12:26

"A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."

Those who are righteous know the value of good friends. People who can be trusted. People whom they can depend on for encouragement, correction, and help when needed. This means they are careful in the process of committing themselves to others. This is because they know the power of the influence others can have in their life.

The wicked are not so careful in how they choose their friends and relationships. The key focus in their thinking is what they can gain from another person to support their lifestyle. They seek people they can use, and only those who are in favor of what they do.

This sounds similar except that instead of leading them to do good, their goal is to find those who will back and support their selfish lifestyle and choices. This leads them farther and farther from the truth and the ability to see what they are sacrificing to gain what they want. The goal is to get what they want and only give if it helps obtain that goal.

This is the key - the goal. The wicked focus on getting. The righteous person will focus on receiving and giving. Good friends open the way for a two-way relationship that allows both to help the other to grow and stay focused on their relationship with God.

Day 93 Prov 13:5

"The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace."

What does your world look like? Is it real, representing what truly exists, both the good and the bad? Or have you constructed a world that has a combination of true and false? Or worse, is your world a fantasy that you have constructed to satisfy your desires and image of yourself?

It is rare to find a person whose world is completely based on reality. We struggle with seeing the honest truth about ourselves, but that is the goal. The righteous have this as their goal - to remove all that is false from their world.

This is not the way the wicked live. To see the truth about themselves would mean confessing the sin of their lives and the stench it brings to themselves and those around them. To numb their senses, they must create a false world. This world results in shame, which in turn means they will need to attack anyone who attempts to reveal their false reality to protect themselves and maintain the illusion.

The righteous seek to avoid this scenario. To do so means dealing with the truth about their weaknesses and the desire to hide them. The righteous have learned that facing the truth, however painful and difficult, is always better and will allow them to be pleasing to God and others.

So, our focus needs to be on identifying what is false in our lives and seeking God to find the resources to deal with it. Then we will bring honor and not shame to God and ourselves.

Day 94 Prov 13:9

"The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out."

Think of truth as a light within a person. This light will always reveal what is hidden. It is this reality that is being dealt with here.

The other thing that must be kept in focus is that all of us are wicked. This is a fact we cannot escape, and the Bible reminds us of this over and over. This is the key to understanding what is being said here.

The wicked are afraid of this truth and work tirelessly to extinguish the presence of truth in their lives and in the people around them. This creates all manner of conflicts for them. This is because they desire people of truth around them to manage key areas of their life. But this creates conflict because people of light cannot tolerate the wickedness they see nor participate in it. And the wicked person does not want them because they will see the falseness of their lives.

The righteous person is very aware of the areas of sin and failure in their life. They use this knowledge to seek out others to help them deal with them and grow in their knowledge of God and truth. This makes them a bright lamp to guide others and help them find this same path. They do not fear the truth, knowing that hiding from it is not possible. It is in being honest that they grow and learn and so find God in their lives.

Day 95 Prov 13:25

"The righteous eat to their hearts' content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry."

At first glance, this statement seems wrong. The wicked usually have enough, even more than enough. Even when others are starving, they are not. Even when there is a shortage they have enough. Even when the world is coming apart they have enough. So how is it that the wicked go hungry?

And the opposite - the righteous suffer when the wicked don't. Why? Because the wicked take from others and then take more. Also the righteous are more willing to share what they have with others, even when it means their hunger will not be completely satisfied. They allow themselves to see and to respond.

And yet the righteous are content while the wicked remain hungry. The reality is that what brings satisfaction and contentment for them is different. Meeting their needs, having what they want and more is all the wicked can think about. This causes them to always be fearful there will not be enough and so they are never satisfied. They cannot enjoy what they have and that leaves a deeper hunger unsatisfied. The stomach is never satisfied.

The righteous are most content when able to share what they have in the moment. This is the most important focus, caring for the needs of others and so whatever they have brings contentment. Their hearts are satisfied. They can enjoy what they have and be content because they know they have all they need.

Day 96 Prov 14:19

"Evil men will bow down in the presence of the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous."

As I read this I wonder if this is true. It is hard to see it happening. So many evil and wicked people have destroyed the lives of others, including the righteous. As I reflect on this it often seems that the first people to suffer at the hands of these people are the righteous.

The problem with my view is that it is very much anchored in and affected by the present, the place and time where I exist and deal with these realities. I deal with the greed and avarice of the wicked. Their corruption affects so many areas of my life. They are a constant source of abuse of others and the righteous do not appear to be exempt from their machinations and desires.

All true if my focus is only in my place and time. What I need to do is step back and look at the big picture. The evil come and go on this planet. They do not last. They may wreak great havoc and cause all manner of destruction but the righteous always survive. The lies of the wicked run their course and die, but the truth of the righteous remains.

This brief statement is a reminder that in the end the wicked will bow to the presence of God and will have to submit to his judgement. The God I serve is eternal and righteous. It is this that needs to be kept in focus.

Day 97 Prov 14:32

"When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge."

There is one sure thing that we all will face - death. It cannot be avoided or the reality altered. We will die. It is the penalty that all must face because of our sin. And there is nothing in this world that will change this fact. All the wealth and power of a person means nothing when this day comes.

In war they have what is called a delaying action. It has two possible purposes. The first is to hopefully allow enough time for a new plan to be put in place that may allow victory at a later time. Most often its purpose is to allow as many as possible to escape. Defeat is unavoidable. It is only a matter of time. The hope is that, in the time remaining, those that can will escape to fight another day from another place.

The wicked attempt this same time of action. They use their wealth and power in the hopes that they will win or at least delay the inevitable. While this may give them more time, limited access to medicine and medical treatment, this is only a delaying action of what is inevitable. Death will eventually win. There is no possibility of regrouping, defeat cannot be avoided.

The righteous know this and know they have a hope the wicked will never have short of a full confession of their sin. The righteous have a refuge in God which will guide them through death into God's presence.

Day 98 Prov 15:6

"The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble."

In many of the Psalms and other scriptures we hear how the righteous are oppressed by the wicked. We hear how they are often poor when it comes to the things of the world. This passage tells us that while the above may be true in terms of the things of the world, the righteous possess great treasures.

They possess peace, the knowledge that, though they deal with strife from those who oppose them, they have peace with the One who created them. They know, as did Job, that no matter what is happening around them they are in good standing with their creator, they have peace. They also know that one day the strife will end and they will live in peace in heaven.

They possess hope, the knowledge that there are better things that lie ahead. While they may not enjoy them now, they know that one day they will enjoy all the blessings that have been promised to them.

They possess truth, the knowledge of what is right and cannot be altered. They may see it being twisted and abused but know that in the end the truth will be victorious. They will stand before the throne and know they will be vindicated and all will be revealed.

They possess love, the knowledge that as they seek forgiveness it will be given because they love God and are loved by God. They know that if this is the focus of their life they will enjoy God's presence in every situation and for eternity.

The wicked know nothing of these treasures.

Day 99 Prov 15:28

"The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil."

This is about control, the ability to think about what you say before you say it. It is about considering if what is said will be beneficial and provide both the one speaking and the one listening the ability to grow in their relationship with each other, with others, and with God.

The heart is the focus because it is not just about information. It is about know-how and when to share that information. The heart is concerned about finding the best way to do this.

The wicked do not care about these things. Their only concern is themselves. If what is said makes them look better and have more control, then they will speak. They will not be concerned about the damage that can be done. For them the goal is creating fear and dependence. They want people to be afraid of what might be shared and when. It matters little if it is the truth or it is lies that they speak. They are willing to harm - even destroy - others to make themselves appear better and more powerful.

The heart of the righteous has no such desire. Its focus is always to help others grow and be encouraged. It is why they take time to consider what to say and how to say. It is why they spend more time listening than speaking. It is why when they speak their words have value and reveal God presence.

Day 100 Prov 15:29

The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

Have you ever thought about what the wicked pray for? To be honest I am not sure I have any idea of what they pray for or if they even pray. And that is probably a key thing. They do not pray. They do not recognize their need for God. They do not recognize that they will one day answer for all the evil they have done. They do not concern themselves with how others are doing. Their focus is only on them.

Now consider the righteous. They are the opposite. They are in constant communication with God. They pray over ever decision. They pray about all that is happening around them. They recognize their need for God and more importantly their need to be right before God. They know that one day, no, not one day but every day they stand before God and need to act accordingly.

The righteous know that God is concerned about them and every detail of their life. They know that God can lead in doing what is right, teach them to know what is right, and give them the strength to do what is right. They know that others are in need and are concerned about the needs of others and are concerned that God be a part of all that is happening.

In other words, the focus of the prayer of the righteous is on their relationship with God and that others would have this same relationship. God hears them.

Day 101 Prov 16:31

Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life.

There are two things to consider here. One has to do with the age of a person and the other has to do with the state of the person who has reached old age. It is clear from history that both the wicked and the righteous often experience the same realities. They both die young, unexpectedly, and they both die of old age.

But for the gray hair to be a crown of splendor is only possible for those who live a righteous life. It is not the gray hair in itself that makes it a crown. Graying hair is a genetic reality of old age. Almost everyone will gray at some point as they age. The nature and entirety of that will vary from person to person. But how it is seen will depend on the choices the person has made in life.

In itself gray hair indicates a person who has lived long and accumulated knowledge and experience. It indicates a person who could possibly have wisdom and knowledge that can benefit others. But it is only when one has chosen to follow God and do what is correct then the graying that comes with age also signifies to others a person who by the life they have lived is worthy of respect and honor.

It is this person, the one who has made the correct choices, lives a life of truth, that the gray hair becomes a crown of splendor.

Day 102 Prov 18:10

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

One of the things we all seek in this world of ours is a place of security. A place that will not change or be affected by the world and all it seeks to destroy, or us and our inability to provide for our own security. We search for a place where we can know we are safe and be accepted.

The world does not know what this is and uses all manner of activities and chemicals in search of this place. When they can't find it they use any means available to escape the reality of the world in the hope of finding a moment of peace or escape.

Those who are righteous know where this place is. It is found in a relationship with God. But to enter this place means dealing with the reality of who they are before God. This requires honesty and a willingness to be shown the truth. The righteous are those who understand this and are willing to see the truth about themselves. They are aware that to enter God's presence will reveal all that is hidden, and this does not frighten them.

They know that in running to God they will be safe and all they are will be accepted and they will find help to grow and deal with the truth about themselves. God is the tower that can protect them as they learn and grow in who they are and who they were created to be.

Day 103 Prov 20:7

The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.

What good is it to live a blameless life? The most obvious is the access it gives the person to a relationship with God. But there are other benefits that are less obvious. One of those is the benefit a blameless life created for the children of that person. Oh, your father or mother is/was so and so. What follows is what is critical.

If your parents are known to be a source of a trouble, then it is assumed you will follow that path and be untrustworthy. If your parents are known as good people, then that opens up doors of trust and a willingness to allow you to be treated in a more generous manner. Trust and respect are given more easily, and help is received with less fear.

As parents we need to be aware that not all inheritance is in the form of possessions. A good name is as valuable and even more so than money and status. A good name, an honest life, a person whose word can be trusted often are more desirable and bring about more good than the wealth of a rich person.

Our life has an impact on the life of our children. Children of the wicked will struggle with the inheritance given them if they want to be a person of value. Children of the righteous will not have this struggle. They will be blessed and able to benefit from our relationship with God.

Day 104 Prov 21:12

The Righteous One takes note of the house of the wicked and brings the wicked to ruin.

God is watching. We may not think about this. In fact, for the most part we do our best not to think about this. We want to believe we can have our secrets. We want to be free to do what we want when we want without people knowing what is in our hearts and thoughts.

God is watching. We will one day have to give an account for all that is done, both public and private. How and when God carries out this accounting will not be known until it happens. But it will happen, maybe not as fast as we think it should, but it will come. And that is good news. That delay allows us time to become aware of God, become aware that nothing is hidden, and make key decisions that will allow us to avoid that reckoning.

And is the key. Those who are wise realize that all of us are wicked. We all are under the eye of God, and he is watching. Those who are wise know that there is hope to avoid the judgment that awaits and choose to come before God. They know that in confession and repentance they cannot just avoid the ruin prepared for the wicked but can find restoration and renewal. They will seek God and will find forgiveness and hope.

Day 105 Prov 21:15

"When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers."

This is an encouraging note. So often justice is lost and it brings great discouragement to the righteous. The wicked enjoy injustice because it means they are free to live the way they want and can expect to escape the consequences of their actions.

The reality is that one day things will be set right. The joy is this will happen and the release it brings to all who have been held captive by the injustice that has been the norm. This day, when it comes, will create fear in the wicked. They know they will finally have to answer for their crimes. Their house of cards is collapsing and they will not escape.

This is the hope that we must maintain, the fact that the day will come when all will be set right. Then God will restore justice and we will be able to live in peace and freedom in His presence.

Do I hope for this day? Do I live in a way that reveals my faith in God's control of all things? If I do, I will see the possibility of the restoration of all under the authority of God. I will even hope and pray that the wicked will see their need to change and submit to God's justice.

Justice is only a terror to those who are unwilling to confess their sin and stand before God in repentance. The true goal of justice is to align everything with God's purpose so all can experience the joy of His presence.

Day 106 Prov 21:18

"The wicked become a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright."

I struggle with this statement. It is hard for me to think that the wicked could serve as my ransom, the payment for my freedom and future. There are examples of this - the most notable being the story of Achan and how his sin resulted in the punishment of others. When his sin was dealt with, then the people were free to continue in, claiming the promised land. It doesn't seem right.

Then I began to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice. He was righteous without flaw but in the moment on the cross, he took on all our sins - all our wickedness - to ransom us from the punishment that we deserved. This is the reality, and it makes me uncomfortable that someone else should pay my debt, but that is what has happened.

Until the wicked are gone and the impact of their presence and attitude is removed, then it is hard for what is righteous to be evident and have an impact on what is happening.

Now consider this. We all hang on to wicked attitudes. Until we sacrifice them, we will not be able to live a righteous life. Until we pay this price, sacrificing what we want, to receive what we need, we will not be freed from its bondage. The presence of what is wicked is just that - bondage. Until wickedness is removed, we will not be free and we will not know the blessing of what is righteous.

Day 107 Prov 21:25-26

"The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. 26 All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing."

A sluggard. Who is this person? This is someone who wants others to provide for them while doing as little as possible in the process. This is someone who expects to receive, feels they have the right to receive, and even demands to receive, but at the same time does little to make it possible to receive. This person craves more and more and, in the end, receives less and less because what they receive is never as much as they want or feel they deserve.

In contrast, the righteous person is more concerned about giving than receiving. They can see the needs of others and feel compelled to do what they can to help where they can. Behind this ability to see the needs of others and give is an understanding of the source of all they have. They know God and see the wonder of all that has been provided and are actively connecting with the source of all they enjoy which helps them to give and be generous in the process.

This is because they see how generous and wondrously God has provided all that they enjoy. This realization helps them see how to be generous to those in need around them. God has provided in so many ways and so they seek to emulate this in their lives toward others.

Day 108 Prov 23:24

"The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him."

How does one know the value of living a righteous life? By seeing it lived out in the lives of those they touch. This is doubly true if, as a parent, my children not only see how I live but choose to follow the path I have chosen as a parent. They have seen beyond the struggle that is often involved to the relationship I have with God that provides the wisdom and strength to live in every situation.

And there is a second layer of joy. This is the confirmation that my choice to walk with God was the right choice. When we see others choose to make that same decision it brings joy. Not because they have followed us, but because they have seen enough of God in us to make the choice we made. A choice not to follow the world but God.

To know that my life has opened the door for others to see the correct path is an incredible blessing. Even more so to see my children make that decision. Why? Because more than anyone else they see the real me behind all that I say and do. They know if there is hypocrisy or deception. While they can choose not to listen, it is usually clear that that choice is not based on a lack of knowledge but a rebellious spirit.

Yes, as a parent what brings true joy is to see my children follow God.

Day 109 Prov 24:15-16

"Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against a righteous man's house, do not raid his dwelling place; 16 for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity."

How bound are you to what you possess? How will you respond if it is stolen, lost, or destroyed? The wise know that the things they possess are temporary. Their loss, while hard and difficult, does not alter the critical reality. They know that of all they possess there is one thing that cannot be taken from them, their relationship to God.

So when life and people fail them, create havoc in their life, and abandon them, they can rise again and again and continue on. They have not allowed things to possess them. They know it is not what they possess but who possesses them that is the key to life.

Not so the wicked. They work hard to obtain more and more. They will steal it, cheat for it, and hurt others to obtain more. They see their value in what they possess and when disaster comes all sense of value and purpose is lost because their life is tied to things.

They have no other hope, no other source of meaning and so they are brought down by a single event. In contrast, the righteous know they can never lose the presence of God and, as a result, can rise up again and again and again.

Day 110 Prov 25:26

"Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked."

If you are wearing a clean white shirt and you stain it that stain becomes obvious even glaring in nature. It can't be hidden. It is obvious to all that you have made a mistake that has resulted in the stain. This means everyone knows and wonders why you are wearing a shirt so obviously dirty.

With a shirt, it is possible to simply change the shirt to a clean one and wash out the stain, hopefully. Hopefully, because some stains cannot be removed no matter how much we work at washing them.

While changing your shirt allows you to present a clean appearance, the fact is you had to change your shirt to avoid people seeing and knowing about the other shirt that has become stained. So, no matter how many shirts you may wear, some people will remember the stained shirt and how it became stained.

This is the reality of living a righteous life. There is no taking a break or pause from all that it means. The moment we think we can have a secret life, we become stained and, at some point, it will be revealed. After that, no matter what we do we cannot restore what has been lost. Only God can do this and this will only happen if we are honest and confess the stain, that is, the sin we have allowed into our life.

Sadly, though God cleans us, the world will remember and they are not as forgiving.

Day 111 Prov 28:1

"The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."

This is very true. The wicked live a life of fear. They are afraid because they have created enemies. This is how their lives work. They take from others what is not theirs by any means. They hurt others constantly because they believe they must demonstrate their control. They ignore the people around them and focus on themselves. They lie to others to protect themselves from the truth. They reject the ideas and advice of others because they believe they are smarter and don't need the help of others.

In the end, they live a life of fear because they know what they have done and know they have created enemies. But they never know when someone may attack and so any little hint of trouble causes them to flee.

The righteous do the opposite. But, more importantly, they know they are living correctly and know exactly where trouble may come from and why it will come. It will come from the wicked because the life of the righteous will expose them for what they are. The knowledge that they are doing what is right gives them profound strength. Not only that, they have a deeper source of strength which is their relationship with God, something the wicked do not have.

Knowing you are right and that God is there to care for you makes the righteous bold and able to live life in the face of all opposition.

Day 112 Prov 28:12

"When the righteous triumph, there is great elation; but when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding. "

These statements are generally true but, in each statement, there is a group of people who do not respond with elation or fear. When the righteous triumph, people in general rejoice and experience relief because they know that there will be equity in how all are treated and the truth will be restored as the guiding principle. At the same time, the wicked will go into hiding. As a rule, when the righteous are dominant, the wicked hide their activities.

When the wicked rise to power, some go into hiding. But the wicked will come out of hiding and join them to attempt to bring an end to truth and whatever principle guides them will be the foundation of all their actions. They will do anything to destroy the truly righteous who are those who do not hide and work to reveal the lies being promoted.

So, there are three groups, the wicked, the righteous, and the amorphous. This third group will follow whichever group is in power but know that life is better with the righteous. They know that with the wicked in power, that hope for equity and peace is tentative. They also know that with the righteous life will be better.

Do we understand this and choose to stand against evil and risk being attacked, or become part of the amorphous group hiding our true nature? This is the line that is drawn in the sand and we each need to decide where we stand, a source of blessing, or a source of fear.

Day 113 Prov 29:6

"An evil man is snared by his own sin, but a righteous one can sing and be glad."

We know that sin will eventually catch up with us and we will deal with the consequences of our sin. If a person doesn't know this, then no amount of words, teaching, or counseling will change the person's mind.

The righteous do not have this fear. They know what their sin is and confess it before God and man when needed. They understand the consequences of sin and work to correct what they can and depend on God to help where they can't. They know the truth of sin in man and come to God for transformation and hope.

All of this - the confession, the work at restoration, and the redemption of God make it possible for the righteous to rejoice. They do not live in fear. They do not live in the shadows. They do not hide from God. They have the privilege of knowing what peace is. They have the blessing of enjoying the light of God in their world. Most importantly, they know they are right with God and that is joy.

So, no matter how dark and difficult things may look, the righteous always have a source of peace, light, and joy to fill their life and guide them day by day. Even in the darkest places, they can sing and be glad. God is there.

Day 114 Prov 29:7

"The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern."

Do you want to know the true heart of a person? Take some time and watch them. Watch how they interact with the people they meet. Watch how they respond to the needs of others. Watch what they do, hear what they say, and observe their willingness to enter into the struggles of others. When they have the resources watch what they give and more how they give it.

A righteous person does not just observe, hear, and react; they empathize. They feel the pain, they understand the hurts and struggle, they reach out and touch the person. When they give, they do so by first coming alongside the person and giving something much more important than objects. They give themselves, their heart, and their spirit. They commit themselves to building relationships, building trust, and helping the person recover some dignity and self-confidence.

And this is the most important part of how they care. The gift of self often has more power than any other gift and if help is given the power of small gifts of time and resources are multiplied.

The wicked are not this way. They don't have time for anyone other than themselves. They only think about what they can receive. They don't understand the value of building relationships and community. And, if they are the ones in need, they will never understand the true value of any gift given.

Day 115 Prov 29:16

"When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall."

This truth about the wicked is very evident. When they are active and in control their world thrives. They seem above the law, outside the law, and even a law unto themselves. The wicked attract others to join in their sin and their sin multiplies. They seem to thrive but it is built on chaos.

The righteous know what is happening. They are saddened by it but know it will all come unglued. They know a world built on evil means that, in time, its members will attack each other, lose confidence in each other, and desire to be in control. They will betray each other. And that is what will bring its downfall. A system built on sin is a system built on betrayal. First is the betrayal of God. Second, the betrayal of truth. Third, the betrayal of everyone else, because they cannot trust anyone.

The result is that the world created by the wicked will, in time, destroy itself, because there is no faith, no truth, and no hope.

The righteous, while living with all the wicked have created in the process of destroying, know that one day it will self-destruct. They have nothing to trust outside of themselves.

Not so the righteous. They have an anchor, a foundation, that does not shift. It is God. This truth brings hope and confidence to live in the face of such wanton disregard for God and the value of others.

Rejoice not in the downfall of the wicked but in the security you have in God.

Day 116 Prov 29:27

"The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright".

This passage makes sense. Righteous do approve of what is dishonest. Lies and deception do not help people find the truth and deal with their need to deal with the sin in their lives. The wicked would, out of necessity, oppose the upright because they represent exposure. When lies are confronted by truth the lies are exposed.

The word detest expresses just how strongly each group feels about the lifestyle and actions of the others. Other words used to define this are: abhor, hate, loathe, and despise. These words express an intense sense of antipathy toward the others.

The truth is that, if left unchecked, the dishonest will destroy all that is true and honest and, if the righteous are not controlled, then the wicked will lose their power and their world will come apart. There is a clear awareness on the part of each group of the danger the other group represents to their chosen way of life.

But there is one very clear difference. For the righteous to overcome does not require the destruction of the person, only of the dishonesty they depend on. The righteous God wants to do this with the goal of restoring the person. The wicked have no such plan. They must destroy completely because any vestige of truth can become a challenge to them. What they don't realize is that the very act of destruction reveals the truth

With the righteous, it is the goal of restoration that reveals who they are, and the right to detest what is dishonest for that is what prevents restoration.

Day 117 Eccl 3:17

"God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed."

One thing that is easy to lose sight of in life is the desire for justice. It is the fact that all will be judged. The righteous and the wicked will all stand before God. This should cause us to pause a moment before we judge others too harshly or cry for others to be judged - the fact that we too will stand before the Lord to be judged.

On that day all of our sins, all our hypocrisy, all our flaws will be exposed. And that is true since no one is truly pure and righteous in the presence of God. This fact should cause us to pause before we become too self-righteous in our demand for God to judge and punish those we see as wicked. and while they may be wicked and deserving of judgment, an honest righteous person will temper that cry, because they realize that but for God they might be one others want to be judged and punished.

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We all will stand before God. We all will be judged. No one will be found perfect. If we are honest we know we will not stand up under the scrutiny of God. If we understand this we will come before God, humbly confessing who we are and our dependence on Him for our life and our ability to walk in His truth.

Day 118 Eccl 7:15

"In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness."

This is a true statement in that we will all die. But what is missing here is the end result of the death of these people. The one will face judgment and punishment. The others will face judgment but will be welcomed into God's presence because of their desire to know and follow God.

For the one long life may mean enjoying things now but that will all be lost. For the other may mean a short life but one of joy because of all that has been gained. The one does not know God and so their joy is temporary. The other knows God and that opens the way to eternal joy.

Do we understand the value of knowing God, even if for only a few days on this earth? Or do we, like the wicked, ignore that to satisfy ourselves and our desires?

One of the great fears we have is not living long enough to enjoy life. This is part of the human condition, but we should keep in mind that what is more important is to live long enough to know God. This is the purpose for which we were created. The one ends when this life ends and the other begins. The end of life here is only the door to an eternity of knowing this joy.

Day 119 Eccl 7:20

"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins."

This is the baseline for all to remember. No one is righteous. And though a person may live a righteous life, there is always sin present in some form. No one is perfect and the Bible tells of the failings of even the most righteous among us. Moses, Elijah, and David all failed in one way or another. Paul called himself the worst of sinners.

Before Jesus and since Jesus no one has lived a righteous life, one free of sin. This means that, with Jesus as the benchmark, we are never going to compare.

The good news is that this is not the end of the story. Our judgment will not be based solely on what we do but on our relationship with God. Moses was allowed to see the face of God, Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, and David was forgiven. God looks at the heart to see if we desire to be righteous and to walk with Him.

The other good news is that our sin has been dealt with by Jesus, which opens the way to be forgiven and restored. So, while the above statement is true, it is not the end of the story. God has opened a new chapter with a clean page on it and we have the opportunity to let Him write the story as we walk with Him.

Day 120 Eccl 8:14

"There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless."

At first glance, this seems wrong. But is it wrong? Is it what it appears?

If our only point of reference is what happens to us on this earth during our short lifespan, then this could be true. Often the righteous suffer under the oppression of the wicked, and just as often they struggle with illness and difficulties that many wicked do not face or deal with.

And the wicked seem to have everything they need and have little struggle in their life. And you would be right in thinking that this does not seem fair. But, if that is all life is about, what we do and enjoy here on this planet, then this is clearly backwards. If all we have is the span of life on earth and God is not present, then it is clearly meaningless to be righteous.

Sadly, that is how many people perceive life and all that happens. As something that relates little to whether you are righteous or wicked. You are lucky or unlucky is the way some people think. Still others see it as fate, something that cannot be altered no matter what you do or don't do.

This opens the way to look beyond the now and into eternity. The righteous know God and know that this temporary existence will be replaced by eternity. This life is merely the point of entry and what happens here is insignificant compared to what lies ahead.

Day 121 Eccl 9:1-3

"1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. 2 All share a common destiny — the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish; the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. 3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all."

Polarity is the theme here. The good, the bad; the righteous, the wicked; good man, sinner; oath taker, uncommitted; clean, unclean; all are ways to express these two points of the compass of man.

But if you combine one set, like righteous, wise, good, clean, oath taker, or the other, like wicked, foolish, bad, unclean, uncommitted; you begin to see something that indicates choice. A person has chosen this path, the path did not choose them. This means that, though they share a common destiny, the path that brings them to the ending point will be very different. The one leads far from God and the other draws the one ever closer.

One is focused on finding God in life, and the other is focused on avoiding God. Their lives and destinies are not the same, and though they both die, the one will know peace and find God's presence in their life and on into eternity.

Day 122 Isa 3:10

"Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds."

When we are suffering. When we are attacked. When we are discouraged. When we are tired and life seems hopeless. When…. And the list goes on.

Yet this passage tells us if we are righteous, if we are in pursuit of what God wants, then it will be well.

But what are the fruits of their deeds? Here is where it is so easy to get confused and distracted by what the world says should be the fruits of a good and righteous life.

The world tells us that health is something a good person should enjoy. The world tells us that prosperity in the form of things is something a good person should enjoy. The world tells us that control and success are something a good person should enjoy. And that is often what we would like and think would be the best form of blessing. But…

Will these things protect the truth from the lies of the world? Will these things protect us from the attack of the wicked? Will these things prevent disasters and suffering in the world? Will these things deal with the impact of sin in our lives? Will these things actually bring peace with God?

No. Not one of these things can do that and reproduce the same in the life of another person. They are all focused on one critical idea, which is our well-being here on this planet in our life. The real fruit to enjoy is God and only the righteous will enjoy this fruit.

Day 123 Isa 10:22

"Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous."

The world reels under the weight of so much struggle. Plagues, wars, disasters, and famine become a never-ending cycle of pain and misery that it must deal with. Every time these events happen, people wonder why. Doesn't God care, or is God enacting judgment for our sins and disobedience?

It could be all or none of them. Sometimes events just happen and we must deal with them. That is not to say that it couldn't be different. Different, because if man had never sinned, none of these events would have been part of our existence. At least that is the theory and that is the hope that we look for in the promise of God to create a new heaven and earth,

In the meantime, we must deal with what we have. No matter where you are, or what is happening, destruction has been decreed. A judgment that does not allow for anyone to say I don't deserve this, or this isn't right. We have created the environment we live in and all actions are a result of the impact that the sin of humanity has had on this world. Which means all that happens is righteous.

Does this sound harsh? Yes. Is it correct? Yes. Even being the chosen people of God did not exclude them from the consequences of their behavior. They had been warned and had refused to listen. The judgment came and it was overwhelming and righteous.

A greater judgment is coming. Are we ready?

Day 124 Isa 24:16a

“From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One." “

This sounds great and wonderful. All the earth will sing and honor God the righteous One. But, if you read the text before and after, you will begin to wonder what is happening, and there are two possible ways one must consider to clearly understand this passage.

The first interpretation is filled with dire warnings. Judgment awaits the people. But, instead of changing, they go through the motions of praising God. Hear the words that follow this:

Isa 24:16b “But I said, "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray! “

The prophet sees the deception that hypocrisy can create. The idea is that, as long as we perform the correct actions, all will be well. If this is the intent of the people and especially of the leaders and false prophets of his time, then, in truth their words are treachery and will only result in God fulfilling his words of judgment. This was the message of Jesus to the leaders of his day.

The other interpretation is more hopeful. It is that, no matter how dire things are, there are always those who recognize the presence and power of God. They never give up hope even though judgment will come and many will suffer. They may be few and may be scattered across the earth, but their voice will rise in triumph over all that is happening so that the people of the earth will know of God the Righteous One.

Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Be faithful.

Day 125 Isa 26:2

"Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith."

God is working and the goal is to purify His people. These will be the people that will be allowed to enter into the holy city of God. Until that day, no nation is righteous in all that it does. No nation truly serves God.

There have been times when a nation has chosen to follow a righteous path, at least the majority of its people and its leaders. But this has not resulted in a righteous nation, simply a time when the righteous prevailed and, for a time, led the people on the correct path.

Israel is a prime example. A righteous king would purge the country of idolatry only to have a wicked king restore it. This cycle repeated itself until the nation was finally punished. There were always the wicked waiting for the opportunity to once again defy God.

This is not an encouraging image. It makes life seem so hopeless. It makes one wonder if there is any reason to truly follow a righteous path. Will righteous people ever prevail?

Take hope in this passage, for one day Christ will return and the righteous nation will be established. It will be populated by those who have remained faithful. On that day the gates of heaven will be opened and the righteous nation, made up of every tribe and people, will enter and there will be a place of peace in the presence of God.

Day 126 Isa 26:7

"The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth."

This is God's goal for us, a level and smooth path. It is not the reality but it is the goal. It is not the reality not because of God but because of our own choices and actions.

God wants it to be level. This means that we can see clearly all about us. A path with hills means there are places where we cannot see. Places where an enemy can hide. But a level path means any trouble or enemy is visible long before it is actually in our presence. This means plenty of time to prepare and come before God for wisdom and guidance. A level path also means God's presence is easily observed and experienced. This is what God wants. He wants to be visible to us if we choose to look for him.

God wants it to be smooth. Uneven and broken paths require more attention to travel on. The focus must be on the path to avoid stumbling or even falling. This means we are less able to enjoy the surrounding beauty that God has placed along the path. It means we will risk not keeping our eyes on God.

The problem is not with God, it is with our constant interference with God through our desires and sin. We make the path difficult. Thankfully He is always laboring to make it level and smooth.

Day 127 Isa 41:10

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

We live in a tumultuous world. We face a constant stream of challenges. As a result, our lives could be filled with the fear of others and how they will treat us, the fear of what it will cost to do what is right, and the fear of weakness, will I be strong enough to live a righteous life?

This promise carries many affirmations to help us deal with all of the above and more. It declares that the one who walks the path God has chosen will not be alone nor dependent on others for what is needed to follow this path. It reveals that the one who follows the path need not worry if they will have the strength to make the journey. And most important, the one who follows this path will not have to worry about what it will cost, God has provided the resources and paid the price for them to not only follow the path but reach its destination, which is Him.

The word uphold also has a legal aspect. In a court of law when someone claims their rights and they are correct, the court will uphold their rights. A decision to follow God is a correct decision and God will uphold that decision and validate our desire to follow Him.

We do not need to fear, God has provided and upheld our right to follow Him.

Day 128 Isa 45:21

"Declare what is to be, present it — let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me."

This passage deals with the falseness of the idols people carry with them. Idols are physical, spiritual, and emotional. It talks about their unreliability and the danger of believing they can say or do anything that is true or will last.

In contrast, God is the one true God. The evidence is clear. He has spoken and His word is true. He has saved and protected over and over. He will be worshipped, of this there is no escape, no alternative, for He alone is God - there is no other.

God is righteous. All that He does is correct. The final word and judgment will be His and those who oppose Him will be put to shame.

Of greater importance for us is that those who are the descendants of the true Israel will receive everlasting salvation. This means those who are in the Lord will be found righteous and will celebrate.

This passage was one of hope. Today we are on the other side of the promise and hope, for Jesus has come and provided for all who are descendants of Abraham by faith have been made righteous through the act of a righteous God.

Day 129 Isa 53:11

"After the suffering of his soul, He will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities."

Do we completely understand the power of a righteous life, a life that has borne the suffering and persecution of those who do not understand?

Jesus is the righteous person in this passage. He suffered greatly. He paid the price of our iniquities. He had no debt because he was truly righteous in all ways. This gave Him the ability to justify those who understand and believe. By bearing their iniquities, they can see the light because of what He did.

Now, let me ask another question. Do you see the value and power of living a righteous life? Do you realize that when you willingly choose this path you have the power to influence and direct the lives of others? Do you realize that what you suffer for your choice may lead people down the right path so they will meet this righteous person who can save them?

We sometimes miss this truth. Our lives, when lived righteously, have the power to influence and direct people to the Source, to the One whose righteous life can not just provide a great example but can save them and restore them.

Being righteous should never be just for our benefit, but, as Jesus demonstrates for us, so that others will find their way to Him and so back to God.

Day 130 Isa 57:1

"The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil."

This passage is not one we like to consider. It answers the question of why the righteous are killed by the wicked. Why do the righteous die when the wicked live and seem to prosper? Why the righteous could die from hunger and disease.

We want to believe that because they are righteous, they will be spared all of the above. But is being spared really a blessing? Do we really understand the idea that the righteous being taken away spares them from evil? If this is true, then why not take all of the righteous?

We wish we had all of the answers and we don't. But we are given one answer here, they are taken so they will be spared from evil. Hunger, disease, war, and oppression. But is that the evil they are being spared from? One wonders if there are worse things that could happen, like living and losing their faith, living and becoming hateful.

I can see why not all the righteous would be taken. There is a need for the world to still have a witness to what God's love means.

The death of the righteous has the power to move the hearts of others as they consider the injustice that happens. Both the death of the righteous and the righteous can move the hearts of those who are wavering and looking for a reason to believe.

Day 131 Isa 60:21

"Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor."

Do we understand God's purpose for the righteous? We all can agree that one of them is to bring honor to Him. This passage highlights another key concept:

For the people of Israel, it was interpreted as relating to a time when the kingdom would be restored and they would once again live in prosperity and enjoy life as the chosen people. They would enjoy an earthly blessing

Another interpretation was not clearly seen until the coming of Jesus. It is about God preparing people to be His witness and establishing, not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one, that is more vast and far-reaching than any earthly kingdom could ever be.

As you read passages like Peter's comment in 1 Peter 2:9,

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

it becomes clear that it is not about being gathered into one place to be a nation, but being scattered so that wherever God plants us, we can be the chosen people in that place, so that the people can see the light and respond. God plants us where we need to grow so others can be fed on the truth and know God.

Day 132 Isa 64:6

"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

Israel had failed to listen to the message of the prophet and would be judged. This is a very sad commentary on the truth about all of humankind. No matter how good our thoughts are, no matter how correct our intent may be in comparison to the truth about who we are deep inside, our actions are all tainted. None of it will last or hold up in the test of time.

But be encouraged - in verse 8, we are told that we are clay in the potter's hands. He is working to take this flawed clay and reshape it into a useful and valuable item. His goal is to create in us something that reflects His righteousness. That is the key. We have to realize that all we do is flawed, filthy rags, but everything He seeks to do through us is truly pure and righteous.

The key is our willingness to submit to him and allow him to put us on the potter's wheel and shape our lives in a way that will allow Him to be revealed in what He will create in us, and through us display His incredible love and concern for His creation.

The key word is submission. Will we give over control of our lives to God?

Day 133 Jer 3:11

"The Lord said to me, "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah."

One of the greatest dangers that we must be aware of is comparing ourselves to others and using that as the basis for deciding how good we are. It goes like this: "I am not as bad as they are, or I would never do what they do." There are many variations on this, the purpose being to make ourselves feel less guilty about what we are doing and assuage what guilt we might feel.

It is false and will lead us away from instead of closer to God. Israel did not hide their sin, but Judah was using the idea that they had been more faithful overall to cover up the truth that what they were doing was no different than Israel. They had abandoned God and replaced Him with their preferences. They maintained a superficial appearance of honoring God. They had the temple. They had been faithful at times. They believed, falsely, that God would not punish the chosen people.

We do it by saying things like: "At least I go to church more often than another person", or "I manage to read my bible on occasion". The list goes on. All of it is to define the idea of being righteous according to my standard and so believe God will not notice or will allow me to live and not punish my sin.

The idea of being righteous must be based on God and His standards. Only this will keep us focused on the truth, and not a false concept based on who we think we are.

Day 134 Jer 4:2

“and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the Lord lives,' then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory."

We all want to be seen as honest people even when we are not so honest. We want people to trust us. We want them to believe what we do is right and good and will benefit them. If we are consistent in how we live and are honest the majority of the time people will treat us well and allow us to be a source of encouragement and guidance.

But do we want God to believe us? This is not as simple or as easy. A key reason is that it is impossible to be dishonest with God. He knows when we shift from true honesty to partial honesty. We know we tell the truth but not all of it, and when we shift from being dishonest. Not in that we outright lie, but in that we do not admit anything. We simply cannot hide the truth from Him.

So, this call to be truthful and to do so in a just and righteous way will be a challenge. It means that we will have to be honest with ourselves and humbly admit that we are not what we want others to think we are. It means admitting we cannot hide anything and so must be honest about everything. It is when this happens that we can be used by God as a channel to bless others.

Day 135 Jer 12:1

"You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"

This question has been asked over and over by so many people in scripture. Why do the wicked enjoy a life of material prosperity and ease? Why do those who do not trust in God but themselves have so much and suffer so little?

But do they? Appearances are not always representative of what is happening in the soul and heart of a person. It only reveals what their focus is and what they believe will provide them with security and value. It is a form of prosperity that excludes God and depends on the resources of man to provide what they seek. It will not last and because it is based on material goods only a few can enjoy this way of life. Because to have it means selfishly limiting what others have so I can have what I think I need.

So, while one prospers, many are relegated to a life of poverty to make it possible.

The righteous see life differently and do not need all of this. They have God who provides in abundance his love and presence. This exists in unlimited supply. Having more of God does not limit or affect another person's ability to have the same.

Yes, the way of the wicked may bring a form of prosperity and ease, but is it worth the cost it will exact from others? Do we really want this?

Day 136 Jer 20:12

"O Lord Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause."

This is a dangerous, or at best, risky prayer request. God, judge those who persecute me and make life difficult for me. Why do I say that? It is because of the opening comment. Think about this.

The person knows an important fact about God. He examines the righteous. But this examination is not just about appearances, something we would be more comfortable with. Because we all know it is easy to create the appearance of being a good person. Instead, it is about probing the heart and mind. It is about evaluating what we desire and how we think.

This is an uncomfortable concept. We don't mind people looking at the visible us. We become uncomfortable if they decide to probe beneath the surface. Most of us have any number of defenses in place to divert people from getting too close to the truth about our true motives and thinking. We tend to let very few people into that part of our life.

But God has access to all of that all the time. So, if we are going to call on Him to judge others, then we need to be ready for Him to examine us first. That is the point of the last phrase "To you I have committed my cause." It means I am ready to be examined.

If we want God to act, then we must be ready for this examination of our motives first.

Day 137 Jer 23:5

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land."

I have read and heard this passage many times. It is well known as one of the messianic passages. It talks about a coming king who will rule and provide justice for the people. The interpretation of the Jews of that time and even until now was that a king of the line of David would come and once again establish the earthly kingdom of Israel. This interpretation blinded the leaders to the possibility of a kingdom not limited to a specific time and place.

As I read again the phrase "a righteous branch" and reflect on its meaning, I realize that this promise was fulfilled in a way that far exceeds our normal thought process. Normally we think only in human terms and conditions but there is so much more here. Another human leader could be a righteous person and also from David's lineage. But would that be enough to truly reign wisely and do what is just? David was not perfect and made many mistakes. Solomon, the wisest ruler to ever live, failed.

But this lineage is more than just the line of David, it is the line of David and the lineage of God. This righteous branch could do more than lead a kingdom in a specific time and place. This King could rule for all time and everyone on earth. God raised up a truly righteous branch so we could be part of the kingdom of God.

Day 138 Jer 33:15

"In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; He will do what is just and right in the land."

This is the second time in Jeremiah we see this image. But it is not the only time it is used. Isaiah uses it in Is 4:2 and talks about a branch rising from the stump of Jesse in Is 11:1. Zechariah uses the image twice (Ze 3:8; 6:1-2) in reference to one who will come. Later, Paul talks about those who hear the truth being grafted into this branch and benefiting from its resources.

My question is what does this mean to me?

I know that Jesus is this righteous branch. I know that He did what was just and right. I know that this action opened the way for me to be grafted into this branch. This means that God has provided a place where I can grow and receive the nourishment and strength I need to live for God.

It means that I now can bear the fruit of a righteous person. These are revealed in the passage in Isaiah.

Isa 11:1-3 "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

This means I can delight in God and be a delight to God.

Day 139 Ezek 13:22a

"Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, …"

This phrase appears in the midst of a judgment of God against false leaders and prophets. People who are leading others away from God and into dependence on false truth and false worship of what is not God.

The judgment is because their actions dishearten the righteous. But in what way do they cause this discouragement?

I see two possibilities. The first would seem obvious, the righteous are being discouraged and losing their confidence in God. But I struggle with this idea. While it may be true, I have seen many scriptures showing how the righteous are who they are because they are not easily misled or discouraged. They have an anchor that holds and provides them the faith and strength to face these types of challenges.

The second possibility is that they lose hope that their words and lives will make a difference in the lives of others. This makes more sense to me. A key work of the righteous is to be a light, a beacon, that others can see and so find their way to the truth and so to God. False teachers, leaders, and prophets obscure the light and make it hard for others to see. They work hard at distracting, misdirecting, and twisting the evidence provided by the righteous. They must do this or they will collapse under their lies.

This behavior can severely impact and limit the ability of the righteous to help others know God. Be encouraged - God is working and watching over you so that your testimony is being heard.

Day 140 Ezek 16:51-52

"51 …You have done more detestable things than they and have made your sisters seem righteous by all these things you have done. 52 Bear your disgrace, for you have furnished some justification for your sisters. Because your sins were more vile than theirs, they appear more righteous than you. So then, be ashamed and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous."

Here is the danger of pride and a lack of humility. We look at ourselves and say we are not as bad as so and so. Then we think we are good people because our actions are not as sinful as those of someone else.

Suddenly we forget what sin really is. It is not about a particular set of actions as defined by man. It is about denying our failure to hear God and be what he created us to be. All sin has the same effect, disobedience to God. It does not matter what we do, or how serious it may appear to us and others. It all has the same result; isolation from God.

Paul said he was the greatest of sinners. David said even the best he could do was still like a filthy rag.

The good news is that if we will humbly confess this truth – that we are sinful - then God can cleanse and restore us. Without that decision on our part, how our sin may appear to us and others is unimportant. What we must see is that God has provided forgiveness and we are the focus of his love.

Day 141 Ezek 18:5

"Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right."

We all want to know what it means to be righteous. We want to know the key qualities that can be used to identify this quality and show us if we can be considered righteous. This is the introduction to such a list which is found in the verses that follow:

1. Does not worship idols
2. Does not act inappropriately towards the wife of others and his own wife
3. Does not oppress others
4. Does not rob but helps those in need
5. Does not lend with the purpose of excessive gain
6. Does not do what is wrong and is fair in the treatment of others
7. Follows and keeps the law of God

This is a righteous person.

This is quite a list and, if we are honest, it is a step in the right direction. But notice that the list is bounded by two key focuses. First, there is nothing that replaces God for God is the focus of their life and worship. I repeat nothing is allowed to interfere with this. Second, the righteous person makes sure that this focus permeates their lives by following all, not some, but all the decrees of God.

This passage does not say the righteous person is perfect. It says that the righteous person does what is just and right. The goal is to be what God intended and seek God in everything. We must consider this as we evaluate the focus of our lives and our activities.

Day 142 Ezek 18:20

"The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him."

Here it is, plain and simple. We do not die because of the sins of others, nor are we saved because of the righteous life of another. Our punishment is our own and we are the source of the judgment that follows our sin, or if we walk with God, then the blessing that follows. My wicked or good life does not factor into how God responds to us.

That being said, our wicked or righteous life can and will impact the lives of others. The wicked can act in a way that will harm others. The righteous can act in a way that will benefit others. We do not live in isolation nor act in isolation. This is critical information. So different from what the world thinks and what people hope for, and the distorted reality that often exists.

We desire to blame others for the sin in our lives. We want to benefit from those who are good. It is wisdom to think about how we see the sin in our lives, and whether we are dependent on the righteous life of others as the source of our hope for blessing.

Neither is true, but both impact our lives. The final decision will be based not on our relation to others but on our relation to God.

Day 143 Ezek 18:21-22

"But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. 22 None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live."

There is hope. This is the focus of this passage. The wicked can change. All of us can change. Since we are all wicked, there is hope for every person.

It is possible to hear God's word and, through its power in us, change. It is possible to know what is just, to live a life approved by God. It is possible to know what is right, to know how to serve God and teach others. It is possible to live, to be able to come before God and be restored. It is possible to overcome death. To be able to one day stand before God and celebrate in His presence.

There is hope. My sins will be forgiven. My sins will be forgotten. My sins will be erased from the record. All that history will be removed and replaced by what God places in my life and how I live because of his power and presence working in me.

Only one thing cannot be changed, the impact of the evil I have committed. But there is still hope. I can now work to correct and undo the past results of my sin. I can become a witness to the truth that there is hope because God is.

Day 144 Ezek 18:24

"But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die."

This is a message we do not want to hear. We do not like to think that our good acts cannot be saved up to cancel future debt caused by sin. We want life to be a balance sheet where our good and bad are tallied up and hope that the balance on the side of righteousness will cancel out any negative balance.

We like to hear that if we confess and repent the past is erased. Our debt of sin is canceled. What we don't want to hear is that rejecting the righteous life has the same effect as the cancellation of all the good of the past.

But we cannot have it both ways. A righteous life is not a bank account that we make deposits to in order to cover future sins. If that were the case, then legalism and keeping the law would work in providing us salvation. That is the basis of those concepts, to do enough good to convince God that I am righteous.

Stop and think about why you do what is right. Is it because it is the right thing to do, or are you trying to prove to God that you are what you cannot be?

Day 145 Ezek 21:3-4

'3 …This is what the Lord says: I am against you. I will draw my sword from its scabbard and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked. 4 Because I am going to cut off the righteous and the wicked, my sword will be unsheathed against everyone from south to north."

This is a judgment no one wants to hear or believe will happen. That the righteous will have to deal with the judgment that comes as a result of the lives and actions of the wicked. The righteous want to believe that they will remain unaffected by any action God takes in the judgment of the wicked.

Sadly, this is not what we hear in this passage. The evidence supports this. Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel are a few of the righteous who clearly suffered at one level as a result of the judgment of God against an unrighteous nation. Ezekiel and Daniel were taken into exile. Jeremiah saw the fall of his country and then was forced into exile by those who would not listen.

Why?

None of the answers are simple or pleasant. But all have one theme in common. To allow people to see the behavior of the righteous and consider what they have done and maybe repent.

Judgment will come, it is unavoidable. How will we respond? Will we be like the three men above and be the evidence of God's right to judge? Will we be like the three men above and show people the way back to God?

Day 146 Ezek 23:45

"But righteous men will sentence them to the punishment of women who commit adultery and shed blood because they are adulterous and blood is on their hands."

In this passage, Ezekiel gives a detailed message about the sins of Israel and Judah. It has been likened to a woman who is unfaithful to her husband and the vows she gave. The judgment is given and comes from not only God but those who are righteous, those who have kept their vows.

The focus is on the issue of maintaining God as the center of one's life and not allowing anything else to replace Him as the focus of our love and devotion. This is a challenge because in the world there is constant pressure to serve other idols. Not necessarily other gods of the spiritual world but desires, preferences, and emphasis that subtly encourage us to give our time, resources, and energy to things that push God out of the center.

The reasons we do this are many: to be accepted by others, to gain power, to increase our wealth, or simply to enjoy doing what we want when and where we want to do that activity. This is the heart of what adultery is. It kills our love for God and worse, can cause others to do the same or prevent them from encountering God.

This was the center of the sin in this passage. The people replaced God with idols, adultery of the worst type, and then led others into the same adultery.

We need to think carefully about whether our desires and actions draw us and others to God or lead them astray.

Day 147 Ezek 33:18-19

"If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. 19 And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so."

This is part of one of the better-known passages in Ezekiel. It is about his calling of God to be a watchman for the people. It says each of us has a responsibility to warn others. If they heed the warning, they have the chance to choose to listen or not to listen. The issue is whether the watchman carries out his duties. If he does, they have an option. If he doesn't, then they don't.

But then this part about how the righteous can turn to evil and all the past suddenly means nothing and they will be dealt with based on the present and not the past. Then how the wicked turn to justice and all the past is forgotten and they are dealt with based on the present. The one is a frightening warning, the other is a ray of hope.

The worst evil here is not what one thinks. The worst evil comes from the portion about the watchman. The worst thing a righteous person can do is not warn people about what awaits them as a result of their disobedience. This is a measure of a truly righteous person. They cannot remain silent. They cannot sit back and do nothing. If they do, then they are not righteous but are wicked.

We are called to be watchmen. Will we do so and be the righteous person God needs?

Day 148 Dan 9:7

"Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame — the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you."

This is part of Daniel's prayer of repentance for himself and his nation. It is a prayer of sorrow and sadness over the failure of himself and his people to truly understand God's love and as a result their rebellion to obey and listen to God.

He understands the shame this has caused God by their disobedience and failure to place God first in everything. He understands that God is right in His judgment and pleads with God to turn away from His wrath and His right to punish them for their sinfulness.

More importantly, he knows that he has no right to make this plea for forgiveness. His right to seek God's favor is not based on any righteous behavior on his part or of the people but on God's mercy. He knows that it is only as we confess our sins that we can come before God and seek his favor.

Pride will tell us to remind God of all we have done, of our usefulness, of our ability to serve, and so on. And God will not respond.

Humility, like that of Daniel, will remind us of our sins, of our failure, of our reality before God and will allow us to submit to God. This God will hear and to this God will respond.

Day 149 Hos 14:9

"Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."

The Bible is very clear that there is a correct way to walk in this world before God and man. The wise are those who realize this truth. They are willing to observe what is happening and can see the way God has prepared.

The one who is discerning not only sees the path God has prepared but can see what must be done to get on the path and follow it. All paths have places and areas where access is possible. The more difficult the path, the fewer options for access. A discerning person understands what this means and why this is true.

Think of a limited-access highway. You cannot enter it anywhere along its route. You must find the entry point and there you can join it. Stop and think about this and how it works. Trails in mountains, through forests, and many more are like this. Traveling down a river is the same. If you want to get on them you need to know where you can do so.

The path of the righteous is like this. It is not just access, it is also the ability to stay on the path, which means keeping things in focus. The righteous know what all of this means and do not fail to enter or stumble in the process.

Day 150 Amos 2:6

"… for three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals."

God is judging Israel. God is listing their sins. Here the focus is on how key leaders are accepting bribes to condemn the righteous, in this case, a person who has not broken the law in question. How there is no room for clemency so that the needy can pay their debts - even a minor debt. As a result, they are punished for minor infractions. They are sold to pay a minor, very minor debt.

How do we measure if we are righteous? Do we attempt to bribe others and even God hoping they will overlook what we are doing when we know exactly what we are doing is what it is? Do we attempt to judge others, and make them pay for minor offenses while overlooking the fact that our judgmental attitude condemns us?

Israel's sins were not minor, they were serious and they were extensive. They were not the sins or errors of a moment, easily corrected. They were a conscious denial of the truth and God's law. But isn't that what every sin is? A conscious choice.

This is where we find out what our righteous life really means. Do we confess our sins and our failures, and accept the consequences seeking to be restored? Or do we make others pay so that we can assuage our conscience?

Day 151 Amos 5:12

"For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts."

Despair is a powerful emotion. If we aren't careful, it will bury us and render our hearts and souls helpless in the face of the evil that is always present, always oppressive, and always opposing all that is good.

Will this ever change? At times it is less intense and almost appears manageable. One must be careful because it always lies in wait to resurface, making life miserable for everyone and anyone.

Am I being very negative? Yes, I am. That is how despair works. It leaves us struggling to hope, struggling to live, struggling to care.

But God knows and warns the wicked that He sees and that they will be held responsible for all they have done unless they listen. If so, if they seek good and hate the evil they have done, then perhaps He will have mercy on them (vs 14).

God is aware of the situation of the righteous. He will deal with the wicked in His way and in His time. Our task is to remain faithful and be the evidence that there is a better way to live. Our task is to live as children of God so those who are wavering will have hope and be able to see God. Our task is to have faith and reveal God's love and desire to restore all those who listen.

We need not despair for God is with us.

Day 152 Mic 6:5

"My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember [your journey] from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."

It is wise to review the past so we know what God has done and have an idea of what God will do.

This passage is a quick review of a past event. It reminds us that there are people who oppose the righteous. Some people want to destroy and eliminate the righteous. Why? Because if the righteous are not stopped, then their way of life and plans will come to an end.

Balak wanted to curse the people of God. He called on a great sorcerer to do this. God intervened and all that Balaam could do was pronounce blessings on the people. Balak did not listen and suffered for his unwillingness to heed the warnings contained in the blessings.

We need to keep this clear in our minds. There will be opposition, but it is not focused on us alone. It is against what we represent as righteous people. It is against the truth and the God who established that truth. Though for a while the wicked may appear to have control, in the end, God will respond and bless those who seek the truth and follow it in every aspect of their lives.

In the end, all that Balaam and Balak represent will fail and be overcome.

Day 153 Hab 1:4

"Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."

So how often do we start or end or spend the day moaning and groaning about our situation? How often is our moaning and groaning appropriate? Or is that just how we live and think?

We are quick to complain even when there is nothing really to complain about. We all too often go out of our way to bemoan how difficult our lives are. On and on we go, never seeing beyond our life and our concept of what we think it should be.

And then there comes a time when we should moan and groan because things are truly wrong. What is happening is truly in opposition to God and all that is right. Then we moan and groan and do not consider that God can or will do something.

Habakkuk is moaning and groaning and he has every right to do so. The people are defiant. The people have defied God and he is about to respond. Life is going to get a lot worse before it gets better. But the good news is that God is aware of everything that is happening and is about to respond. His response will put things in order, but only those who understand God will see and rejoice.

So how are you doing with your moaning and groaning? Is that all you can do? Or will you shift your focus and be able to see what God is doing in all that is happening and find the joy there is in being His child no matter what happens?

Day 154 Hab 1:13

"…Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

Everybody will ask the question of why the wicked seem to do well at the expense of the righteous. It is a normal thing. We want to know why those we think are wicked, or at least more wicked than ourselves do so well. Why does God allow them to continue in their denial of Him while those who are less wicked suffer?

There is an interesting point in the way the prophet states the question. It is one of comparison. The phrase 'those more righteous than themselves' highlights an important point. It is one of perception.

Many times when we see suffering, we set up a scale of good and evil, or righteous and unrighteous. It is natural and we do it constantly in many areas of life and activity. We set it up on a graded scale of first to last. We all want to be first, the best, or a number higher than someone else. You know I was 23rd and you were 30th in order.

The real truth is there is only one category. All are in it because we all are sinners. Ouch! When we start to think we are more righteous or less evil, we are in danger. While the question is valid, "Why do the righteous suffer?", from our perspective, from God's perspective, it is very different.

So, take a minute and consider this: are you truly more righteous than someone else? Your answer will help you answer the question of the prophet and let you see if God is truly silent.

Day 155 Hab 2:4

"See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous will live by his faith"

This is part of a warning given by God. There will be an accounting of people's actions and treatment of others and of their failure to hear his word and repent. A day is coming and when the appointed time comes there will be no escape.

In the meantime, the prophet is encouraged to announce this reality so they will not be able to say they did not know or were not warned.

The responses of the people fall into two categories. The wicked who in pride ignore such warnings believing they are above such warnings. Their pride creates a false sense of control and so they continue in their chosen path and do not hear the warnings or see the evidence of what is waiting for them ahead.

The righteous know the truth. They have a clear understanding of the consequences of ignoring God and choose to listen to the warnings. They know that a day will come when God will respond, and live according to that knowledge even though it presently appears like God is not watching and seems unaware of what the wicked are doing.

The righteous choose to pay attention to the warnings of the prophets, the guidance of God's word, and the truth of God's love. They not only believe that God sees and hears, they live accordingly. They know that they must do so if others are to hear God's warning and be able to see its truth in themselves. Their faith gives them the hope that others will hear and return to God before God finally judges.

Day 156 Zeph 3:5

"The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame."

Do you understand what is happening around you? Do you believe that each day God responds to the evil around us? More important, do you believe God does no wrong and his actions are the correct ones needed for each day?

We struggle with all of these questions. We want to see behind the curtain and know the why behind all of God's actions and choices. We want to see the evidence of God's righteous presence in the world around us.

That is the problem. We are looking beyond ourselves and think God should be acting and dealing with those who know no shame. Did you hear what I just said, we want God to deal with them.

The real issue is are we letting God deal with us. Are we thinking about making sure God has access to our lives so that He can work and reveal Himself? This is the most important place for God to work It is in the lives of those who are ashamed of sin and those who are ashamed of the behavior of the unrighteous.

The truth is that God is working every day and revealing Himself. He does this by leading and guiding those who still understand the truth. He does this by speaking to those who want to hear and follow him. If we will let him, he will dispense His justice through the truth seen in those who follow him.

Will you be the one God uses today?

Day 157 Zech 8:8

"I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God"

The focus of this passage is on the people of Israel and a time when they will be restored and once again be seen as the people of God. Two concepts are contained within this promise that we need to understand and use to guide our relationship with God.

First, God is always faithful. He can be relied on to keep His word and His promises in every situation and with every one of us. He is not fickle in how He acts. We can depend on Him to be who He is and to provide the stability we need as we walk in this world.

Second, and this is very important, God is always righteous. His actions will always be governed by this truth. He cannot, will not, tolerate sin and disobedience.

This means we too must learn to be faithful and righteous if we hope to fully experience the blessings following from the fact that God is faithful and righteous. This is an awesome gift, filled with so many blessings. At the same time, it contains a truth we must be aware of. We are not capable of being faithful and righteous. Sad but true.

But God has foreseen this. He has provided for us one who provides what we lack and has paid the price so we can dwell once again with God and guide us as we learn to be faithful and righteous in His power with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Day 158 Zech 9:9

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Today we understand this passage. It proclaims the coming of the Messiah. We know the meaning of why the King arrives on a donkey. We know the victory that has been gained by this King. We know the meaning of the word salvation. We know so much because we are part of those who have lived after the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the King being described here.

The battle for our salvation has been won. The conquest of sin has been gained. The possibility of peace with God is now not just a dream, but a reality.

The King has come and He is righteous. Everything has been done correctly so that the salvation that is offered is perfect and complete, capable of providing for the rescue and restoration of all who desire to join in the celebration.

The other word here is the word gentle. Not a word you would expect as part of the description of a conquering king. Yet it is the correct word, for the goal of this victory is not suppression and control by force or coercion. The goal is to bring peace through an act of love, not of destruction. Jesus forgave the thief, he offered forgiveness to those who carried out the crucifixion.

This is the joy. This victory means we can be forgiven and restored by the gentle hand of our loving Lord.

Day 159 Mal 3:18

"And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

I don't like the sound of this passage. It suggests that it is possible to become blind to this difference. Yet it is a reality. It does happen and in ways one would not notice.

It is like wagon wheels on stone or donkeys on a stone trail. In time they will wear a path in stone. I have heard of a place in the USA called Wagon Wheels Park. It represents a section of the trail used by wagons to settle the west where they wore tracks in the stone. I have also heard about a similar thing here in Panama on the Gold Trail. As the donkeys carried their cargo, they wore a track in the stone.

Everything is subject to this kind of repetition, even the soul of man can be worn down under the weight of the constant pressure of the world. Paul warns us not to be conformed to the world. It is a real issue, but the greatest threat is not in the obvious things that are clearly seen, but in the subtle things that wear down our senses until we are numb.

The good news is that we do not have to depend on ourselves to deal with the constant dulling that can occur. We are told here that God is constantly at work and will restore and maintain our hearts so we can see and be able to keep our eyes on Him. We can know the difference and stay free of the dangerous currents flowing around us.

Day 160 Mt 1:19

"Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man, and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

Do you take time to think about how your actions and reactions related to people could affect not just your life but theirs as well? Are you more concerned about protecting yourself than others? It is a natural response.

Joseph had every right to be angry with Mary. The fact that she was pregnant meant one of two things, both of which could cause a great deal of problems for Joseph. The one, that he had slept with her before they were married, an unacceptable action, would mark him as one willing to violate the law. If willing to do so in such a serious matter, then how could anyone trust him in any other aspect of life?

The second, that she had slept with another man, though not a result of Joseph's actions, would reflect badly on Joseph and his wisdom in becoming engaged with such a woman, who was willing to behave in this manner. Again, if he was so careless in his choices, could he be depended on in other critical areas related to making wise decisions?

In such a situation, the only real way to keep his honor would have been to expose Mary and have her punished. A punishment that meant her death. But this is not the manner of a righteous person. Such a person considers how to protect and help even those who have caused them pain and anguish.

This is the righteous way, and Jesus would be the supreme example of this way of living.

Day 161 Mt 5:45

"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Jesus has just told us to love our enemies. This is a challenge and then to emphasize the point He reminds us of a fact that we often forget to consider. God allows all to experience the benefits of the world He has created for us. The evidence of this is that both the good and the evil experience the blessing of rain. We could easily make a large list of things that both groups enjoy and make use of in their daily lives.

God cares about everyone. He provides for everyone. He reveals his presence to everyone. The issue is that not everyone is willing to see what is happening and consider what it represents. The point is that if God, who is truly righteous, is willing to do so much for everyone, including those who choose to reject Him and His words to us, then we are to have the same attitude towards others. This includes those who revile and persecute the righteous and reveal that they oppose the truth and blessing of God.

And to further emphasize this, He states that loving and caring for those who love us has no blessing. Even the wicked do this.

Think of this. Every day God greets everyone. The sun rises and blesses everyone. We who call ourselves righteous and are followers of God are called to do the same to all. Greet them and reveal the presence of the God who created them.

Day 162 Mt 9:13

"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Who do you associate with? So many groups over the years have created an isolationist attitude as part of their structure. They are afraid to be polluted by contact with the wicked of this world. Worse, their definition of wicked is often based not on a true image, but a construct of all those who don't fit their description of righteous. The only people accepted into their circle are those who match that description. You have to change first and then you can be an approved member.

Jesus' teaching was the absolute opposite of this. His life was lived in the context that by walking among all the people he would be able to help them see their sin and their need for mercy so that they could change. His example is so true.

Consider this: What kind of doctor is the one who only treats the healthy? If this is true, then clearly this person does not understand the true role of a doctor - to help the sick.

Consider again this: What kind of person, who once being rescued, ignores those in need or even hinders their rescue by their own attitude?

This is the point. If our focus is only on ourselves and our safety, then are we truly a righteous person?

Consider this: Jesus, the most righteous person, the only righteous person, focused on the rescue of those in need. If this is true, then if we seek to be righteous, a follower of Jesus, then what should we be doing? What should be the focus of our life?

Day 163 Mt 10:41

"Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward."

The focus here is on our ability to treat properly those who follow and serve the Lord. Do we show them proper respect? Do we give them the attention they deserve?

But take this one step further. How do we treat each other as the children of God, as those who follow the Lord? Do we respect each other? Do we understand that those who follow Jesus are our brothers and sisters?

There is a reward for us when we care for each other in the right way. This treatment will determine how God treats us. Why? Because how we treat each other reflects in a true way how we treat God. Take a moment and think about that. How we treat each other as members of the same family will reflect how we treat God.

And this will determine how God treats us. If we are careless and inconsiderate, then how do you think God will respond to us when we come to Him? If we are respectful and care for those who are members of our family, then God will respond in like manner to us.

That is the center of this reward. God will hear us and respond to us in the same way he treats those called into specific areas of ministry. As we bless them and care for them, so God will bless us and care for us.

Day 164 Mt 13:17

"For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

What do I seek each day of my life? What do I want and how does that correspond to what I need? Am I listening in a way that will allow me to hear the truth? Do I long to see and hear God each day in my life?

These questions look at the focus of a person's life. They are a way to examine what I truly long for and what guides a person's actions each day.

So much of life is focused on seeking the things needed to care for the physical and emotional aspects of our lives. So much of life is about hearing what will make me feel good about myself and let me know that I belong to a specific group and indicate that I am accepted and approved.

But if that is all we seek and all we hear, then we will never receive what we need to care for our spiritual needs. Do we long to see and hear God speak? Do we long to know God? Though we may not see and hear everything, we know that God will speak and reveal what we need so that we are satisfied. We will receive the evidence that He is working. Though we may not see or hear the final word, we are satisfied because God has heard us and spoken to our needs in this moment.

Day 165 Mt 13:43

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

This passage comes after an explanation of what will happen when the judgment comes. It talks about how the angels will be sent to separate the wicked and the righteous. Sometimes it is hard to imagine how they will accomplish this but, in this passage, we are told they will shine like the sun.

Have you ever used a good pair of anti-glare sunglasses? Before you put them on it is hard to see anything clearly. Once you put them on, it is amazing what you can see. And how easy it is to see. Now I am not suggesting the angels will be putting on some kind of vision tool but clearly, there is something about the righteous that makes them clearly visible to the angels.

Here is another way to think about this: on a pitch-black night, even the smallest point of light becomes visible. Even if it appears that the light is not able to do much to push back the darkness, the evidence is clear that it is present and it is visible to those who wish to step back and take a look.

We are called to be light in the darkness. If we are doing what we are called to do, then when the time comes, it will become clear to all and that light will be a piece of powerful evidence that God has always been present to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

Day 166 Mt 13:43

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Have you ever flown in an airplane at night? You look out the window and notice something interesting - individual lights that represent the yard lights of farms. They are small points of light representing the location of a family. Then, as you continue to watch, you will see small towns, larger towns, and then the great cities. What is worth noting is that the more individual lights that are present, the brighter that area appears.

When I have been driving at night, I can tell the size of a town by the reflection or glow that exists in the sky above it.

We know that the presence of God in a person creates a glow. It may not be as strong as that of Moses when he came from the presence of God or what people saw on the face of Stephen as they stoned him, still there is something about the righteous person that people see. They have a peace and calm that is evident. While at times it might seem like a tiny point of light in a dark place, it is still evident.

The angels can see it and they will gather the righteous. As they are gathered, this glow will grow until it is bright like a sun. Our individual light is important, but the power of that light is even more evident as we gather and display God's love and peace to the world around us.

Day 167 Mt 23:28

"In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

Jesus had little time for people who tried to define the concept of being righteous based on a set of rules and personal interpretation of God's word. He called these people hypocrites and warned them that they were to be judged for their falseness.

But do not each of us try to define this word righteous for ourselves? We want to believe we are people of worth so we make a list of the things that we believe will prove to others that we are good people, people God should approve as part of His kingdom. That is where the problem is. The moment we start to establish a standard based on what we think is right, we are in trouble.

Now our goodness is not based on our relationship with God. Instead, it is based on what we do, which always reveals our inadequacy. Anything we do is to make us acceptable to God. To be honest, none of us can even maintain our standard of good and right. We will fail. Using our ideas of what it means to be good will only isolate us from God and lead others astray.

Being righteous is not about our capacity to do what is right - we cannot succeed in that. It is about our relationship with God and our dependence on Him to cleanse us and make us acceptable to Him.

Day 168 Mt 23:35

"And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, …"

This is a reality that we wish we could avoid. We wish that being righteous would protect us from the hatred of others. We wish that God would place some kind of protective forcefield around us so that the wicked could not touch us or harm us, but He doesn't.

And history shows that the righteous suffer and at times have been killed by the wicked. It happened during the time of the kings of Israel and Judah. John the Baptist was killed, and Jesus was about to die at the hands of the wicked. The history of persecution since then confirms this reality. In this world, there is little peace for the righteous. At least freedom from suffering and oppression.

While we may not see their judgment, it will come. Jesus spoke of that coming judgment with sadness in his voice. He was sad because they refused to listen, and the day was coming when that refusal would result in judgment.

So much gloom and despair here. Yet, over and over, God asks people to go, asks people to share the truth, asks them to risk their lives so that maybe some will listen, and they willingly go.

Judgment will come. That is not the point of this. The point is that God loves the lost. Those who know God love the lost. The issue is do we love the lost? What is more important - a little comfort and peace now with no thought for the eternal peace of others, or do we think like those prophets and Jesus - what I risk now may save others and bring them into the presence of God and eternal peace?

Day 169 Mt 25:37

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?"

Here is one of the key characteristics of the righteous. They are doing good and they are not thinking about getting a reward or any recognition. They simply see the need and respond, and God sees this.

From this passage, we learn that the judgment may not be based on great and mighty deeds. Great declarations of faith and great acts of sacrifice. Well, those may still be important, but they are built on a deeper more critical foundation. They are built on everyday acts of compassion and concern for others.

Jesus tells us that our love for others and the expression of that love is what God is looking for. More importantly, those acts are done without concern for recognition or reward. They are done simply because there is a need. The righteous are not selfish or greedy. They know the importance of little acts of kindness and the need of people for such acts.

They have eyes to see the need and hearts open to freely respond to the need. They have received and are willing to share what they have received with others without concern regarding who the person is and whether they can respond. Great or small, all are seen as equal and all are in need of love and kindness. It is not about what is done, but why it is done that determines the value of the action.

Day 170 Mk 2:17

“On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." ”

They were criticizing Jesus for spending time with sinners. They didn’t understand and so judged Him as unworthy.

But we do the same thing. We are hard on those who spend time with those who are of questionable lifestyle. Yet aren’t they the people who are most in need of our presence? How will they learn about God’s love if we do not spend time with them? How will they know about God’s forgiveness if we are unwilling to demonstrate its reality by demonstrating it in our lives and forgiving them?

The greatest act of forgiveness and love is what is done before people know what they are and what they need. The greatest work of healing and restoration is the willingness to see the wound and allow a person to come and be treated. When people know they have access to care, a critical need is met. The emotional need to be seen and believed.

But if we avoid them, close the door to them, out of fear of how their lives might affect us, we condemn them. We prevent them from finding the healing they need. If you have the medicine and treatment they need, the only way they will get it is if someone willingly has contact with them. Someone willing to enter their world or allow them to enter their world.

Day 171 Mk 6:19-20

"19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man."

When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

The world is caught in a conundrum. They both admire and hate the righteous. They know that the righteous are right when it comes to condemning sin. They know they need the righteous to keep a balance in their world.

And yet they hate the righteous because the very thing they admire is the very thing that condemns them. They hate the fact that as long as there is a righteous person the world will know them for what they are, wicked.

The wicked respect the holy and righteous and at the same time want them to disappear and not disturb their world. At times the conflict is such that the wicked want them removed and will seek to destroy them despite their admiration.

The challenge is for the righteous to understand this reality, knowing that at any time the admiration can shift and result in great danger. It takes courage to declare clearly the sins of others, including those in power. It takes even more courage to maintain the truth knowing what such actions may cost them one day.

We are called to be light in the darkness. Following that call will place us in harm's way. Are we ready to be admired and hated for being true to God's word?

Day 172 Lk 1:17

"And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

This is the true work of the righteous person. This is what we are called to do as children of God and true followers of Jesus. We are to be the evidence of what God can do in the life of a person who is committed to following God's word and keeping His law.

That is the work we have been given. We are to go into the world and be a witness of God's presence and power. We are to help people see and desire God in their life. Our lives should prepare people for the truth.

What a joyous task this is. What a promise we have been given that we do not have to depend on our strength and ability. We have been promised the power and presence of the Lord as we go.

We are the righteous seed that God wants to use to produce a harvest. We are the ones that carry the truth and if we do our work correctly people will be ready for the truth and their hearts will turn from the folly of this world to the wisdom of God.

We have the opportunity to be the evidence of God's kingdom and the proof of his promises to all who believe.

Day 173 Lk 2:25

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."

One of the great blessings of being a righteous person is the ability to know and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. Simeon was a righteous man. He had received a revelation. He knew what to watch for and what it would mean. He had patiently been faithful in his service in the temple and in waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled. When the day came, he knew and clearly proclaimed for all to hear what he knew to be true.

This is what we all should seek. We should desire to live in such a way that God is willing to make himself known to us. We should commit our lives to being a vessel that God is willing to indwell and use. This will allow us to see what God is doing and share that information with others who are willing to hear and see.

God wants to speak to us. God wants to reveal his plan to us. Our task is to be like Simeon, one who walks in such a way that we can hear God and can know the truth of what we hear. This will allow us to bear witness that God has kept his promises. We not only hear but proclaim what we hear and because we are righteous and devout they will be able to hear God speak through us.

Day 174 Lk 14:13-14

"13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

How does one analyze their lives and actions? How does one know if they are living correctly in this world and in a way that God approves?

Jesus gives us a very clear answer. You can tell by how you treat those outside of your normal circle of people. You can tell by how you treat those who cannot repay you for the help you give. You can tell by analyzing your expectations about recognition and repayment for the gifts you give, the people you help, and so on.

The righteous are aware of the many people around them who are in need and have no one to help them. Their families are unable to help or in many cases even unwilling to help. They have no network of friends. There is no system in place to provide crucial services. Even if there is, they have limited ability to access them. All these people need help and they will not be able to repay you.

They need the help of someone who really cares and is not concerned about the cost involved in caring.

Those who are righteous care and know that there is a greater reward waiting for them one day, the approval of their heavenly father and his blessing.

Day 175 Lk 15:7

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

This makes sense in so many ways. Every righteous person, if that is who they really are, has this happen in their life. Each time a person repents and restores they become one of the 99 righteous. They have caused celebration and now they are, or should be the ones, seeking to restore others and join in the rejoicing that occurs when that happens. Jesus presents several parables that show us this truth in different ways. In two, the person who is righteous could be the one seeking the treasure and willing to give everything to gain it and so celebrate gaining the goal (Mt 13:44-45). Jesus gave up everything to find me, the pearl of great price, and the treasure hidden in the field. In the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:4-7), the shepherd, and, in the parable of the lost coin (Lk 15:8-10), the woman is focused on what has been lost, and not on what they still have. Those resources are set aside to find what is lost and then celebrated when they are found. More to the point is the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32) and the father's comment to the other son related to the celebration. (Lk 15:31-32) " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " Those of us who have already been found always have access to all the resources of the Father, a special blessing. Something we should celebrate and not begrudge the celebration of the one that is being restored. We have the wonderful opportunity to celebrate both, what God supplies every day to us and to celebrate when one is restored.

Day 176 Luke 23:47

"The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

The real evidence of whether we are righteous or not comes in times of testing and struggle. How we respond to that will be a clear indicator to the people around us of the nature of our faith and relationship with God.

Jesus revealed the depth of that reality and his dependence on His Father. From the cross, He heard and forgave the thief. From the cross, He forgave his oppressors. From the cross, He cared for his mother, a loved one in great need of comfort. On the road to the cross, He counseled those who cried for Him. In the persecution, He kept his eyes on God. In the encounter with His enemies, He proclaimed the truth though it meant risking His life.

Here is the proof of the value of not fearing what others may do and how they will treat us. One of those tasked with his execution saw the difference, saw the truth that the man on the cross was a righteous man, and declared it for all to hear.

So what about us? Do we do the same? Do we set aside the potential danger of being declared a Christian to care for those around us? Are we willing, in the midst of suffering for that truth, to forgive those causing the suffering? Do we see the needs of others and care for them even when we are struggling? Do we stand before those who hate who we are as Christians and fearlessly declare the truth?

Day 177 John 17:25-26

"25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

If you are wondering why it is important to be righteous in a wicked world, then here is the answer. It is found in Jesus' prayer as he faces death on the cross.

People do not know God. They do not know of His love. Without a reliable source of information about these, the wicked will continue on their chosen path, and that path will bring them to judgment.

Now since we are called to be righteous and to be like Christ, then we have this task - to reveal God and His love for them. Paul does not use the word task, he says it is a calling, a special ministry that is bestowed on those who desire God in their lives and desire to be transformed.

So. we have this joyous calling to be the light for the blind, to show love to the unloved, and to make it possible for them to know God.

And here is a critical point, to do so when the wicked hate and attack us. Jesus was about to go to the cross and his focus was on demonstrating the knowledge and love of God. That is the opportunity and reality that we have if we are truly righteous.

Day 178 Acts 3:14

"You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you."

This is a message we need to hear and remember every day. Unfortunately, we have a problem with our tendency to self-righteousness. The idea that I am a good person and would never consent to the death of a righteous person, much less be directly responsible for their death - that I did not actively pursue the release of a wicked person and participate in the death of a righteous person.

While it may be true that I was not there on that day when this happened. I was not there with the crowd joining my voice with theirs in calling for Jesus' death. I was there because it is my sin as much as anyone else's that made this event possible. My sin contributed to the events of this day.

Why do I say this? Because when Peter declared this fact, it is likely that not everyone in that crowd had been there on the day in question, but he made the statement anyway. He made it clear that my sin placed me in agreement with those actions whether I was present or not. The people present heard this truth, both those who had been there and those who had not. All knew the truth about themselves.

My confession should be the same. I helped kill Jesus on the cross because of my sin, and my need to be forgiven. Will I be humble and honest in admitting this and so be freed to reveal Jesus to others?

Day 179 Acts 10:22

"The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."

If you ever wondered if someone could be good enough to be saved, here is your answer.

Cornelius was a foreigner but had been impressed by the belief of the Jews in a supreme God. He adjusted his world to follow their moral standards and lifestyle. The change was so significant that he was considered a righteous and God-fearing man.

He was also seen as a man to be respected for his treatment of others. He was not a hypocrite like the Pharisees who were not respected in general. The people around him including the Jews saw the difference and yet this was not enough. Even Cornelius seemed to be aware something was lacking and when an angel was sent to him, he responded immediately to seek out Peter as directed.

What is clear is that an earthly form of righteousness is not enough to provide for your salvation. The good opinions of others in this area will not provide for your salvation. It is only our acceptance of the message of the cross, of God's love and provision for our salvation, that makes that possible.

Being good is a good thing. Being righteous is a good thing. Being seen by others as good and righteous is a good thing. Being considered god-fearing is good as well. But they will not bridge the barrier and bring forgiveness.

Day 180 Acts 22:14

"Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth."

We all like Paul have been chosen to know God's will and to see Jesus, and to hear His words. If we are not careful, we can fall into several traps as we consider what this means. The words we use to describe what God has provided often sound great but if we are not careful, they can also lead us down some dangerous paths. Consider the following:

Privilege to receive – this can open the way to pride. The idea that somehow we are special and deserve what God has made available. The modern term for this is entitlement. I am entitled to receive what has been given, since God loves me and created me I deserve to have what He has. A very dangerous way to interpret the idea of privilege.

Blessing – we all want blessings. But if we are not careful, we can come to expect them and even depend on them. We can become lazy and think that God will provide all we need.

Gifts – I don't know anyone who doesn't enjoy getting gifts, but if we are not careful they can create an expectation. Since it is my birthday, I should get a gift. Since I am graduating, I should receive a gift. Because I have done this good thing, I should be rewarded. Instead of the gift being a symbol of a relationship it becomes a requirement.

We read later Paul was given a thorn. To truly enjoy what God has given requires humility.

Day 181 Rom 1:17

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." “

To fully understand this statement about how the righteous live, we need to understand what faith is about. A key aspect of faith is a belief in what will be, and in what can happen tomorrow. It is not about what exists at this moment, but what can exist if we believe and commit our lives to that belief.

The righteous see a possible future where God is revealed and known. A future where all struggle caused by sin will be over. A future where one will walk with God and know God.

The righteous know this and live accordingly. They are not dominated by the failures and struggles of the present moment. They see all of that as a temporary situation that will one day end and peace with God will be established.

In a sense, they see behind the curtain and know that what lies ahead is worth the struggle of this moment. They will commit themselves and all their resources toward following the path that leads them to God and what God has promised. Though they don’t know when it will occur, or if it will come to be in their lifetime, they know that one day all that God has promised will be fulfilled.

This allows them to live as children of God now and reveal this truth to those who have not heard or believed.

Day 182 Rom 1:32

"Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

This is the scary part of the reality we live in. The world knows the truth and yet they build structures to protect their right to do what they want. They use those structures to condemn anyone who chooses to speak the truth. They question whether anyone has the right to decide what is right and wrong.

The moment you exclude God, then you have chaos. There is no standard if man is the standard. There is no hope for peace if man is the basis of right and wrong. When everyone has the right or claims the right to decide, then conflict is guaranteed.

God has allowed us to go our own way. But He has also provided a way back to Him and the truth. He asks each of us who know Him and the truth to declare it to all who are seeking to destroy it. This is what Paul is doing.

We should be what God created us to be, beacons of truth in a dark world. The source of life in a world that is destroying itself. We must not fear to be known as followers of Christ. We must do as Paul did and declare what we have been given to our world which is deep in sin.

This has been and always will be the work of the righteous.

Day 183 Rom 2:5

"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."

Have you ever watched the battle between a stubborn child and their parent over who is in control? The child is defiant and willful. the parent has said no. and the reason for saying no is correct. No more candy, time to nap, no more of this or that. They know what is best for the child, but the child doesn't want to listen.

Sometimes we smile and chuckle. We think it is cute. The truth is it is not. It represents the reality of our own lives. We are that child, and God is the parent trying to get us to listen and do what is right. But we don't want to listen.

This choice to disobey reflects how we all are. We all want control. We all want to decide. The reality is that, at some point, each child will need to learn there are consequences for such behavior. The sad truth is that so many refuse to learn this. The Bible says no one learns and that we all are, in one way or another, spoiled children who don't listen to their heavenly Father.

At some point, there will be consequences, and that is the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous. One learns and finally begins to understand and listen and the other doesn't. One chooses to deal with the consequences and the other doesn't.

The warning is eventually, if we don't listen, we all will have to deal with the consequences of our stubbornness.

Day 184 Rom 2:13

"For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

Well, here it is. The clear statement that going to church on Sunday will not save you. The clear statement that reading your Bible will not save you. That listening to that teaching or reading that good book will not ease your way into God's presence.

There is no room for facades here. There has always been one more step. It has always been to hear and obey God's word. It has always been to practice what you have learned from God's word. It has always been to hear and obey.

The truth is, if you don't hear first, you won't know how or what to obey. It makes sense that hearing alone will never be the same as actually doing something. How many good students graduate with a degree and with great grades but never do anything? Never accomplish anything? They live under the false impression that completing the training is enough. They never realize that if you don't use what you have learned, nothing happens.

I can read a book, watch a video, or listen to a seminar, but until I use the information - "put my hand to the plow", to use an old expression, the information means nothing.

The world has little interest in paper Christians. They want contact with real flesh and blood people who live out the truths in their daily lives. God has the same perspective. The ones who live the truth are the ones who are approved.

Day 185 Rom 3:10

"There is no one righteous, not even one;"

Paul has been reviewing the sinful state of man. In this process, he is also reviewing the state of a Jew before God. His conclusion is very clear. Being a Jew or being a Gentile, neither matter. No one is righteous. No one seeks God. To support this, he quotes from several texts in the Old Testament.

This is the state of man and there is nothing he can do to change this reality. Everything in his life confirms this truth. Left to himself man is a liar, a murderer, deceitful, and does not fear God. Man has no redeeming value based on his actions, desires, and purpose in life.

This is a dark and scary image of our true condition before God. what is even worse is that man does not fear the one who created him. So even the best of those among us are riddled with sin and a lack of desire to know God.

If we are to have any hope of being restored, we need to deal with this reality. We need to be brutally honest with ourselves about our true nature and the true state of things between us and God. It is only when we get to the place Paul is talking about that we can understand the work God has done to save man from his self-destructive way of living.

Today take a moment to reflect on the truth of the passage and give thanks for God's love which did not abandon us.

Day 186 Rom 3:20

"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin."

This truth is more profound and critical than we often realize. Sometimes we focus on just the law given to Moses and we should because that is the clearest definition of the law. But the law is a much bigger concept and we must realize that fact. The reality, though, is that the core of the law is part of every culture and every person.

God is our creator and we are in His image. That means that no matter where we live, or what culture guides our life, there is the law of God. It is seen everywhere and man uses it as a foundation for defining how to live and treat each other. While it may be distorted because of our sin, it still judges everyone.

The truth remains that no one can be declared righteous by observing the law whatever form the law takes. No one is capable of keeping it. Paul's focus is on the law of Moses, but the truth remains, if we are honest, everyone fails to keep the law. Every form the law takes results in the revelation of sin.

The question is: Will we be honest about this truth and admit the fact that we cannot succeed in keeping the law? Will we let ourselves see the truth about our lives?

Thankfully this is not the end of the conversation. There is hope for those who see the truth.

Day 187 Rom 5:7-8

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Would anyone willingly die for another person? Maybe. Parents sacrifice themselves for their children. In battle, soldiers sacrifice themselves for others. But in those situations, there is a clear purpose, a clear reason for such sacrifice.

We can see the reason for sacrificing ourselves to protect the truth. We can see the reason for sacrificing ourselves to protect what is good and right. It makes sense. We want to see what is righteous protected, and we want there to be a source of good in this world. All of that makes sense. The people who make those sacrifices have a deep faith that their sacrifice has value because of who they are and who they are rescuing.

But do we see the value in the sinner, the wicked, the failure? Would we sacrifice ourselves for a criminal, an addict, an outcast? If it is a rare thing for one to die for the good and the righteous, then it is unlikely that anyone would do so for one of these. Yet that is what Christ did. He died for the unrighteous.

Why?

Because He believed that such a sacrifice would open the way for the criminal, the addict, the outcast, and you and me to find our way to God through His sacrifice. He believed we would respond and be made righteous and good through His sacrifice. That is what we are called to do.

Day 188 Rom 5:19

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

Consider the following concept. What is the focus of each of the above?

The original sin was focused on doing what I wanted and having what I wanted. The result was disobedience and the ruin of God's plan for us.

The great sacrifice was focused on doing what others needed and what they should want. The result was obedience and the restoration of God's plan.

The first focused on one's ability to make wise choices and be in control.

The second focused on depending on God's wisdom and allowing Him to be in control.

The first resulted in everything mankind does being stained. There is nothing that is done that is not in some way polluted by the desire to replace God with me.

The second resulted in making it possible to remove the stain through the cleansing process of the perfect sacrifice. This process makes it possible to put God back on the throne and restore the fractured relationship that has been laid in ruins since the first act of selfish desire.

The choice we are given is which of these paths will we follow? Will we continue to live in disobedience and forever stained by placing me first? Or will we finally learn to focus on others, with the first other being God, who then can restore us to see the beauty of what He intended when He created us?

Day 189 Rom 7:12

"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."

Do we believe this? That the law is holy, righteous, and good. Do we believe that when we keep the law, we are able to love God with all our heart, mind, body, and soul?

That was its original intent, to reveal to us how to live in a holy, righteous, and good way. To reveal to us how to know if we truly did love the Lord completely and above everything else in this world. The law was to be a guide in defining the path we are to walk.

The problem is that once sin entered, the law revealed to us how badly we were failing in our love for God. It revealed our corruption and love for self over everything else. So the good purpose of the law -to guide us in loving God, became a tool to reveal our sin. This is not what God intended.

Instead of helping us stay on the true path, it becomes a constant reminder of the fact that we are not on the path, and of our preference to follow our own path. So through the law, we learn the depth of the reality of sin in us.

To make matters worse, sin corrupts our ability to understand and love the law that God has given. Thankfully that is not the end of the matter, and because of Christ (verse 7: 25), we have the hope of the law carrying out its original purpose of helping us to truly love God.

Day 190 Rom 8:3-4

" 3 ... And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Jesus' action on the cross condemned sin in the sinful man. His life and death on the cross confirmed what the law revealed, that we all stand condemned before God.

And while Jesus' action fully revealed this truth it also fulfilled the requirements of that law. Further, it provided us with a way to fulfill those requirements in our lives. The key is a decision not to live according to our sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Do I sound like I am simply repeating the scripture above? Yes, I am. We should repeat this every day as a reminder of the price that was paid so that we could be righteous - so that we would have what is needed to fulfill the requirements of the law.

The truth is we stand doubly condemned. First, because we are sinful. Second, because the truth is revealed in Jesus' perfect life and sacrifice. Does that sound harsh? Not at all. It is simply the truth. It is a further reminder of how important it was for Jesus to come and deal with the debt of our sins.

I am now free to choose. Free to receive forgiveness. Free to live according to the Spirit. The requirements of the law have been met and I can find joy and peace.

Day 191 Gal 3:11

“Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "The righteous will live by faith” “

If this is so clear, why do we constantly create laws and structures to evaluate if someone is righteous, a true follower of God?

Those who are truly righteous understand clearly that relying on such laws and structures will not save them. They only condemn. This is not to say that we should not allow the good law of God to guide us. It does provide a way to help us understand what is righteous and what is not.

The issue is when we let the law define whether we are saved. If we are serving God or not. If we are acceptable to God or not. It cannot do that. Only our faith in the sacrifice of Christ and the cleansing action of repentance and forgiveness can do that.

That is the key. We cannot stand before God and claim to be righteous because we have followed the law. But, if we stand before him as one forgiven by Christ's love and sacrifice, we will be able to live a life that fulfills the heart and purpose of the law, to love God above all else.

It is our faith in Christ’s love working in us that will give us the ability to live a righteous life. It is that faith that changes us and we no longer are slaves to the law and able to do what the law could never accomplish, which is to know God.

Day 192 1 Thess 2:10

"You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed."

So what do people remember most? Your words or your actions? How important is the way you live to your testimony?

Paul considered it critical evidence that the words they shared had value and represented the words of God. The way his group lived was the proof.

If we want people to not just hear our words as we share the gospel, we need to live in a way that shows the value of those words. We need to be holy, revealed by how we live, our dedication to God, and the work we have been given. We need to be righteous, showing people that our lives are different when God is living in us. We not only talk about love and treating others as worthy of God's love, but we live it out.

The last word here is blameless. Can we live without making mistakes? Probably not. But we can live in such a way that people see clearly why we are serving God. There is no hypocrisy. There is no egoism. There is no pride. We are exactly who we say we are. We are sinners who have been forgiven and transformed by God.

People see that our one focus is to honor God in all that we do.

So consider this: Paul said the people of Thessalonica were his witnesses that he had done all of the above. So would your neighbors be able to be witnesses that you are holy, righteous, and blameless?

Day 193 1 Tim 1:9

"We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,"

When God is part of one's life there is no need for an external law.

All the forms of written law serve one purpose, to provide a framework for judgment and appropriate punishment. Even the Mosaic law does this. It defines what is unacceptable behavior and allows for appropriate punishment to be applied.

When God dwells in a person a different system begins to function. Its focus is on walking with God and helping others to do the same. This was the focus of how Adam and Eve lived in the garden. They walked and talked with God. It is what defined the life of Enoch. He walked with God. Moses' life and ministry were such that he was allowed to see God's glory and had constant access to the presence of God.

When we talk about David, though he sinned, the Bible tells us that he was a man after God's own heart. That meant that in every situation, success and failure, he always came back to God because that was the core of who he was.

This is what we need to be. We need to be righteous, not by defining what we do not do, but by letting the presence of God define what we do and how we live.

Day 194 2 Tim 4:8

"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

Paul has been reviewing his life and ministry for Timothy. There are two focuses of this passage, what he expects to have because he has been faithful, and who will determine what that will be. Let us look at the second of these.

When we look back over our lives or look forward to what lies ahead, we need to keep in mind that only one person's opinion really matters. It is the Lord who will judge us and determine the value of what has been done by us. If that person approves, then it is certain that others will blessed and not hurt by our lives and our activity.

Paul looks at his life and one key item stands out. It is the idea that he has seen his life and ministry as an offering he has made to the Lord. He has poured out his life and endured all that has happened so that when his life is reviewed, it will be revealed that he has done what is right until the end and has been true to his relationship with God.

And the thing that has kept him focused and on track has been his longing to see his Savior and Lord. This desire to know God and be in his presence has been his life's focus and should be ours as well. This alone will merit the right to stand before a righteous God and receive the blessing prepared for the faithful.

Day 195 Tit 3:5

"he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,"

There is hope. We do not have to be perfect. It is not our perfect lives that God requires before we can experience His mercy. We do not have to provide a perfect vessel before God will come and work in our lives. He is the one who perfects us if we are willing and allow Him to work.

There is hope. We do not have to become trapped in legalism living a perfect life to guarantee God's continued presence and activity in us. He is the one who helps us learn to live correctly. Like our human body which requires bathing and care, He is present to continue cleansing our lives and helping us become all that He intends us to be.

We neither have to be perfect for Him to work in us, nor perfect for Him to remain and continue to create in us a mature and complete member of His family. I do not have to prove I am worthy of His love before or after He works in me. It is this truth that helps me open the door to His dwelling in me. And it is this truth that helps me overcome my failures.

In both cases, I have learned the wonder of His love and forgiveness. I have hope and can walk with God just because I know He loves me.

Day 196 Heb 10:38

"…But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

What do you desire today? What price will you pay for what you desire? How long will you be willing to do what is needed to receive what you desire?

The answers to these questions depend a lot on what you desire. Some desires reflect the moment in which we live. They come they go and not having them has little impact on our lives and no impact on the lives of others. Others reflect a period in our life. What we desire as children, youth, in marriage, as parents, in work, and so on. While not absolutely necessary, they can have a great impact on our lives and how we live. But again they are not as essential as we may think they are.

Then there are the desires that define who we are. We will invest all that we are and have in pursuing these desires. A career, a relationship, a level of success, an education. Failure to obtain them has the potential to bring ruin.

The righteous desire to live by faith. This desire gives them the focus and perseverance to deal with the costs that must be paid to obtain what is desired. The thing that the righteous desire is God in every aspect of their life. They know that no price is too great to pay to know God and do His will. The righteous know that pleasing God is the one desire that is worth whatever price may be required of them. Nothing will deter them from seeking it.

Day 197 Heb 11:4

"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith, he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead."

The heart and soul of being righteous is not what we do but the motive for what we do. Why you choose to do what is right is more important than what you do. Both Cain and Abel presented a sacrifice to God. The sacrifices were different but that is not the issue in why one was acceptable and the other not.

It was about the why behind them. As I read the story what seems apparent is that Abel brought the best from the first fruit and Cain brought some of the fruits. One appears to be based on honor and respect, the other on fulfilling an obligation. The Lord's comment seems to confirm this. "if you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"

If one is seeking to be accepted by God then one realizes nothing they do can make that possible. There is no sacrifice, no deed adequate to accomplish that. But when a person understands that and presents their sacrifice and acts in humility and honor to God, that act of faith and trust makes the sacrifice acceptable. It makes our actions something that has value before God, and He accepts them.

it is not about what I do but why I do it. God sees this and accepts the sacrifice of a righteous person. That attitude reveals the righteous nature of the person.

Day 198 Heb 12:23

"to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,"

There are two images in the passage where this text is found. One of a mountain of fire, unapproachable and deadly. A place that is forbidden to enter or touch. One of fiery judgment and fear. The other of a city of life and light. A city filled with the presence of God where thousands of angels have gathered in joyful celebration.

In this place are gathered all those whose names are written down. All those who have stood before God and been declared righteous. Standing before them is Jesus, who made possible this declaration through His blood. A sacrifice that has made them righteous and fulfilled the covenant made by God to Abraham.

The first image was what the people of Israel encountered at Mt Sinai. It left them in fear of approaching God. It was here the law was given and man learned of the truth about sin. But it was also here that God began to prepare for the establishment of the second image. An image of joy, hope, and peace. An image that invites all to come and see.

Because of Jesus, the image has changed from fire and fear to light and joy.

The truth is that we have the opportunity in Christ to choose. We do not have to face the fire of the first but can enjoy the beauty of the second if we do not refuse what has been offered to us in Christ.

Day 199 Jas 1:19-20

“ 19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

Anger is such a complicated emotion. It so easily gets out of control. When that happens, we say and do things that are destructive and not helpful. We judge others before we consider all that has happened.

We too quickly forget our failures and God’s incredible patience with us. We too quickly forget how He has taken the time to listen to our cries and confession of our sins. We too quickly forget that He has forgiven us and that to do so meant the sacrifice of His son to make that possible.

We forget and then become angry with others for their failure. We do not give them the same grace and mercy that was given to us. So we become offended, judge them, and push them deeper into the abyss of sin.

Such anger does not help us grow and will not give us the tools to help others escape the sin that binds them. It is a false path and will lead us away from the life God has for us. Our forgiveness was based on the love of God. He calls us to live in love and not anger. He calls us to learn to forgive not to judge. He calls us to the power of kindness and a gentle spirit.

Day 200 Jas 2:21

"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?"

What is the test? How does one know they are righteous?

If we really want to know then we may be confronted by tests that will reveal where our confidence is. Do we have the faith that reveals who we are?

To be righteous means trusting God. Which also means having our trust in Him tested. Abraham had to deal with an incredible test. A test that I am not sure I would have passed. God had given a promise to bless him and the nations through his offspring by Sarah. He had only one child by that marriage, Isaac. Now he is to sacrifice that son and still trust God to fulfill the promise.

To be righteous is to let go of what we think we have, of what we think is essential to living for God, and let God decide what we need. It is often not what we think it is. The truth is until the day of the test comes, we may not realize what the test will be. We may not realize what we need to let go of to be the person God wants us to be.

Do we need to let go of a person, our family, a key possession, or a position that we enjoy? Do we need to let go of our deepest desires and hopes so that God can be the center of our life? If we are righteous we will do so and discover the depth of God's love for us and what His promises truly mean.

Day 201 Jas 5:16

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

Do I understand the power of a righteous life? Do I believe that if I am humble and follow God in all my life, I have access to power and that my words can bring blessing and healing into the lives of others?

This is what James is saying. I can stand before God and pray for the needs of others and God will hear my prayer. I can prevail on God to forgive the sins of others. I can pray to God and request that He heal those who are physically and spiritually sick.

I need to realize that if people see me as a channel of God's presence and power then I need to humbly pray for them. I need to see that if I am righteous before God's eyes and in the eyes of others I have this unique blessing, to pray for them and act as their representative before God.

But I need to keep clearly in mind that it is not because I have influence or authority that I have earned. It is because of my relationship with God that makes this possible. It is a relationship that I must keep in focus as people ask me to pray for them. If they see me as righteous it is because they see how I am walking with God. It is not about some special quality that I have - it is God who they should see.

Day 202 1 Pe 3:12

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

This is a great comfort, to know that God is not just watching over me but is attentive to my prayer. This means He is not simply listening to what I am telling Him. He is carefully listening to all that I am saying.

He hears the words and he hears the tone of my voice. He sees the expressions of my face, and the position of my body, and observes every detail of my being as I speak to Him. He sees and hears the entire process of communication.

He knows exactly what I am feeling at all levels. The words, the emotions in the words, the intent of those words, and the desire they express. The most important desire is to be known. Sometimes it is not about getting an answer. It is about being heard and understood.

With God, He always hears and understands. He stops what He is doing and gives the righteous His full attention. This is something we all desire, to know that when we speak, the one we are speaking to actually is listening and responding to us. That they are willing to give us their full attention.

This is what God does for the righteous, for those who desire the truth and want peace with God.

Day 203 1 Pe 3:18

For Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."

This is the truth of our condition. A righteous person had to die for us, the unrighteous so that we could be declared righteous and be brought before God.

There have been many sermons, many articles, many poems, and so many attempts to explore the depth, width, and extent of what Christ had done for us. No matter how much inspired and creative language we use, it comes back to this basic statement. He died for our sins.

No matter how descriptive we are of the death on the cross. No matter how much we work at understanding the pain and suffering involved, it comes down to this, He was put to death for us.

No matter how beautiful and inspiring the words are that attempt to explain the victory that was gained by that sacrifice and the death that it required, it was made possible by the Spirit of God.

Sometimes we need to come back to the basics and let them fill our thoughts. Jesus died for our sins, a perfect righteous man for an undeserving unrighteous person, me. He was put to death and made alive so that I, a person wrapped in the shroud of death, could be set free to live by that same spirit.

Rejoice, my soul. Christ died for me so that I could live.

Day 204 1 Pe 4:18

"... If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

How often do we say to ourselves or others that it is easy to be saved and restored to the kingdom of God? All you have to do is repent and confess your sins. Then God will work in your life to cleanse you and transform you. It sounds so easy and we try to present it that way in the hopes of reducing the barriers to a person accepting Jesus as their Savior.

But this passage reminds us that there is/was nothing simple about what God has done. It was not a simple matter to choose to be incarnated in human flesh. It was not a simple matter to live as a human and deal with all our struggles and temptations. It was not a simple matter of dealing with people who were more interested in having their needs met than learning the truth. It was not a simple matter to deal with those who heard the truth and ignored it. And it most definitely was not easy to be crucified for us.

There is no such thing as easy when it comes to our salvation. And the person who is confronted by their sin, truly faced with its reality will not say it was an easy process. Facing the truth about oneself is never simple or easy. and lastly learning and growing as a child of God is work.

I am so thankful that God is there to help us along the way.

Now pause and think about the state of the wicked.

Day 205 2 Pe 2:7-9

" 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)"

There are two themes in this passage. The first is the idea that God will rescue the righteous, and the second is the response of the righteous to the sin around them and how this indicates who they are.

As we look at the righteous and God's willingness to rescue them, a couple of facts come to mind. One, Lot was saved but lost everything, all of his possessions, except a few things, the clothes he was wearing, whatever he could carry or grab in the rush to leave, and his immediate family. His life was the focus of the rescue.

The extent or limit of what was saved is seen in the fact that his righteous life did not save his wife when she looked back and it did not result in righteous thinking on the part of the daughters. Our life cannot save others. It can only point them in the right direction and give them a light to guide them.

This brings us to the second theme. The sin of the world torments those who are righteous. This person is the indicator for others to see what it means to live in a way that pleases God. It also reveals the basis of the judgment to come.

Sin causes us pain and we have a choice - use our knowledge to judge others, or help them find the way to God and His rescue as well.

Day 206 1 John 2:1

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

We have an advocate. Keep this always in mind. We have an advocate. This advocate lives among us. This advocate learned about the frailty of our lives and the power of sin. This advocate learned and overcame all that beats us down. He understands and is ready to represent us at the throne of Grace.

Yes, it is also seen as the throne of judgment, and without this advocate at our side that is exactly what it is - a place of judgment and condemnation for our sins. But with the advocate at our side, the one who sacrificed Himself for us, the one who understands our needs, the one who watches over us, those who desire to walk with God, He is there to represent us and make it a throne of mercy and restoration.

John reminds us that He has saved us and continues to represent us before the Father. If we sin, as we are likely to do, we are still living in this sinful flesh with all its temptations, and if we confess, as we always must humbly do, He is there to represent us.

He does not defend our sin. He defends the truth that in Him and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome and continue growing and become what God intended, a restored child of His creation.

Day 207 1 John 2:29

"If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him."

Why do we use the term Christian? It is because a Christian looks like Christ in what they do and say. He is the template by which all who follow Him will be shaped. That is if we agree that He is righteous, then He is the pattern or standard which is used to measure and identify all those who claim to be Christian.

It also means that we accept the Bible's definition of righteousness and all the examples it gives related to this term. Almost all belief systems have such a term to describe a person who correctly lives by what they define as righteous. The key difference is the standard given to us as Christians does not come from human interpretation or understanding that is internal.

What we have as Christians comes from an external source. A source that cannot be adapted to our setting or altered to fit our current ideas and concepts of what is right and acceptable. It has an eternal immutable source, and we see that reality lived out for us to emulate in Jesus.

This is not something we can duplicate in our lives; it must be reborn in us. To live right is a result of our being born again in Christ. It means allowing Jesus to be our template and have him reshape us into all we can be through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. That makes it possible to be a Christian.

Day 208 1 John 3:7

"Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous."

Does this sound like double talk? The one who does what is right is right because he is right.

Maybe this will help: I know how to use a hammer because I have a hammer and it is a hammer.

We struggle with absolutes because we don't want them. They have a way of judging our activity and leaving no room to wiggle. You know that space where we can excuse our behavior and escape consequences.

Within the context of scripture, the word righteous is absolute because it is based on the nature of God and was revealed in the life of Jesus. In Jesus, we see the truth of the statement. His actions were just that right and so righteous because He was righteous.

When we truly walk with God, when we let Him be the foundation of all we do, when we let Jesus forgive us and transform us, then we will be righteous like Him. This means what we do will be right and reveal that we are righteous in the way Jesus was righteous.

Am I still sounding like double talk? No. If we are righteous, then what we do will reveal we are righteous. If we are truly like Jesus, then we will do what is right. That means we are righteous, not because of who we are but who we are in Jesus who was righteous and did what was right.

You, like myself, will need to take some time and think this through. It is about knowing that God lives in us and changes us to be like Christ. Is that happening in your life and is there evidence that you do what is right?

Day 209 1 John 3:12

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."

Do we realize that we can't fool God? We may fool others but we can never fool God. He knows exactly what is in our hearts and the reason behind everything we do. He knows our motives and that should cause us to pause a moment and think carefully about why Jesus said to be great in the kingdom of God is to be the least. That is why He said we should become like children.

Do you understand this? Anytime we act with the hope of recognition or approval of others then we place ourselves in harm's way. Anytime we do something, anything to look good in the eyes of others we are at risk of losing God's approval.

It may seem like a simple and natural thing to be recognized by others. It may seem alright to be honored for what we do. It may seem good to be seen and noticed. But if that is why we are doing what appears right to others and to satisfy the expectations of others and God then we have missed the point of Jesus' comment about not letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing. (Mt 6:3)

Honestly, we cannot avoid being seen. At least not completely. We cannot avoid people appreciating what we are doing. The point is that we should not be seeking that but seeking to do what is right and having God's approval.

Day 210 Rev 15:4

"Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Don't worry, it will all work out in the end? Or someday the truth will come out?

Have you ever used these phrases or heard them used as words of encouragement? They sound good. They are intended to give hope and encourage a person to keep going despite the challenges, opposition, and struggle.

But how often do they actually happen? How often does it work out the way we hoped or desired? How often is the truth finally revealed the way we think it should be revealed? Truthfully, in this world, it never works in the end the way we hope or want it to. Revealing the truth could also mean revealing something that we would prefer to remain hidden. But there is one thing that we can guarantee will happen: God's plans will be carried out and all will be revealed for all to see.

That is the promise of these words. The day is coming when the one who is Holy will be revealed and all will see the truth of His majesty and power. They will have no choice but to come and worship Him. The day is coming when all that is hidden will be revealed and all will see that all God has done was righteous, in accord with His plans and character.

The blessing is that we have been given the chance to know Him and share in the fulfillment of His glorious plan.

Day 211 Rev 19:8

"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

There are many illustrations about how our lives are a tapestry and all the different events of life woven into it to create a picture of who we are and what we have experienced.

Do we realize that each day we are contributing to another piece of weaving? We are creating the clothes we will wear when we are presented as the bride of Christ. Our righteous acts become the linen garment, the wedding dress.

As we live and keep our focus on serving Christ, being Christ-like, and following Christ in all our actions, they become the wedding dress.

So, the question is, am I contributing to this dress? Are my thoughts and actions adding another thread to this incredible garment? Are those valid questions? They tend to have a 'me' focus which runs counter to the humility that is so critical to the attitude of the righteous.

It may be better to focus on the end result and not how we get there. It is not about how the gown was created but what it represents, lives lived in service of the King of kings. The better question is does my life represent such a gown? Am I living a life that Jesus would be pleased to make into His wedding gown?

So how are we doing? Do we stop to think about how our lives appear? Are they white like linen? Thankfully the result does not finally depend on us, but the cleansing blood of the sacrifice given.

Day 212 Gen 15:6

"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness"

We live in an age where the concept of credit is critical. We have credit cards. We also have credit scores. Both of these represent the belief of banks and lending agencies in our ability to be financially responsible. Not in the short term, this is about establishing the belief that over the long term, we will pay for what we buy on credit. They believe in us and trust us to do what is right. As long as we do so, then we can continue to buy on credit.

So, do we have a credit account called 'My Righteousness Account'? Is there a place where we can bank our good deeds today for use at a later time? Sounds a bit ludicrous, doesn't it? Especially when we recall some of the comments in the prophets about how if we are righteous and start doing evil, all our past righteous acts have no value.

Here we have God saying that because Abram believed, God converted that belief in some way as credit. The form of that credit was not money, not something to be drawn on, but something to build on. God was helping Abram to see that certain actions and responses could be used to build on and develop a better relationship with God.

There is no banking system built on righteousness. We can't bank enough righteous acts for that to save us. Only Jesus' life of righteousness can accomplish that. But we can learn how to believe and let those actions become the basis of how we live.

Day 213 Deut 6:25

"And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."

Moses has been busy reviewing the history of the people, the law that has been given, and so on. He then pauses and says if your child asks what it all means here is how you should answer them.

We were slaves. God did incredible things so we could be set free and enjoy a land promised to our ancestors. As part of this promise, we were given the law and all the other guidelines to help us know how to walk with God so that we would always prosper and continue to be alive.

Then he adds a twist which is the verse above. If we are careful to obey, then that obedience will be our righteousness. It is not what we have or what we might gain. It is about our relationship with God. All the money, property, and power in the world cannot buy righteousness. It is the way that we obey God. Do we do so out of respect and reverence? Do we do so to honor Him in our lives?

Or, do we do so because of what we can get?

Careful obedience is about knowing not just the law but the lawgiver. The real value of obedience is that it opens the way to develop a relationship that will produce righteousness. A relationship that God approves and so brings life. Freedom to be in God's presence.

Day 214 Deut 9:4

"After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you."

It is not because of your righteousness that God takes action. This is such an important point that Moses says it three times, in verses 4, 5, and 6. God does not base his action on the righteousness of those who will benefit from that action.

The focus of his action is to reveal His righteousness and His right to judge. We are the same as the people of Israel, stiff-necked and stubborn. Without God's grace, we would be no different than the people of the promised land who were so wicked the time had come for judgment.

Is there good in us? NO. That sounds harsh but it is the truth. Is there the possibility of good in us? YES, because God created us and declared us to be good. So, we could have been, except for the sin of Adam and Eve.

We need to always keep in mind that God does not love and forgive because we deserve it. He loves and forgives us because He sees what we could become, the beauty that could be restored if we will humble ourselves and obey Him. It is not what we deserve, nor something we have earned. It is a choice God has made and we must decide how we will respond.

Day 215 Deut 33:19

"They will summon peoples to the mountain and there offer sacrifices of righteousness; they will feast on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand"

The call is to offer sacrifices of righteousness. It is interesting that the call is not to bring your gifts of money, your gifts of material goods, or any other object or animal. The call is to bring sacrifices of righteousness.

And what is the source of such a sacrifice? It is the life I live before God. It is my obedience and my choices that are the source of this kind of sacrifice. Why is this true?

Consider why Samuel when responding to Saul about his reason for keeping the best animals to sacrifice to God instead of obeying the directions given him, that states that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sa 15:21). Consider why David said the best sacrifices are those of a broken and contrite heart (Ps 51:17).

It is when we understand the meaning of these two concepts of obedience and a heart submitted to God that we will understand what a sacrifice of righteousness is. It is in that knowledge that we will learn that whatever we bring to God will be acceptable, something that honors Him and reveals our relationship with God.

Take time to consider what you bring to God. Consider if your life and how you live before God and others will allow you to bring sacrifices of righteousness to the King of kings.

Day 216 1 Sam 26:23

"The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed."

David has just let Saul go free. He could have killed him but chose to leave the life of Saul in the hands of God. He chooses God's path and does not take the shortcut to fulfilling God's promise. He chooses a path of submission to God and God's timing.

Do we realize that true righteousness is about following God's leading and letting God orchestrate our lives to bring us where He wants at the correct time? Do we realize there are no shortcuts in demonstrating our faithfulness?

It would have seemed so easy to end Saul's life and stop running. But would that have made things simpler, or would the barriers to David being respected and followed as king only increase?

This choice was one of several that meant David would have to wait. Wait for God to act and place David on the throne. This choice left David free of any accusation of seeking power, of greediness, and of course murder. In the end, the people saw David as honorable, and for the first time, the tribes were truly united.

We want shortcuts. We want what appears to be the easier faster way to our goals and what we think God wants. There is no such thing if one wants to follow the path of righteousness and be approved by God.

Day 217 2 Sam 22:21

"The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me."

One wonders how David could make such a claim. How could say that the Lord's actions were based on the way he has lived?

David has committed adultery, did not handle well the rape of Tamar, and not handled well his relationship with Absalom. He spent several years fleeing from Saul and has been involved in many battles. Later God will say he cannot build the temple because he is a man who has shed much blood. So how can he make this statement?

How can any of us make such a statement and hope to be treated well or blessed by God in any way? We are no better than David. We sin, we flee, and we mishandle so many issues and relationships. We easily hurt others and the list goes on. So again, why could David say this?

It is not based on a sinless perfect life, this we know. But we hear many times that David was a person approved by God, a man after his own heart. Why? Because David is honest about himself, honest about his failures, and honest when confronted with his sin. Because David trusts the Lord above all else and looks to the Lord for direction and forgiveness.

David is a strong leader, but he is also a humble man before God. There is no pretense, and we see it in the Psalms he writes. We see that what makes him righteous and his deeds acceptable is his dependence on God.

Day 218 2 Sam 23:3

"The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: 'When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God,"

These are part of the last words of David, a man chosen by God, a man who has walked with God and has been blessed by God.

In this verse, he explains the key to why God has blessed him. He has ruled in righteousness and the fear of God. He has chosen to follow the path that God chose for him and live according to the guidelines God gave him. While he was not perfect this one thing he kept in focus, a healthy fear of God. we would probably talk about respect and honor as well as submission to explain what the word fear means.

By doing so he became light to others and a source of life. With this as his focus, he has a clear guide for his desires and life and is convinced God will save him and grant him what he desires.

Now it is time to consider my life. So, who or what is the rock in my life? What provides the basis for how I rule my life and so impact the lives of others? Do I fear, respect, honor, and submit to God or something else?

The evidence will be in the list of things I desire. It will be in what my life reveals and creates in the lives of the people I touch and influence. It will be seen in how I walk with God.

Day 219 1 Kings 10:9

"Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness."

The queen of Sheba has come to Israel. She wants to know if all the stories she has heard are true and they are. It is at this point she makes the above statement which also reveals a critical truth behind what she has seen. It is God who has made this possible and placed a person in a critical place to maintain justice and righteousness. Not to maintain splendor and wealth, but a correct understanding of how to live.

This should be a key result of how we live. People should see and hear about our lives and want to know more. When they do come and sit down with us they discover a greater truth and the source of how we live. We are people of truth because of our relationship with God. We can live where He has placed us because walk with God.

We are called to be guides to others. We are called to help maintain justice and righteousness where we live and serve. We are called to reveal God's love for every person. We are where we are so that God can use us to reveal Himself through us. When we do so, God delights in us and the people see and hear.

Day 220 2 Chron 9:8

"Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the Lord your God. Because of the love of your God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever, he has made you king over them, to maintain justice and righteousness."

This comment of the Queen of Sheba is so important that the writers of the books of the Kings and Chronicles included it in their record of Solomon's reign.

How important is it for us to be at the center of God's delight? Do we realize, do we really understand the importance of being where God wants us? Do we understand the critical nature of our role in this world?

Wow, that may be more than we can digest, and it may be a little frightening to think about. Truthfully, I don't know that I want that kind of responsibility, to maintain justice and righteousness for large groups of people. But that is the point. God places us where we are to accomplish this.

I am a member of a family. I am a student with classmates. I am a worker in a business. I am a member of a community. It is not about how many people but the understanding that wherever we are placed we have this role. We are to be a guide to the people we are with. We are to help them understand and desire justice and righteousness.

Day 221 Job 27:6

"I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live."

Life has been tough for Job. It has been disastrous. Everything is gone. Everything. And now his friends, instead of being a comfort, attack him and blame him for everything that has happened. They tell him he deserves everything that has happened. He has secretly sinned, and God has revealed this by punishing him.

Job knows better. He knows that they are wrong. He knows that he is not guilty of what they believe he has done. They never specify what that is. They simply assume it is something so bad that God responds with almost total annihilation of Job, his family, and property.

Job knows and hangs on to the truth that he has lived an honest life based on righteousness. He has always kept God at the center of his thinking and as the guide for his life and actions. He will not submit to their analysis and accusations. While he may not be perfect, he knows that he has chosen the right path to follow.

So, do we have that same confidence? Do we know we have made the right choice when we choose to follow God? Do we have the faith to see beyond our circumstances and hold on to that choice? To believe that following God no matter what happens and what people say was, is, and always will be the right choice, the right path for our life?

Day 222 Job 29:14

"I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban."

When you get up in the morning, you have to decide what you are going to wear. That decision reflects what you expect to do that day. Will you wear clothes for work, for school, for play and so on? Each of those can be different. The clothes for work can be very different depending on the work involved - office work, construction work, etc. The idea is that we pick specific clothes for what we will be doing.

But there is another type of clothing we should consider wearing. This clothing should always be the same. Job calls it the clothing of righteousness. So, the question is, when we get up each day, do we consciously put on this clothing? Attire that will identify us as people who know, do, and encourage what is right? Attire that lets people know that we are concerned about justice? Attire that will tell people that we respect them and care about their lives?

Of course, this is not a piece of physical clothing like shirts, pants, dresses, and shoes. But it is something we do need to carefully consider as something we consciously choose to wear. It is so easy to forget to choose how we are going to live each day and how we are going to present ourselves to the world. So often we forget this clothing and walk out the door with the wrong attitude.

So, do you put on righteousness each day?

Day 223 Job 35:8

"Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself, and your righteousness only the sons of men."

Have you ever found yourself stating the obvious? Why do we do that? Do we do so to remind ourselves of the truth? Do we do so to somehow avoid that truth? To somehow make it less important or lessen the impact of that truth?

So why state the obvious here? Of course, our wickedness affects us. Of course, our righteousness only affects those around us. As is reflected in the rest of the passage, neither has any impact or benefit to God. So, what is missing here?

The error is that nothing is done, and its impact - either right or wrong, is limited to the person doing what is right or wrong. They always affect others. Stating the obvious is to admit this reality. The speaker is reacting to what is happening in Job's life. It is affecting him and creating a response. We need to keep this in mind - that what we do, good or bad, will affect others. It will bring trouble or blessing.

As to whether our lives affect God. In truth, our actions do not affect God. But they will limit our ability to know God, to experience His presence, and since our actions affect others, those actions will affect how others relate to and know God. In that sense, our actions can affect God because they can either draw people to God or drive them away.

Day 224 Job 37:23

"The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress."

There are two truths and one error in this statement by Elihu. The error is that God is beyond our reach. While God is beyond us, he has chosen to be accessible. This has been one of the conflicts between Job and his friends. They constantly say that Job, because of some sin, has no access to God. Job on the other hand continually appeals to God in the belief that God is accessible.

The next statement is true. God is exalted in His power. Both Job and his friends are in agreement with this truth. God is in control of everything, and man must bow to God.

The last statement is also true but from the conversations of the friends, one would begin to wonder. Job is being oppressed, rather than punished for some sin. Job feels oppressed but believes it is not because of any sin he has committed and pleads with God to explain why things are happening.

The truth is God does not oppress, and there is confusion between the idea of oppression, which is to make the lives of others miserable to gain what one wants, and the idea of punishment, which is the appropriate response to deal with sin. In this case, we see that God is not oppressing neither is He punishing, but only we are allowed to see behind the scenes and know.

Do you understand how the exalted, accessible God is working in your life?

Day 225 Ps 7:8

"Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High."

To be honest, is this something we desire? Is this something we would even be comfortable considering? Do we really want God to come and judge us according to either of these two words, my righteousness or my integrity?

Do we know what it means to have integrity? To be and do exactly what we say we are? Are we even able to be righteous?

And yet this is what David desires. He desires to be judged according to how he lives and whether how he lives is based on the concept of integrity. He wants the Lord to examine not just his heart but more deeply what he desires.

Honestly, none of us could survive the scrutiny of God in either of these areas. In another psalm, David declares that even our best thoughts and actions are filthy rags in the presence of a holy and righteous God. He later states that only God can create in him the pure heart that would make it possible to live a life of integrity.

That is the point. David knows that he cannot face God with the truth of who he is. He knows he is not perfect. But that is what he wants. He desires to live a righteous life; he desires to live a life of integrity and the only way for that to happen is for God to be free to judge him and work in his life so that he will be righteous and have integrity.

Day 226 Ps 7:17

"I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High."

Knowing that God will be the One who judges us and that the judgment will be based on His righteousness could you join David in thanking God for his righteousness?

Does the idea of being judged by God and that the standard that will be used will be God himself frighten you? It is definitely unsettling to me. If it is frightening, well it should be because, if you are honest, you know that you can never measure up to that standard. That fear is based on the truth about who you are.

Now take a step back. Does the idea of being judged by God give you hope? It should be because you know that the judgment will be fair. But it also means that God knows exactly what is needed for you to be restored to what He intended you to be. That same righteousness that judges you is the same that God used to establish what would be needed to restore our relationship with Him.

While it is true nothing can be hidden from Him, it is also true that that same knowledge is what He uses to work in our lives to create in us a new heart. He uses that same knowledge to help us understand the truth and find our way to Him.

Day 227 Ps 9:8

"He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice."

Do you pay attention to the signals that warn you of what is happening? Do you hear the sirens of the police, firemen, and ambulance? Do you know what they mean?

Have you ever heard the sirens used to warn of the possible arrival of a tornado? Do you know what to do if you should ever hear this warning? Some may remember the sirens used to indicate the possibility of an atomic bomb and the direction to head to a shelter. I am glad that never happened.

Warnings have been a part of most of man's history. Guards were posted on city walls to warn the people of when an enemy was approaching. Air raid signs and shelters were well-known during wars. The list of the means to provide warnings of impending disaster goes on.

Their purpose is to give people time to find shelter, to escape, and to prepare themselves for what is coming. However, they are ineffective if the people do not know what they mean and do not respond appropriately.

This warning, that God will judge the world and the standard he will use, appears throughout the scriptures. It should create great concern and should help us be prepared for what lies ahead.

The problem is that we have become unresponsive to the warnings received. There are many reasons for this and this fact should cause us great concern. So, are you paying attention? Are you making sure others know about the warning signal? Are you prepared for what will happen when the judge comes?

Day 228 Ps 17:15

"and I — in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness."

What is the focus of your life? What is it that will satisfy you as a person? And lastly, what is needed to keep that in sight?

A telescope is a fun tool. It allows you to see the universe no matter how big or small. Any telescope will allow you to look into to the heavens and the wonder of the universe God created for us. But two things are necessary for you to be able to see and enjoy the use of a telescope. You have to know where to point it and you have to be sure it is focused properly. A mistake in either of these and all you will see is the emptiness of space.

This reality is the same for our lives here on Earth. There is a lot to see. There is a lot to enjoy but if our vision is aimed at the wrong things and is out of focus all we will see is emptiness. That is because, without God in the picture, everything else has no meaning or beauty.

The reality is that our lives are to be a telescope that allows us to see and enjoy God and the beauty He has created. But if our lives are pointed in the wrong direction or out of focus, not focused on God, then we will not see either of those. We will not see God and we will not see the beauty He has created for us to enjoy.

Day 229 Ps 18:20

"The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me."

This passage could cause one of two responses. One of fear or one of hope.

Fear because when we are honest with ourselves, we know that being judged according to the state of our life and the cleanness of our actions we are doomed.

Hope because the focus of this Psalm is on the care God provides to us and more importantly how He responds to those who are humble and faithful in following God. How He responds to those who understand that God's way is flawless and worthy of following. How He responds to the one whose central goal is to follow that law.

This fact is so important that in verse twenty-four he repeats word for word his statement in verse twenty and then adds the phrase "in His sight."

God is watching not to see if we are perfect but if our desire and purpose in life is to be faithful and blameless. Most important is whether we are humble. A humility that knows that it is only because God has rescued me and is delighted in my desire to follow His law. A humility that understands that my ability to follow God's way is based on God working in me.

And since it is God working in me, then I have hope. God sees my desire to be pure and blameless. God sees my desire to walk according to His law. God sees that my hope is in Him, and I am saved.

Day 230 Ps 22:31

"They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn —for he has done it."

What will people say about how you have lived your life? What will they say about how you have dealt with the struggles and the joys? What will you say to the next generation about your relationship with God and how it has affected the way you live?

One of the greatest mistakes people make is not learning from the past. Each generation seems to think they don't need the knowledge and insight of the past and so it is lost. As a result, the knowledge and skills of the past are lost, and we do not benefit from all the previous generations learned and knew.

Then one day a person reflects and wonders how they managed to live and survive. A person considers what they did and produced and becomes amazed at the skills and knowledge they had to create the tools and resources needed to live.

As David reviews the past of his life and the provision of God, he begins to look to the future and a vision of what he sees needs to be learned and retained. What he sees is something worth telling the next generation and it is a message of hope based on all he has learned about God. The heart of this message is the coming of the man of righteousness.

Do we see this and does our life communicate this message to the next generation? Do we know and proclaim what he has done so the next generation will be blessed?

Day 231 Ps 23:3

"He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

The metaphor of life as a path is used often in scripture. Most commonly there are two paths. One that leads to destruction and the other that leads to life. Each one has a guide and we must choose which path to follow and which guide we will follow.

The guide for the path to destruction will likely abandon you. That is the point of the path, and it takes little guidance to follow it.

The guide for the path of righteousness is faithful in his commitment to guide us. He knows that there will be constant attempts to mislead us and, just as often, we will fail to heed the directions given. In both cases, he remains close to step in and reveal the attempts to mislead us as well as to respond when we realize we have not been listening. He wants us to find the way and so be able to help others choose wisely as well.

God has a vested interest in our success. He created us for fellowship and each time someone succeeds in making the right choice the image he created in us is revealed. When it is revealed then others can see the wonder of what God accomplished when he created us, a being that could reflect in some way the glory and wonder that is God.

Choosing to follow God provides us the guarantee of the true guide who knows all that lies ahead. It also allows us to see how to live according to all God planned for us.

Day 232 Ps 31:1

"In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness."

Do we realize that there is a proper way to be delivered from trouble or be rescued? I was taught in my lifesaving class the right steps to rescue a person in the water and the right way to approach a person when trying to rescue them. The wrong way and you put your life at risk as well. The person doesn't think about letting you help them correctly and they just grab and flail. They don't know what they are doing and that makes helping them risky.

With God things are different. We can't create a problem for Him. But we can create problems for ourselves if we are not willing to be helped or only want help to come in a certain way. As a result, our actions limit what God can do and hinder his work in delivering us.

Here we are reminded that if we pause, take a moment to reflect on what is happening, and look to God, then our rescue will create blessing and not harm. We will receive the help needed in the perfect way only God can provide. We will be delivered from the danger that faces us and be shown the wonder of God's perfect way. We will be delivered, and the world will know how God loves and cares for those who trust in Him.

Day 233 Ps 33:5

"The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love."

The first part of this statement is a given. Since God is the source of righteousness and justice then He will love its expression and presence in us and His creation.

The second may seem difficult to imagine since man has so filled the earth with violence, hatred, and disregard for all God's laws. Yet he created the earth in love to express his love to us and for us.

Further, He maintains this world as an expression of His continuing love for us and His willingness to be patient as He waits and hopes we will see the evidence of that love and respond.

Think about it. Despite our disobedience, our lack of righteousness, and justice, we continue to enjoy the wonders of this planet. We continue to receive what is needed to feed and care for our lives. The rain comes, the sun shines, and the food we need is produced day after day and year after year.

Everywhere one looks there is evidence of our disobedience. At the same time everywhere you look there is also evidence of God's unfailing love. He has created a world filled with wonderful things to enjoy.

Pause with me and consider all that God has made possible so we can live and know Him. Yes, if we will do that, then we can join the psalmist and declare that the earth is full of God's unfailing love.

Day 234 Ps 35:24

"Vindicate me in your righteousness, O Lord my God; do not let them gloat over me."

This is a bold request and courageous. How many of us want God to vindicate us? How many of us would be willing to submit to the scrutiny of God and allow him to determine if there is something in our life worthy of his approval and so of his protection?

God has told us in other passages that He will test and purify us in the same way silver is purified. When that happens the dross or material of no value is removed. Keep in mind that this process is by fire - not easy or pleasant.

So, vindicate me is just that, asking God to purify us and test us to see if there is wickedness in us, remove it, and be able to vindicate us. He will cleanse us so that there will be no basis for suspicion of wrongdoing or having wrong motives for what we do.

David knew this process. He has asked God in many other psalms to cleanse him and make him whole and acceptable. So, he was able to call on God to vindicate him. He had been tested and been proven worthy.

If we wish to be vindicated, first in the eyes of God, then in our eyes, and finally in the eyes of the world, then we need to be willing to submit to the scrutiny of God and the cleansing it will bring about in our lives.

Day 235 Ps 35:28

"My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long."

So here is a question to consider. Could you, if asked at any moment in the day and your activities, stop and praise the Lord no matter what is happening? Could you share the righteousness of God as part of everything you do during the day?

Behind these questions is the need for us to evaluate whether everything we do makes His presence evident to ourselves and those around us. Does what we say and do truly speak of God's presence and righteousness in our lives?

What would happen if at any moment someone came and stopped us and asked if what we just said or did truly honored God? How would we respond? Could every word of my mouth and every action bring honor to God?

These are some critical questions, and our answers will reveal much about how closely we walk with God. They will reveal the focus of our lives and will reveal if we are hypocrites or honest. They will reveal whether we walk with God or only treat God as a means of rescuing us when we get in trouble, a safety net when we do foolish things.

Pause with me and consider how much of our life is spent in foolish activity that gets us in trouble. Pause and consider how much of our life is truly focused on revealing God's righteousness and allows us to praise Him at any moment in our day.

Day 236 Ps 36:6

"Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast."

In his description of God's relation to man, David has to abandon any description that involves man as a reference point. Instead, he has to use God's creation to describe God and His righteousness. Consider these.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains. An immovable unscalable object that dwarfs us by its sheer size and grandeur. When I stand by a mountain, I am overwhelmed not only by its height but by the depth of rock that is below supporting what I see. Truthfully, I only see a small piece. A mountain is like an earthbound iceberg, and I feel eclipsed by its massive nature and immovable reality. That is God and the nature of His righteousness. And yet He loves me.

Your justice is like the great deep. God's justice comes from His righteousness. I have been on the ocean in a small boat. I have paused to think about the depth of the water below me and the immense pressure that occurs at the bottom of that depth. Then I consider the deepest points in the ocean and they are so deep that the greatest mountain would disappear into its depths. And yet this same God loves me.

Your love reaches to the heavens. I have just recently learned how incredibly immense the heavens are. And that is only to the edge of what we can perceive. Even the greatest ocean depth is not even a speck compared to that. And the heavens reach beyond that in an almost unlimited scope. And yet this same God expresses that love to me and knows me by name.

Day 237 Ps 36:10

"Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart."

The psalmist in verse 6 described God's righteousness as a mighty mountain. Now he asks God to love those who know Him. How does one know a mountain? What can you learn about a mountain? What is hard to learn? What will the risks be in knowing a mountain?

The roots of a mountain. If you have never done it take a trip to a cave under a mountain. Not just a grotto, something that is only a dent in the side of a mountain but go deep inside. A mine will work for this. Then once inside think about the massive weight that is above you. A weight that could crush you but for the walls of rock that support all that weight. And they do so by design. The structure was made to allow for this space. Now think about how God has made a space deep inside of His being for you. A protected space for you to know and consider God.

The peak of the mountain soars above. To reach it you must study in detail the surface of the mountain. You must consider what path will work and what won't work. You must consider the weather and so much more if you want to know and reach its heights. But unlike a mountain, God desires that you find a way to the summit. To get there you need to know Him and only the upright in heart will pay the price involved to know the mountain, God.

Day 238 Ps 37:6

"He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

Here we see the power of righteousness and how it impacts the world around us.

Consider the phrase shine like the dawn or as in other translations "come like the light". If you will get up early on a clear day, no clouds, and watch the light come. The darkness is not dissipated all at once. But slowly the light grows and dispels the darkness until the sun fully rises and all is bathed in light. All that was hidden is revealed.

This is the power of righteousness in us. To do its work until what was hidden in darkness is revealed. And not all that is hidden is evil. The truth is often hidden in darkness and through our lives it can be revealed so that people can see the truth through the light of our lives.

The second concept here is that of the noonday sun. Again, go out in the middle of the day, even on a cold day, and stand in the light of the noonday sun. At this time of day, the shadows are almost gone, and nothing can escape the light of the sun. This too is the work our lives should accomplish in the world around us. It should be consistent and clear so that nothing good and true is hidden from sight, and all can experience its light.

Day 239 Ps 37:6

"He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

Do you want God to make you shine for others to see who you are and your relationship with God?

If you do, then the psalmist gives us guidelines for that to happen. Here they are. Check how you are doing and whether your righteousness will shine.

1. Do worry because of evil men – honestly anything they do is bound to this life which is temporary at best. Heaven is our goal.
2. Do not be envious of them – again what they have is nothing compared to what God offers, which is His presence with us.
3. Trust in the Lord and do good – only this will provide safety and value. And remember the goal is to reveal God, not you. That is what righteousness is all about.
4. Delight yourself in the Lord – by now you should know what you should desire, what God will always give. If you have followed the first three things, your desire will be what God wants to give.
5. Commit your way to the Lord – this is the path that will let you be most effective in making it possible to shine for God. If you are doing the first four, then it is clear how to do this.
6. Trust in Him – it is not about what you do to shine, it is about what God does in you.
7. Be still before the Lord – God knows the best time for everything.

So let Him work so you will shine like the dawn.

Day 240 Ps 40:9-10

9 "I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord. 10 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly."

If you are truly walking in the path of righteousness, then you cannot hide. You may not shout out who you are and why you live the way you do, but you cannot hide it. You will be the one honest and humble person in the crowd. The one everyone trusts and depends on.

And when there are critical issues related to salvation and God's work you will be the proof of all that is true. Though you may not speak out, your life shouts the truth for all to see.

At least the above should be true. No matter if we speak out verbally or not, our lives should be clearly declaring the righteousness of God. Our lives should reveal what is in our hearts. There should be nothing in our words or our actions that would conceal our love for God and his truth.

Pause now and look at your life, your words and actions and consider what you are proclaiming to those around you. Not those in the church but those in the great assembly of the people you encounter every day. The great assembly of humanity that is listening constantly and waiting to hear the truth.

Day 241 Ps 45:4

"In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds."

Consider this: are you a prince or are you a commoner?

Does that seem like a strange question to ask? If you are truly a child of the king, a member of God's family then you are a prince in the kingdom of God. Your status has been changed from that of a commoner to that of a member of the royal family.

So, when you head out into the world hold your head up. You have been given the authority to represent your king in the world. You are serving the king of kings, and you represent him. You are authorized to bring truth to the world and to reveal what humility looks like, and to do this in the power of righteousness.

In this, there are blessings and warnings. You have been given the truth, you have been shown what it means to serve, and you have been restored by God. Failure to understand any one of these will result in failure. Think of it this way. Without truth, you will be championing a lie. Without humility, you will teach arrogance. Without righteousness, the work done will not last.

Thanks be to God that all three are possible because we do not depend on bloodlines or on proving our worth. We depend on God who has restored us and called us to serve. Hold your head up and serve your king, claiming victory in His name.

Day 242 Ps 45:7

"You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

This is one of the royal psalms. It looks at the king and how he is to live and how God will respond to his actions.

But this should be the attitude of every follower of Christ. We should love righteousness and hate wickedness. This should be something everyone sees in our lives and actions.

Will God be able to see this attitude in your life?

There is a way of knowing if you do love righteousness and hate wickedness. We are told here that if this is true, God will set that person above his companions and give the person joy. The term is anointing and that indicates that the person is to be blessed by the presence of joy in their lives and activities. But what does that mean?

It means that you know God is pleased with you. It means that you will have victory in your life over those who would attempt to alter the truth. It means people will see the truth in you and honor who you are and who you serve, even your enemies.

Most important is that you will be able to teach others what you have learned and that is a source of great joy. When people hear and respond to the truth, we have received that real joy.

Do you see evidence of this in your life today?

Day 243 Ps 48:10

"Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness."

Many, though not all, cultures use the right hand in greeting another person. How one shakes the hand of another person communicates many things. It can communicate, fear, submission, control, warning, and peace.

There are many cultures where the use of the right hand is important, not just in greeting but in how gifts are given. The use of the right hand to give the gift indicates that the gift has value and that the person giving it respects and honors the person they are giving the gift to.

The use of the right hand is also used in many cultures as a means of sealing an agreement. When both parties shake hands then the negotiation process has been completed and both parties understand what is expected of them in the agreement they have made.

God's hand is filled with righteousness. He extends it to us so that we may learn from Him and understand what He has to offer us. The fact that it is filled with righteousness defines for us what is involved in accepting His hand. If our relationship is correct, then it will bring us peace and blessing.

If we accept His hand then we are agreeing to live according to what His hand represents, to live righteously. He, in turn, is committing Himself to support and care for us so that we will have what is needed to live according to this agreement.

Day 244 Ps 50:6

"And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge."

There is a reality that exists. It is negative in nature. It is the belief that we can hide - that somehow we can go unnoticed in our sin. It is a contradiction because, for the most part, we want to be seen. We want people to notice us and see that we have value and that we can do something of value.

The problem is that in everything that we do or are that has value, there is a shadow or a hint that there is also evil somewhere hidden within what is good. We fear that it will be seen and revealed and so we hide. We even believe we can hide.

There is another reality that exists - that nothing can be hidden. Consider the heavens, they cannot be hidden. Of course, there are times when they are not visible, times when clouds are present, or when we are inside a structure or hole in the ground. Even then, they are not hidden - just out of sight because the moment you leave that place the heavens are still there.

The heavens are proclaiming the reality of the presence of God, and scientists tell us that the heavens are immense beyond what we can see or imagine. This immensity cannot be altered by any action on our part and they declare that that which created them cannot be altered. This also means the character of the One who created them cannot be altered. Which further declares to us that righteousness, a key quality of God cannot be altered.

The reality is there is nowhere to hide. The good news is that God sees and cares about each of us.

Day 245 Ps 51:14

"Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness."

Before we can get to the part about singing, we need to know why the psalmist is singing. As you read through this Psalm, and yes, you need to read the whole Psalm, you will begin to see the focus of the singing.

The focus is on being saved. He uses the words wash and cleanse several times to indicate the need to be made pure. The goal is to have the past hidden and removed. But that is only the first step in the process. The next step is what needs to be done after the cleansing has been accomplished; after the past has been erased.

Now he asks God to create a pure heart in him and to help him become steadfast in his relationship with God. More importantly, to create a change that restores to him the joy of God's work in him and a willingness to live and teach others about God's love.

This is what he will sing about. It is the righteousness of God that makes it possible to be cleansed, to have the past laid aside, and to live in God's presence.

All of these make the second verse of the song possible. The verse that proclaims that this is what God desires of us. He desires a broken and contrite heart that knows the need for God to cleanse the heart and give direction to each person who seeks God first in everything.

Day 246 Ps 65:5

"You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, …"

Do we wonder why people use the word awesome so much? We do and I don't think we really think about the fact that what we think of as awesome is way too limited. We define awesome based on our limited perspective of what the word really means.

Here is a dictionary definition: causing feelings of fear and wonder: causing feelings of awe. It also contains the concept that whatever happens to cause this feeling is extremely good.

If we look at this definition, then there are only a few types of events that could be called awesome. A few could be a hurricane's destructive power; a volcano that is erupting; a massive earthquake; or a raging forest fire. We can think of more of these and truly they will cause fear and wonder at the incredible power they represent and the destruction they can cause.

But all of these lack the last quality, that of being extremely good. These awesome events are not controlled, they have no clear purpose, and they simply destroy without reason anything that is in their way.

But the psalmist takes us down another path and looks deeper at another set of awesome realities. The wonder of life, the wonder of creation, the wonder of what we enjoy every day that is a gift from God. A God who is awesome and is extremely good. No action of God is without purpose or plan.

What is truly awesome in your life today?

Day 247 Ps 71:2

"Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me."

After this petition, the psalmist asks God to be his rock of refuge. The concept of a rock is something strong and unchangeable. This is a clear description of the nature of God's righteousness. There is a certainty about it because it is unchangeable and so we know what to expect when God acts.

Further, it is a rock, something that can provide protection from all attacks, all intent to harm. It is a place of safety in the midst of trial. This is God's righteousness. It is a place we can go to and know that God will provide the protection we need from any struggle we face as well as any attack of the enemy.

But we must remember that for God to respond we need to place ourselves completely in His hands. A rock does not function as shelter if you only stand nearby and contemplate the benefits of being protected. You must choose to place yourself behind or below or in whatever position is required for it to provide that protection.

In the same way for God's righteousness to deliver and protect, a person cannot stand outside and look at what is available. The person must enter into the presence of God and commit themselves to being in God's presence. A halfway commitment will not accomplish what is needed.

Finally, the rock does not move to us. We must move to the rock. God will not change his standards or his actions. It is we who must change and go to where he is.

Day 248 Ps 71:15-16

"15 My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, Though I know not its measure. 16 I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone."

Here is something to think about. We all want to believe that we are good. We may not say this directly, but we will say we are not bad. Or I have been a good person, implying that though I am not perfect there is enough good in my life and actions that people should see me as good.

By doing this we set up a lower standard for testing and evaluating our lives and actions. The psalmist states that there is only one form of righteousness worthy of praise. There is only one person worthy of being called righteous. Further, unlike our concept of what is good, which we take great pains to define so that we can be called good, there is no way to know the true measure of God's righteousness.

We need to keep this in mind. We are not righteous; we are not even close to being good and to praise ourselves or any other person as good is to diminish what the word righteous means. God alone is worthy of such praise. We have this right, to proclaim His righteousness and His ability to truly save those who understand this truth. Take time to proclaim His righteousness and understand what He is doing in your life to restore you.

Day 249 Ps 71:19

"Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you?"

As you think about God's righteousness do you understand how it permeates everything? Do you realize how extensive it is? Can you see this reality or is it all hidden from sight?

The key to seeing is how we allow the events of our lives to affect our ability to see. So often we let both bad and good become filters that affect our ability to see that God is present and that all is being constantly observed and evaluated.

We let our good acts blind us because we can be good by our own strength and ability. The problem is that even our best efforts at what is good are tainted by the reality of our sins. The fact that the bad we do blocks our vision is obvious. We know that when we act that way, we are intentionally blinding ourselves from the truth. If we don't, then we will have to deal with the truth that our actions are not good and will be judged.

The fact that we do what is bad and that we know it is bad is evidence that God's righteousness is present and reveals to us that our actions are bad. Even attempts to do what is good, though stained with our sin, again reveal that God's righteousness is present and calling us toward what is good and right.

God's righteousness permeates everything. There is no one like God who has such an impact on the entire existence of creation.

Day 250 Ps 72:1-3

“ 1 Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. 2 He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. 3 The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness.”

The word endow is unique. It is about making a long-term investment in a plan, program, or other critical area of activity. The focus is on an investment that will generate funds so that there will be a continued source of resources for whatever is the focus of the endowment. Finally, an endowment has the purpose of benefiting others through what has been invested in.

When we seek God and His righteousness, we are asking Him to invest in us for a long-term plan. In this case, for the rest of our lives. We should also be clear that such an investment is not solely to benefit us but so that God can use us to bless others and in a specific environment. An environment based on the source of the endowment, the righteousness of God.

If we choose to follow God and see His righteousness, we are asking Him to endow in us a resource that will benefit others and bring the righteousness of God to them. If we truly commit to this then our lives will also generate additional resources, we will live in a righteous way and do just that, bringing a return on what was invested by God in us.

While the focus of this psalm is on a key person, with the coming of Christ we all become that person because we are children of the king.

Day 251 Ps 85:10-13

“ 10 Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. 11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. 12 The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. 13 Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.”

This entire psalm has one key focus, God’s salvation. This salvation creates the changes needed so that God’s love and faithfulness can come together. It also means that the relationship between righteousness and peace is revealed.

But the most interesting result is that the Lord will give what is good, which will prepare the way for His steps or a way for Him to walk among us. This path is based on His righteousness and the peace it creates between us and Him.

The final critical aspect is the comment about the land yielding its harvest. Given this psalm's context and focus, it appears that this is not about producing food or other products. It is about what a people who are at peace with God produce.

Consider this: was the true blessing of the promised land the food it could produce or that it would be a place where God would be present and walk among those called by His name? Physical food and peace are limited in nature. You have to have more food every day. You have to be working on peace with others constantly.

But if the focus is on God, then there is an unlimited supply of His presence and He is the source of the peace we experience. Remember they were called to be a nation of priests? What are you called to be?

Day 252 Ps 89:14

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."

I wonder how often we think about what the foundation of our life is. Do we even understand the concept of foundation as it relates to how we make decisions?

Here are a few ideas of what are used as foundations for who we are and how we act.

1. The most fundamental one is your culture and what it establishes as the proper way to live, and it profoundly impacts all of the others.
2. The next one that comes into play is our family. They have a great deal of influence in establishing how we make choices and live.
3. Social and political structures play a role in all of this.
4. Relationships in all their varied forms provide another part of creating our foundation and how we process all the above.
5. Religious beliefs

This last one is the one the psalmist is referring to here. This foundation has many forms, from personal belief systems to immense group systems. Unfortunately, all of the above are quite flexible and can shift easily.

The psalmist declares that there is only one certain foundation that will create the environment critical for a relationship with God and the ability to do what is correct. It is righteousness as defined by the one true God. This foundation will allow a person to walk in God's presence and be a source of blessing to others in every situation.

Day 253 Ps 94:15

"Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it."

History is filled with the record of evil. Tyrants, dictators, megalomaniacs, and ordinary folk. All bent on getting one thing - all they can for themselves no matter what the cost is in lives and freedom.

History is also filled with the record of how all of them finally collapsed, either from internal issues or from the combined effort of others to oppose them. There are no 1000-year Reichs. Why?

It is because the underlying foundation for the existence of man is not based on greed and self-interest. It is based on the fact that we are the creation of God. Evil cannot last, it will self-destruct, and truth will return.

Evil also has an outside force encouraging it. A force that helps man to become more and more twisted, Satan. What is interesting is how limited he is. He has tried over and over to bring man under his control. He even tried to tempt Jesus and later thought that killing Jesus would work. He failed miserably.

Keep in mind that we are sinful, that we want to be the center of the world, and that we want to have control. That makes it easy for Satan to help twist us into tyrants, dictators, megalomaniacs, and ordinary folks bent on being disobedient.

But in the end, righteousness, that of God, will win. In the end, all will be set right, eternally.

Day 254 Ps 96:13

"They will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth."

This is a psalm of joy and praise. The focus is on the greatness of the Lord and His worthiness as an object of praise and adoration. The closing thought is that He is coming to the earth and that a key focus of His coming is to judge.

Now this fact could easily be a source of fear and concern. We are not noted for our level of righteousness and worthiness before a righteous and holy God. No, we are noted for our sinfulness and a nature that opposes God.

But for those who seek the truth and live according to it, the coming of the Lord to judge is a source of hope and cause to sing of God's greatness. It is so because those who seek the truth and live accordingly know that when the Lord comes His judgment will be fair and correct. He will see the truth of their desire to follow Him and honor Him with their lives.

They know He will keep His promises to those who are faithful in following Him and seeking His presence. They know that a righteous God is their only hope for salvation and restoration and instead of fearing His coming, they seek His coming so that they may know Him better and receive forgiveness and peace.

Day 255 Prov 11:18

"The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward."

As I read this I began thinking about Jacob and how Laban changed his wages over and over. Jacob was trying to get a better life for himself and his family but struggled. In the end, one thing remained constant, the fact that God was watching over him. God had committed Himself to fulfilling the blessing given to Abraham through Jacob.

A more modern version is the political world. Each of us is trying to find a better life. The politicians make promises, and then change the conditions or find some way to avoid fulfilling the promise. They make up storylines and we are the ones trapped and being deceived until we don't know who to trust. Even when someone is telling the truth and keeping their word, we don't trust them.

With God and the promises he gives to those who follow the path of righteousness none of this will happen. The promises do not change, the blessings to be received do not change, and most importantly God does not change.

Finally, in the world, any promise made is subject to an 'if' clause. If nothing changes, if nothing happens to prevent it, if you are there at the right time, and so on. There is no end to the 'ifs', the conditions that must be met to receive the benefits being promised. With God, there are no ifs. He is constant and his promises do not change. There is a sure reward for walking with God.

Day 256 Ps 97:1-6

“ 1 The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. 2 Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. 4 His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.”

We have a phrase, the seat of government. In the past, this concept was embodied in an object, a specific chair called the throne. It was where the person of power, the one who had control was seated. Sitting on this chair gave them the authority to rule.

A key goal of a person desiring this control was to ascend, (the seat was usually higher than the rest of the room where it was situated) and sit on this chair. It was the visible symbol of taking control. How this was accomplished also signaled to all the basis of their ascending and sitting on the throne. The basis was not always one that would benefit those being governed.

In this image, the throne is depicted as being founded on a key principle, which is defined by who is sitting on it, God. He reigns and His righteousness is the basis of His reign. He not only ascends to the throne, but He is the creator of the throne and the one who defines its function for all to see.

Day 257 Ps 98:1-2

“ 1 Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. 2 The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.”

What marvels have we seen? What has God done in our lifetime that reveals his righteousness to the nations? Israel could talk about the exodus. They could talk about the conquest of the land. They could talk about the united kingdom under David. Each generation after that could point to an event they or their parents experienced.

But what about us? What marvels have we seen?

We could talk about the life of Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross. We could talk about how we have been saved from our sins because of His resurrection. We could talk about the incredible impact of the church on history. If we stop and consider all of this, we will begin to see how the righteousness of God has been revealed on a grand scale.

What we need to begin to see is how this righteousness is revealed in our own lives day by day. This knowledge will allow us to truly sing a new song. Singing about past history, past wonders, and God’s act of salvation will not create true joy in us. It is when the singing of those events becomes real because we see the evidence of their impact on our daily lives.

Stop and consider how God has changed you and then lift up your voice and sing anew.

Day 258 Ps 98:7-9

“ 7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. 8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; 9 let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.”

As you read this passage it sounds like we are getting ready for a grand celebration. Then you come to the punch line, so to speak, and learn what everything is celebrating, a judgment event. Now if you are like me this does not cause me to dance, sing, or do anything that looks like celebrating. I cannot see anybody standing before a judge and celebrating.

This judgment could appear even more frightening because the basis of the judgment is righteousness. It is about if we have been like God and lived according to what is involved in being in His image. It means have we been and done what would reflect God. The fact that it will be done with equity, complete fairness for all, does not make me feel that much better.

Would you agree with that?

One thing that is encouraging is the focus is on what has happened in our lives because of God’s salvation. The celebration is about what God has done to save us and how we have responded to that action in our lives. The celebration is about God’s faithfulness to those who have received that salvation. That means let’s celebrate. This judgment is to finalize all the promises found in that salvation.

Day 259 Ps 103:6

"The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed."

Do you ever feel overwhelmed with the truth of your sin? Do you feel burdened down with the limits of your ability to do what is righteous and good? Do you feel like things seem hopeless and you are tired of the battle?

Take a moment and read this entire psalm. It is filled with hope. Here are a few of the phrases to lift your spirit and help you remember that God is behind the scenes working to bring you to a place of hope and life.

We are encouraged to not forget all the Lord has done for us. He has forgiven. He has healed. He has redeemed us. He satisfies us with good things and renews our strength like the eagle. That is just in the first 5 verses.

He is compassionate and abounds in love. He does not treat our sing as we deserve. He is slow to anger and compassionate. He has removed our transgression from us. Though we feel life is short His love for us has no limits. He has compassion for those who fear Him and knows our limits.

All of this God shows towards us because He is righteous and works for us in justice. We are oppressed and He cares. We are weary and He understands. We are saddened by our sins and failures, and He wants to encourage us to continue following Him so that He can fill us with His joy and strength.

We are not alone in this journey of life. God is working for us every moment. Be encouraged.

Day 260 Ps 103:17-18

“ 17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children — 18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.”

Do we truly understand the blessing of righteousness? Do we know how our life affects the lives of our children and grandchildren?

We are told here that one of the incredible blessings of God’s righteousness is its ability to impact the lives of our children as it works in our lives. How does this work?

In this passage, we see two words that are critical. The first is the word fear. This is a misunderstood word. It is not about fear that causes a person to hide and worry. It is about a fear built on respect and understanding. An understanding that allows for growth. When we fear or respect correctly those around us, we open the way to love.

The second word is obey. Again, this can be seen as obedience out of fear of reprisal or punishment. Or it can be based on respect and honor. It is easier to obey when we know the result is the development of a relationship that can open the way to love.

If we fear and obey because of a worry of punishment and loss, then our children will not desire the blessing of knowing God. But if we fear and obey because of respect and love, then we create something to be desired. And our children will desire it as well.

Think about this. When do your children truly listen, when they fear the consequences of not listening, or when they know they are loved?

Day 261 Ps 106:31

"This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come."

Do we understand the potential impact of our lives on others? Not just the members of our immediate family or even the next generations of our family, but the impact our life can have on others.

This psalm focuses on the impact of the life of a man on his family and on how his choice appeased God and saved the lives of others. Taking a stand for truth may seem hard, even difficult, and at times almost impossible. We often don't see if it will matter. That is not what is important. What is important is that we make the correct decision based on our knowledge of God and our relationship with him. He will take care of the results.

I doubt Wesley, Calvin, Edwards, Taylor, Carey, and many others considered how their life and service would impact future generations. They didn't think they would be starting a movement or launching a new era. They simply did what God called them to do and we are enjoying the blessings and fruits of their choices.

We know their names, but there are many unsung people who have chosen to walk in righteousness. Their decision has had the same result, the blessing of others generation after generation. They lived and died with one focus, to honor God. Doing so allows God to use their choice to bless people through the generations. This was the promise to Abraham, you will be a blessing to the nations.

So today choose to live in righteousness so that God can touch another generation.

Day 262 Ps 111:3

"Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever."

What about you, will you pass the test of time? What monument will there be to say a great person lived among us? What about you will be called glorious and majestic?

At some point in time, we will pause and wonder if we will be remembered - if there will be anything more than a tombstone indicating that we lived for a while on this earth. Sadly, many will not even have those remembrances. Millions have died without anything or anyone to remember them. Only a few will rise to the level of being remembered.

Pause with me and consider what about any of their lives is truly glorious or majestic. Then think about all the people that were involved in what we remember about that person. All the people that were needed for them to do whatever we remember them for. That is the problem with being famous. We too easily forget the price paid by all the others who made their fame possible. All who took note, supported, and yet remain in obscurity.

With God it is different. In fact, it is the opposite. Think about it. He acts to bring us into His glory and majesty. His deeds are not built on our support or participation, nor do they require our presence. He does not need us to make them possible. It is the reverse. He acts so that we can experience something that will last, something that will endure.

And His deeds have the focus of making us memorable to Him. If God remembers us then we don't need any other monument.

Day 263 Ps 112:3

"Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever."

If you read just this verse and not the rest of the chapter you could make a serious mistake. The mistake has to do with how you define riches. Too often we think in terms of money and possessions. Instead, take time to consider the comments of the psalmist and what he thinks are true wealth and riches.

- Vs 1 The person is able to delight in God's Commands
- Vs 3 His children will be respected
- Vs 4 Even in darkness the upright have light.
- Vs 5 Good comes to him
- Vs 6 The person is never shaken
- Vs 7 There is no fear of bad news because there is trust in God
- Vs 8 In the end he will triumph over his foes
- Vs 9 He will be honored
- Vs 10 His life will perplex the wicked whose hopes come to nothing

Of these, there is an endless supply to the one who depends on God and understands the true wealth of righteousness and walking with God.

Consider carefully today what you are filling your house and life with. This list can be shared with everyone at any time, and everyone can benefit from what each blessing represents. Or is your house just filled with stuff?

Keep in mind that the physical contents of your house have value if they allow you to generously share from the list of wealth and riches above. Consider then what is your wealth and riches and how you use what you possess to share them with others.

Day 264 Ps 118:19-20

"19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter."

There is a way to come into God's presence and it is through the gates of righteousness. But how does one get to these gates and what will permit that person to enter through them?

In this psalm, there is clearly a struggle going on. The writer talks about taking refuge in the Lord. Then three times he uses the phrase 'in the name of the Lord, I cut them off.' The imagery is to remove from my world that which would cause offence to God. To remove and discard what would prevent me from entering into God's presence.

We don't know exactly what the author was dealing with that needed such a decisive action but clearly, there were events that were challenging his faith in God, and he made this key decision to separate himself from them and place his life in God's hands.

Each of us has events, people, and desires in our lives that would prevent us from entering into God's presence. The issue is not what they are, but are we willing to excise them from our lives? Are we willing to take the steps to remove from our lives those things that would prevent us from finding and entering the gates of righteousness?

We all have these areas and each of us, if we are honest, knows what they are and what it will take to cut ourselves off from them so that we can enter into God's presence.

Day 265 Ps 119:40

"How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness."

What is the evidence that you long for God to preserve your life? What are you asking God to do so that his righteousness will revive your life so that it will be based on righteousness and not selfish personal interest?

In the verses of Ps 119, we hear the heart of a person who is seeking God and that life.

- Teach me – A choice to be open to God's instruction and submit to what is taught
- Give me – A choice to learn the right way to use what has been taught
- Make me – A choice to be willing to have God choose the direction for one's life
- Incline me – A choice to have my desires realigned to what God wants in my life
- Turn me away – A choice to have my selfishness revealed so that I can humbly follow the truth
- Restore me – A choice to have God restore my life so I can follow his ways
- Establish me – A choice to focus on God and his word, making them the priority of my life
- Turn me – A choice to turn away from what is wicked to what is good.

This is quite a list, but will clearly reveal that if we do long for God's truth in our lives and if we truly want to have our life built on and protected by God's righteousness and not just our understanding of what is good, then our life will be blessed by God's presence.

Day 266 Ps 119:142

"Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true."

Early in this section of the psalm, the writer states that the promises of God have been thoroughly tested and he loves them. At the beginning of this part, he also states that God is righteous.

Now consider the following idea. Where do you go to test your thoughts, actions, and decisions?

I want to say that I go to God's word but that is not as true as I would like it to be. More often I use other sources to test what I am doing or thinking and whether it is acceptable and worthy of investing my life in. I will use family and friends to evaluate them. I may not actually share my ideas but will think about how they would respond to my plans.

I may use my culture, my work, my past experiences, and so on. Why? Why do I abandon God so easily to use sources that are not truly tested, not truly trustworthy? I say that because they aren't. They are fallible because I am fallible. They are limited because I am limited. They fail because I fail. Why? I will let you think about that.

Then, when the fallibility, limitation, and failure that is inherent in them is revealed, it is often only then that I turn to God and consider His promises and their basis in His righteousness. If I am wise, I will learn this and realize that only in His Word can I find the understanding I need to live as God intended.

Day 267 Ps 132:9

"May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy."

Have you ever wondered why God allowed David to plan for the building of a temple? The Tabernacle had served the people for hundreds of years. So why allow this change?

As I read this psalm, I think I see one reason. The Tabernacle was a temporary structure which could be moved. The temple would be a permanent structure. The one a reminder of the wandering and in a sense impermanent state of things. A temple would make a statement of the permanence of their relationship with God. We are no longer wanderers. We have arrived and declared that this place is our home, and that God is our God.

Now I ask the question of myself. What have I done in my life that will declare who my God is? How will people know that I like David have taken a vow to create in my life the evidence that God dwells in my life and that I desire him to remain?

More than that, will God respond and confirm that my decision and action are pleasing to Him? How will I know that what I have vowed and the action I have taken will, in truth, declare that God is resident in my life, and I desire this to be a permanent change?

One key evidence is the effect it has on others. Will it allow them to serve God as well? Will it help them create a life that is righteous and be a cause to sing for joy?

Day 268 Ps 143:1

"O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief."

We all want relief from whatever struggle we are dealing with. No, more than that, we want to escape whatever is making our life difficult. It is a normal desire. This is where the psalmist begins his prayer. He cries first to be heard.

If no one hears our cry, then why cry? Take a moment to think about how that would affect you.

Truthfully, when we cry out about what is happening to us, we desire to be heard. The writer knows who is paying attention to what is happening. He also knows that in many ways he is responsible for what is happening. He cries for mercy. There will be no relief without mercy.

What is more critical is how he expects God to respond. All too often when we cry, we already have in mind what should happen for us to find relief. We have decided how others should respond and even treat God the same way. But will that really bring relief?

Instead, the writer chooses to allow God to define what will happen. Instead of using his limited knowledge and selfish interest to control what will happen, the author chooses to allow God, and who He is, to define the shape of the relief that will be received.

When we come to God asking for mercy and relief how often do we define how God must respond instead of letting God be God and acting accordingly?

Day 269 Ps 143:11

"For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble."

If you have ever flown in a plane, you will have heard the line that in the case of a crash landing do not take anything with you, leave all your carry-on luggage behind. It is a challenging line because most people place things of value or importance in their carry-on. Things they think of as vital to who they are and what they do. So, when and if the time comes there will be a critical decision to make, your life or at the risk of your life the things in the carry-on.

The author has been talking about being rescued and being preserved. In this petition, he twice uses the idea of the righteousness of God as the guiding principle of how he wants to be preserved or saved.

He knows he has baggage. He is aware that in calling on God that baggage, will have to be left behind so that what God deems important will be what remains.

When we call on God to rescue us, to help us in times of difficulty, do we have in mind that He will act according to His righteous character? Do we realize that He will sort through our lives, and we will have to choose to leave behind what we think is important so that we can be rescued? Being rescued means letting go of where you are and what you may be holding so that you can grasp the hand seeking to give you the aid you need.

Day 270 Ps 145:7

"They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness."

This is a psalm of praise. There are no pleas for help or protection from trouble. There are no confessions of sin just a psalm filled with taking time to recognize all that God has done and give praise.

But, in the middle of this psalm of praise, is the above phrase. It makes me pause and think about why I should be grateful for the righteousness of God. Pause with me and consider that it is the righteousness of God that is the basis for defining sin. It is the righteousness of God that reveals it in our lives and our total failure in being what we were created to be, a being who could have fellowship with God.

So why celebrate this quality that highlights so clearly the reality of our lives?

It is because as we understand God's righteousness we will gain a greater understanding of the depth of His love for us. We will begin to understand in a small way the grace that opens the way for God to act in mercy towards us. Everything we experience in our relationship with God is built on His righteousness.

So yes, we should be joyful about God's righteousness. For though it defines our sin it also defines how we can be restored and provides the basis for God's perfect plan to accomplish our restoration.

Join me in singing joyfully and honoring God for all He has done because He is righteous.

Day 271 Prov 8:20-21

"I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, 21 bestowing wealth on those who love me and making their treasuries full."

We are coming to the close of the section on wisdom in Proverbs. It is at this point we encounter this comment. Wisdom walks in the way of righteousness.

Wisdom, the wisdom that comes from God, can be found in a specific way of life. There are no optional paths, just one. It is the path that God walks, and it has clear requirements. It also has clear benefits.

The problem is that as soon as we see words like wealth, we make a mental shift from the path of God and walking with God to another path. That shift affects how we define what wealth is. That shift will trip us up and we will lose the path. We will begin to think of God and wisdom as the way to have physical wealth and lose sight of the great wealth being offered by God and the pursuit of true wisdom.

Consider carefully how you define wealth and what you love. The focus is on loving the path, the wisdom of God, so that we learn to love God. When we have that focus then the wealth offered is the continued blessing of God's presence, the continued blessing of knowing His mercy, the continued blessing of a life filled with unlimited access to the presence of our creator. The very thing we lost in the garden.

Day 272 Pr 10:2; 11:4

Pr 10:2 "Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death."

Pr 11:4 "Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death."

What is our attraction to wealth? I mean why do we want more money, more land, more stuff? What do we think it will do for us? Do we really believe that having more of anything will protect us from any of the dangers that are a normal part of life? Do we really believe that we can cheat the reality of death by what we possess now?

Look at your life and what you are accumulating in it. Look at the stuff you think is important and then consider what things have been the focus of your efforts to have. Now consider who you are trying to impress or influence by what you accumulate. Are you focused on creating an image to impress others?

Now consider the two verse's texts. They both look at the concept of treasure or wealth. One looks at what is gained by deception, theft, and fraud. The other considers what is gained honestly through personal effort. In both cases, the final word is worthless, of no value.

Why is it worthless? Think about this - how much would it take to impress the creator of the universe? How much would you need to do to impress the one who has unlimited time, resources, and creativity? How much would you need to accumulate to impress the one who literally owns and controls everything?

And now the fact that at death, you lose it all. Now think about why righteousness has such value.

Day 273 Pr 11:5

"The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness."

This verse is bracketed by the comments of verses 4 and 6 which tell us that righteousness delivers those who follow its guidelines and path, those who choose the right map to follow.

This makes sense, at least it should. But we are not good at map reading. You may disagree and in a sense you are right. But think about how you do your map reading. It used to be a special skill to read a map. You had to learn all the symbols and what they meant. You had to understand correctly what the compass meant and how it related to the map you were reading. I learned to read a map and took the time to teach my children to read them as well.

Now you have Google and Waze or something similar. You plug in the address, and it plots the direction, tells you the time it will take, and even shows you where traffic is slow and more. You are not really reading the map. It tells you what to do, when to do it, and how to proceed.

If you choose not to listen or follow the map, then you will not reach your destination. That is the point of this passage. We have the map - the Bible - and it is filled with the directions we need to arrive at a specific destination, a relationship with God. The key choice to make is the path of righteousness. Anything else will result in your destruction.

Day 274 Prov 11:6

"The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the unfaithful are trapped by evil desires."

For soldiers, it is very important to know how to spot booby traps. This knowledge can save your life.

There are two parts to this knowledge. The first is knowing where the booby traps are and knowing how to disarm them. War has created areas filled with landmines. Most of these places are well known but there are still stories of people wandering into them and being killed or maimed. To help prevent that there are military agencies who invest time in disarming or clearing these areas. To do so requires a knowledge of the type of mine or booby trap and then having the correct tools and resources to deal with them.

We live in a world filled with booby traps set by Satan, those who follow him, and those who just don't care about anyone but themselves. To escape being trapped by them we need the knowledge that comes from the pursuit of righteousness. Just doing that is not enough for one who is truly righteous. This person will work to remove the traps or at least reveal them so others can see and avoid the places where these traps are.

There is another reality. Satan and his followers are continually setting these traps. A righteous person will gain the knowledge that is critical to identifying them and so knowing how to save themselves and others. If you are blind, you will fall into the traps. If your eyes are open, you and those around you will be able to stay safe.

Day 275 Prov 12:28

"In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality."

Here I sit in my house. It is filled with stuff. Some of my stuff is over 140 years old. The house is over 140 years old. It seems like a lot of history. It seems like there must be value in such things.

Here I sit in my house and wonder what will happen to it all when I die? Will the next generation have any interest in what has been gathered here? Will they care how many generations have used this furniture? Will they have any interest in the letters between two people in love from 1880?

Maybe. But the real value is not in the age of these things, but the content and how they were used. Did they help others find the path to true life? Did they lead others to a relationship with God? That is where their true value is. Did the people who wrote the letters, used the furniture, and lived in the house guide people to God?

Am I using that knowledge, those objects, and that dwelling to do the same for my generation? More importantly, if I keep them will they provide the same tools for the next generation as they negotiate the paths of their life and seek to lead others?

So many questions. So many things to consider. The key is to keep one thing in focus, will any of this stuff help others find their way to the one path to eternity, God?

Day 276 Prov 14:34

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."

I have a hard time thinking on this scale. I also struggle to find a country or time when this has been true of a nation. Israel during the time of Solomon could be one but it didn't last. The restorations of the worship of God during the reigns of kings like Hezekiah and Joash would be others. But I am not a king nor a great prophet.

I am a small ruler of a small kingdom. In fact, at times I feel like I am a nation of one. So what purpose has this proverb had for me as an individual?

Actually, for a nation to be great it has to have individuals who believe this truth. Not at a national level but at a personal level. No nation will be exalted if its citizens are not righteous. It is the beliefs and way of living of the nations of one that combine to exalt the nation of all.

Similarly, if sin is the focus of a person, it will impact the nation. A dictator cannot lead without a large number of people willing to agree to follow him. In the end, history condemns that dictator and all those who followed that person.

Both of the results, exaltation and disgrace start with the individual. If enough individuals agree then a nation will be exalted or disgraced.

The question is: which do I desire and am I willing to commit my nation of one to help create the greater nation?

Day 277 Prov 15:9

"The Lord detests the way of the wicked, but he loves those who pursue righteousness."

One of the key features of love is the fact that those in love pursue the object of their love. They make changes in their schedules, their habits, and the way they live. They do all of this so they can be near the one they love. They do this also with the hope that there will be a response to their decision to love and so to pursue the object of their love.

That is what is happening here. There are two groups of people. The first involves a group of people pursuing a different path. One that leads away from God and has no interest in God. They are wicked not because they are committing incredible sin. They are wicked because they have chosen to exclude God from their life. That choice will result in sin. That was the warning given to Cain. Be careful, for your choice will produce evil.

If the pursuit of love is true and honorable there will be a response. It will result in friendship. It will result in a recognition. It will result in the love creating a bond. A bond that is mutually desired. When the object of love's pursuit is correct, then two become one. That is what God desires. To become one with the object of His love.

We know God pursues us. It is when we pursue God that the love of God is truly experienced.

Day 278 Prov 16:8

"Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice."

We do not like this kind of statement. We do not want to think about having a little, just enough, or only what we need for this moment. We like to have a storeroom where we place things for emergencies.

We buy extra food just in case. We buy extra sets of clothes to avoid wearing the same thing over and over and then we find ourselves in a job with a uniform. Same clothes over and over. We want more room in our house and then fill it with things to justify the extra space.

Then suddenly the reality comes. We can't take any of it with us. Someone else will be the beneficiary of our extras, and we will pass into eternity with as much as when we were born.

So now what is the 'little' that you really need? What can you truly take into eternity?

On the other side is all the extra and its impact. To satisfy our need for more, we use resources for so much that is unnecessary. Instead of focusing on what is needed, we produce what is not needed. That is an injustice. So many resources are being used to produce so much that is not needed. The end result means that many do not have the little they need because of the demands of those who want more than they need.

The more I want the less that will be available for others. Righteousness says to be satisfied with the little you need and help others find the same. And what we all need is God.

Day 279 Prov 16:12

"Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness."

I wish this were true. It probably is true, but the examples are so few and so far between. A wise king knows this is true. A wise king knows that wrongdoing only undermines the ability to rule. The more wrongdoing the greater the possibility of opposition and even being overthrown.

While there have been examples of wise kings and people satisfied with their rule, the problem is the next king or leader can be just the opposite. The next king can ruin all the good of the former king.

Now what does all this have to do with me? I am not a king. I have no kingdom. I am not trying to establish my right to rule.

Well, yes and no. If you are talking about a country or group of people, most of us will never be a king. But if you are talking about your life, then you are the ruler of your world. That means you will have to decide how you will rule your own life. You will decide if it will be based on righteousness or evil.

Your choice will determine how well you function in relation to all the other individual kingdoms you encounter every day. Will you depend on fear and power to control your interactions? Or will you choose to develop them through trust and honesty?

If you choose to detest what is wrong, you may never create a great kingdom, but it will be one that will be established for eternity. And what you do could have eternal results in the lives of others.

Day 280 Prov 21:21

"21 He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor."

There are a couple of things to note in this short comment. First, in many translations, the word "prosperity" can also be translated as "righteousness". If we keep in mind that the central goal of righteousness is living so that we can have a relationship with God, then it makes sense that if we pursue righteousness, we will indeed find righteousness and prosper in our relationship with God.

The idea that you will find life also follows this line of thought. Too often we are focused on finding a comfortable life in the present while on this earth. This is a limited understanding of why we were created. We were created to have a relationship with God. To that end, God has promised that those who are His will live with Him in eternity. That means if we pursue righteousness, then our focus changes. We now seek to live a life that will open the way for living in eternity with God.

The last word is honor. This word involves the idea that there is something worthy of being recognized for who we are and what we do. We honor people who have accomplished great things, done great deeds of sacrifice and heroism, and who live a life that is worthy of recognition and honor. If we seek righteousness in our lives, then we will be honored. Maybe not by the people around us or this world but more importantly by God. He will see the truth of who we are and allow us to know Him.

Day 281 Prov 25:4-5

"4 Remove the dross from the silver, and out comes material for the silversmith; 5 remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established through righteousness."

We want the blessings. We want the good life. We want to be in God's presence. We want all of this but do not want to pay the price. This passage is about what is involved in being able to gain the presence of God and we may not like what it involves.

Righteousness involves refining who we are and what we desire. It involves a clear and sometimes painful review of who we are and what we have made the center of our lives and desires.

Refining silver is a great example of what the process will entail. To refine silver, it must be heated until it melts and then heated further to force the impurities to float to the surface so they can be removed. What is happening is that the purification process reveals the impurities within so they can be removed.

In the same way, we must go through a testing process. It is in this process that the wickedness in us is revealed and can be dealt with.

The key is having the desire to have our sin revealed so that it can be removed. This is not a pleasant prospect because, how many of us want to have our sin, our wickedness revealed even if it is just to ourselves. But if we truly want God's presence, then our lives will need to be purified, which means we need to experience the refiner's fire.

Day 282 Eccl 7:15-16

“ 15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. 16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise — why destroy yourself?”

This passage has two difficult ideas. The first is the reality that the length of our lives is not affected by how righteous or how wicked we are. This is not what we want to hear. We want to believe that if we do everything correctly, we will be protected from the struggles and difficulties that come. We will not be sick, we will not suffer, we will not be attacked and the list goes on of what we expect should happen.

Oh, and let’s not forget the list of positive things. I will enjoy a wonderful life filled with everything I want or desire.

This belief leads to what is commonly called legalism. The idea is that by establishing a clear set of rules and guidelines, I can gain God’s favor and so get all that I want. This was the basis of Job’s friend's attack on Job. They believed he had failed to keep their set of rules and so deserved all that happened. This is how the Pharisees lived and Jesus condemned them. This was one of the subjects of the council of Jerusalem and it was rejected.

Legalism is the attempt to be over-righteous. It will not save you but will destroy you.

We need to keep our focus on one thing, knowing God. This will take us into eternity and beyond death’s reach.

Day 283 Isa 1:21

"See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her — but now murderers!"

Just a few verses before this God had declared that though our sins have stained our lives, He can cleanse and make us clean. "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow."

This passage tells us the sad truth about how so many, too many, treat God's offer of forgiveness. The key is found in verse 19, 'If you are willing and obedient.' God will not act unless we are willing to accept his offer to cleanse us, to restore in us the beauty that is hidden by our sin.

Sadly, we are often stuck in verse 20 and resist God's actions. No, it is worse than that - we rebel. We fight to keep our filth. We fight to remain stained. We are pigs who wallow in the mud, and once washed, immediately return to wallow in the filth of our sin once again.

God created us to be beings who could understand and know Him. Beings who could be righteous. Beings with whom and in whom He could dwell and have fellowship. Instead, we have become unfaithful to our created purpose. We are murderers of all that is good.

But return to verse 18. God calls us to sit down and think about all of this. He invites us into His presence. He declares that to all who are willing, He will cleanse and restore the beauty we have lost.

Day 284 Isa 1:26

"I will restore your judges as in the days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward, you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City."

We have just seen God's offer to purify us. We then saw the truth that we do not respond to this offer from God. And now we see that God is ready to go one step further. He is ready to do the work of restoring our world so that we can be called persons of righteousness.

While the focus of this passage is on the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, it points to a future plan of God. It points to the life and work of the Messiah. It also indicates clearly that we are in desperate need of this help.

In the prior verse, God says He will purge away our dross, the useless things in our lives that prevent us from being what God created us to be. He will work to remove the impurities so that we will be clean and it will be possible to restore us.

The Messiah's work was just this - to provide the means to purify our lives. He came to deal with our sins and redeem us. In the very next verse, we see this revealed. His act of sacrifice satisfies the need for justice. All that remains is for us to be penitent. To humbly admit our rebelliousness and allow the refining work of the Messiah to purify us and restore us. That is the key. Will we let God do the work we are unable to do?

Day 285 Isa 5:7

"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

Do we understand the importance of the presence of those who are righteous?

Here and in other places God refers to his people as his vineyard. The key purpose of a vineyard is to provide a fruit and its juice. Products that are very beneficial to life. But when the vineyard fails to produce properly, then there is no joy. There is no hope of health and refreshment.

Now if the vineyard is God's people what are we to produce?

The passage says that if we are living correctly, being a fruitful vineyard, then there will be justice for us and those we touch. There will be righteousness which will be a source of joy and peace to the people we touch.

Without a healthy vineyard, we and those we touch will be in conflict. We will damage each other and further damage our ability to produce what God delights in. Without a healthy vineyard, instead of joy and peace, there will be distress in our lives and the lives of those we touch.

Without righteousness, we cannot delight in God, and He cannot delight in us. Without righteousness, we cannot be a source of hope and peace to the world around us. We desperately need both, the delight of God and a life that generates joy.

With that in mind, what does God see in you today and how is that affecting those you touch?

Day 286 Isa 5:16

"But the Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness."

Pause with me and consider the attributes of the gods. Pick any set of gods, Roman, Greek, Inca, Egyptian, or spirits. They all have one thing in common, you can't trust them. Their promises have no value because they can choose to ignore them. Their behavior is unpredictable much like ours. They are just as sinful as we are. Think about that for a moment.

But all too often it is these gods that we turn to for help, blessing, and to fulfill our desires. It makes sense since they are like us, then they would want us to do that and help them get what they want as well.

Now consider God, the God. He is absolutely trustworthy. His promises have eternal value, and He refuses to ignore them, even when the object of His creation will suffer. His behavior is completely predictable. We don't have to guess at how he may respond to us. At the same time, He defines what it is that we really need, that which will give us true life and carry us into eternity with Him.

Why is this so? It is because he is righteous. That quality allows us to know who God is and what he will do in any setting. It also provides a stable consistent guide for us as we walk in this world.

Here is the key question. Do your actions reveal who you follow, the gods of this world, or THE GOD?

Day 287 Isa 9:7

"Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no *end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."*

The kingdoms of the world have come and gone. Some briefly. The kingdom of Babylon lasted for about 2 generations. The 1000-year Reich of Hitler was less than 20 years old. A few have lasted centuries like the Roman Empire, the Egyptians, and a few others. We could go on, but all of these were based on conquest and, once opposed, they eventually fell.

There is only one kingdom that has outlasted all of them and that is the kingdom of God. If you start with Christ as its founder, it has now lasted over 2000 years and it continues to spread. The key difference is that it conquers not by war but through justice and righteousness anchored in the love of God which political boundaries cannot limit or stop.

There have been many attempts through the centuries to destroy this kingdom. Some have been incredibly severe, like the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire and by communist countries in the past. What is interesting is these attacks have only strengthened it.

Those who are part of the kingdom know why. It is governed by a righteous king who willingly sacrificed all to save anyone desiring to be part of this kingdom. Those who are citizens willingly do the same. A kingdom based on the love of God and sacrifice cannot be defeated.

Day 288 Isa 11:3-4

"He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes, or decide by what He hears with His ears; 4 but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions for the poor of the earth."

How often do we jump to conclusions based on what we see or what we hear? How often do we fail to investigate and look deeper into both what we see and what we hear?

The ability to dig deeper is critical to our ability to both understand and practice righteousness. The reason is that nothing is ever just what is visible. There is always more to be learned and explored. The words do not tell the whole story. They never do. There is always more to be learned and understood.

The word of God encourages us to meditate. It encourages us to reflect. It encourages us to ponder and explore. There is always more to know and learn if we want to have clarity in making decisions and judging what is happening.

This passage concerns the coming Messiah and how He will live and judge the people. It is good to know that He will look deeper into what is visible to seek what the visible means. He will search out the words and learn what they mean and what their source is. He will learn the truth behind both what is seen and what is heard.

If you read the rest of the psalm, you see that the goal is to bring peace and rest. This should be how we live and how our life affects others. Peace. Rest.

Day 289 Isa 16:5

" In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness, a man will sit on it — one from the house of David — one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness."

I wonder how many times a king has sought to establish his throne and rule solely based on love and goodwill. How many times has the focus of the kingdom has been solely on the cause of justice?

To be honest, I doubt that such a kingdom has ever existed. Or, if there was such a focus, it was not maintained solely based on goodwill and love for all. Why do I say that? Because there are always those who oppose such a rule. This is the reality of life. Not everyone in such a kingdom wants this to work. The reason is simple. They will not be able to get what they want or have the power they desire.

Even the kingdom of heaven deals with this reality. We are not fully committed to such a kingdom and so we divide it, create factions, and set up minor kingdoms within it. It is sad but it is true.

The good news is that slowly over time God is working to bring this kingdom to complete reality. He promises that one day it will happen. We are told in 2 Tim 4:8 to long for this day and the appearance of the Lord.

In the meantime, we can rest and work in the knowledge that day by day God is bringing this kingdom into being.

Day 290 Isa 26:9-10

“ 9 My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. 10 Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the Lord.”

When life is confused and disorganized, you learn more about yourself and what you truly desire. That is when you learn what is truly important.

It is also when you learn whether the grace of God is at work in your life.

This is a hard truth but so important. When grace is truly working in our lives, then we will seek God and his righteousness. When grace is truly working in our lives, the one thing we desire above all else is God. When grace is working in our lives, we will see the majesty of God in everything around us and in everything happening, both in our lives and in the world.

When grace is not working and is being rejected, then we hide our sins. We do not want to submit to God. We cannot see the beauty and presence of God in even the good that happens.

The question to consider is what do you yearn for in the night? What is the focus of your thoughts, prayers, and hopes in the night? In the time of darkness, what do you focus on and use to guide you?

Day 291 Isa 28:16-17

“ 16 See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. 17 I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line;”

Isaiah has been judging the false leaders of his day. People that establish rules and regulations as a means of establishing what is good and acceptable behavior for the people. He describes them as drunkards unable to understand and so unable to teach even those just weaned from their mothers.

All they know is rules and externals. Sadly, this is true of all mankind. We use ourselves as the plumbline to decide what is correct and what is true. The description of being drunk is appropriate since a drunk is unstable and cannot keep things in focus. We make up rules in the moment, then forget what we did, and contradict ourselves.

God has responded to this. He set up His commandments and guidelines. He showed us how to live correctly and honor Him. But, as Paul explains in Romans, the law of God did not save us. Instead, it further highlighted our failure to live correctly because we begin to interpret this law according to our standards and desires.

Then God sent His Son. In Jesus, we were shown what righteousness really means and how to live according to God’s plan. Now there is no confusion. We have a true guide to help us see our sins and to see what we need to do to live in righteousness as God intended.

Day 292 Isa 32:1

" See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice."

This is the introduction to a short passage on what will happen when one rules in righteousness. What follows is a list of key results:

1. Each person becomes a shelter for others in difficult times.
2. Each person becomes a place of refuge where others can find safety from the attacks of this world.
3. Each person will be a source of refreshment and life to sustain others.
4. The eyes of the people will be opened and they will see.
5. The ears of the people will be opened and they will hear
6. The minds of the people will be opened and they will be able to understand
7. The speech of the people will become clear and understandable.

We know the truth of this because we live in the kingdom of God with Jesus as the righteous King.

As citizens of this kingdom, we have the resources and strength to be a place of shelter and refuge. As citizens, we have what people need to be refreshed and to have their lives restored. We are called to be light to the blind. We are called to speak the truth in love so all can hear. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the one who will open the minds of others and give us the words we need to clearly proclaim the truth.

So how are you doing today? Is your life making any or all of this possible?

Day 293 Isa 32:16-17

“ 16 Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. 17 The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.”

This chapter starts with describing life under a righteous leader and then presents the reality.

The human soul without God is a barren waste. The human soul without God is a place of desolation and destruction. The human soul without God is a fountain of lies and selfishness. The human soul without God produces death.

Isaiah calls the people to repent and mourn. He warns that nothing will change until the Spirit comes. That event will make it possible for the barren soul, the soul that is the source of destruction and deceit, to be changed. It will be changed and instead of barren it will be fertile. Instead of a source of desolation, it will be a source of peace. Instead of destruction, a place of life and security.

The change is evident for all to see. Without God, the human soul is the breeding ground of death and emptiness. But when the Spirit of God enters, that is all changed. The human soul finds peace and becomes the source of life and restoration.

We are called to examine our lives. We are called to mourn for the past and seek and search for life.

If we will do this, then we will have peace with God and we will be able to produce this fruit for others to enjoy.

Day 294 Isa 33:5

"The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness."

If a place, a group, or a person is filled with righteousness what does that mean? The psalmist gives us three things he believes will be in abundance when the Lord comes and righteousness is established and fills a place, a group, or a person.

The first is salvation. All those who are willing to confess their sinful state and seek forgiveness will receive salvation. The phrase used to describe this is a rich store of salvation. Have you ever thought about the nature of your salvation and whether it is rich and full or simply adequate? We are told that this salvation is rich and of great value.

The second is wisdom. This is the ability to know what to do with what has been given. To know how to make use of the blessing of righteousness. It is about knowing how to live, how to choose wisely what we do, and to know how to live in agreement with what has been given.

The third is knowledge. This is the information needed to continue to live and grow. It is about understanding what knowledge to pursue. It is about knowing where to go to continue to receive all that has been promised.

We are further told that this righteousness will provide a firm foundation for where we live and that the key to unlocking all of this treasure is the fear of the Lord.

Day 295 Isa 41:2

“"Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service?...”

I have a serious question to consider. Why does God use the wicked, the unbeliever, to carry out his plans? Why let the wicked have any part in what God is doing?

This passage is from a prophecy given to Isaiah about how God is about to use Cyrus, the king of the Persians, to carry out His plans. God is going to use an unbeliever to do His work, to be part of the plan to establish righteousness. How does that make you feel?

What does it mean when we say God is in control of all that is happening? How is it possible for the lives of the wicked to be used to produce the goals of God? When the wicked are involved do we still believe God is in control?

So many questions.

The truth is that God does allow for, take into account, and use everything and everyone to carry out His purposes. That truth is evident over and over in scripture. God guides the flow of history toward His stated purpose of providing for our salvation.

So how will you deal with the reality? When the world is under attack and people are suffering do you still believe that God is in control and all that is happening will produce what God desires?

We are told that Jesus came at the right time. It was during the oppressive rule of the Romans. Years later, Rome would be transformed by the power of God’s love. God sees the whole picture and the end result. Do we?

Day 296 Isa 42:6-7

“ 6 I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

This text is from a passage describing the Messiah’s coming. It is filled with promise and hope.

It is needed. So often, as we read the texts on righteousness, it is easy to become overwhelmed by a sense of futility. We are not righteous. We are sinners. Our best efforts are like filthy rags. No one is good - not even one. And on the declarations go about the state of man.

Yet over and over we are called to be righteous. To live a life of righteousness and to follow the direction given to us by God. The goal and reality can leave a person in despair. But God understands this and has a plan to bridge the gap between what is and what can be. He is sending One who will take my hand and be my light, who will free me from the prison of my sin and lead me out of the darkness of despair into the light of His presence.

Now read the rest of the passage and rejoice that God has seen your desire to walk with Him and has provided the help you need. He has come so you can live in righteousness before God.

Day 297 Isa 42:21

"It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious."

As I read this, I begin to wonder how often I have thought of the law of God as great and glorious. Have I ever thought of the law in this manner?

The normal response has been one of frustration. Thinking about God's law more often causes fear and distress. Fear that I will never be able to fulfill this law. Distress because it weighs me down with its requirements and expectations.

I quickly forget that the law has another side to it. A focus that is not on me and who I am and what I do but on who God is. God is righteous. He is the perfect almighty creator of the universe and He is my creator.

His law must reveal this. He must reveal His righteousness for all to see. It must reveal the perfect nature of all He has created. A special focus of that creation is me. His law is to reveal Himself in all His glory to me. For the law to be any less than great and glorious would be to diminish God and make Him like me in my sin, imperfect.

Creating the law was not a burden for God. It was not a problem to be solved. It was another opportunity to reveal Himself in all His glory. The heavens declare the glory of the Lord for all to see. The law declares His perfect righteousness for all to know. Even as creating the universe pleased God, creating the law pleased Him because again He could reveal Himself to us.

Day 298 Isa 45:8

“"You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the Lord, have created it.”

Do we truly understand what God has created and what His plan is for his creation? Do we truly understand how God works and what He does to carry out His plan? Do we know how we fit into God’s plan?

We don’t, and we need to be reminded of these things. God is the creator. Creation has a clear purpose, to reveal God to all mankind. God’s ways are beyond our understanding and the truth is we have no right to question why He does what He does. And most important God knows exactly where we fit in His plan.

God is working so that we will know and see His righteousness. God is working so that we will be blessed by His righteousness. God is working so that we will see what He is doing in our lives. We are clay in the potter’s hands and if we are patient, we will see what God intends to create in our life.

That is the key word, patient. When rain falls the immediate result is the dry ground receives moisture. But the real blessing only comes later as the seeds and plants, that needed the water, respond. In time, if we are patient, we will see them.

In time, if we are patient, we will see the wonder of what God has created for us to enjoy.

Day 299 Isa 46:12-13

" 12 Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness. 13 I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel."

In this chapter, Isaiah has reminded the people of the difference between God and the gods they have created. It is a reminder of the key issue and why we do not know God. We want to create our own system of righteousness. A system that excuses our behavior. A system that is under our control.

The problem is that the gods we created are dependent on us. They cannot act without our help. They cannot answer us except as we give them words. In the end, they cannot save us because to do so requires our help which means we must save ourselves. To be honest, a drowning person cannot save themselves, and that is what will happen if we create our own gods.

We are stubborn and, as a result, far from what is righteous. This also means we are far from any help.

Thankfully God has not abandoned us, though we have abandoned Him. He has a plan and in spite of our stubborn heartedness, He will carry it out and provide the salvation He has promised. Yet we choose to follow gods that require our help to act, require our voice to speak, and require us to save ourselves.

What is it that you stubbornly hold on to that will keep you from seeing what God has prepared for you? Be thankful. God will not abandon you to yourself.

Day 300 Isa 48:1

"Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel — but not in truth or righteousness —"

We use a number of declarations to establish who we are and that we are trustworthy. We say we are Christians; we say we are evangelicals; we say we are members of a church, etc. This is not about the answer we may give to a specific question, but an attempt to create confidence in what we are saying or doing.

It is much like swearing an oath in the name of God or Jesus. The problem is that merely using their names or any of the other phrases associated with them, does not guarantee that you are a reliable and trustworthy person. Saying you are a Christian does not make you a Christian. Saying you are an evangelical does not really tell a person who you are and how you will behave and so on.

Being identified by such titles only has value if you are truthful and you are righteous. Those realities cannot be established by your words, but only by your actions and the outward evidence that you have a relationship with God. If that is true, then you do not need to make any further comment.

Consider this.: If we truly lived as Christians and members of God's family, should it not be evident in the way we live our lives? Our lives become our word of truth.

Day 301 Isa 48:18

"If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea."

This passage follows a statement of God challenging people to consider the fact that every time He speaks what He declares comes to pass. He does not hide the truth but declares it for all to hear. The reason He does this is that we will be taught what is best for us and to know the right way to go.

The problem is that we do not pay attention. Even as Israel did not heed God's word and were sent into captivity, we constantly choose not to heed God's teachings. This is amazing to think about, considering God's perfect record. When He speaks, His words are always true. When He speaks we are guaranteed that He will carry out what He has said.

In so many ways we are no different than the Israelites hearing this message. We choose to not listen and so are in captivity to our disobedience. We choose not to listen, and even worse, we allow others to join us in this captivity. We choose not to listen and so prevent others from finding peace in God through Christ, the redeemer.

If we would only listen, then we would have a level of peace that would flow in and through us and benefit all those around us. If we would only listen then justice and righteousness would be as relentless as waves in their ability to alter what they touch.

If only we would listen and obey.

Day 302 Isa 51:1

"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn;"

The prophet is trying to remind people of where they came from. He wants them to remember the faith and obedience of Abraham. They are to remember how God called him and Sarah and blessed them. A blessing that made possible the existence of the people who were hearing the words spoken to them

Most of us are not the physical descendants of Abraham. We are not Jews and so cannot respond to this message from that perspective.

So how does this passage apply to us? What is the stone we have been hewn from?

First, we need to remember that Abraham was not only the father of the line of Israel, but he is also called the father of all those who believe, all those who put their faith in God. Then we need to remember that God has chosen to graft us into His family and make us heirs in His kingdom.

This means that, though we are not physical descendants, we are spiritual descendants. This means that we too must take time to consider the source of who we are. In both cases the source is God. He called Abraham. He chose to act through Jesus so that all who believe could be part of the greater kingdom/family of God.

If we choose to pursue righteousness, then we have all the resources we need. We have the key pattern that we need. Finally, we have proof that God will bless those who follow this path.

Day 303 Isa 51:5

"My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations."

The people of Israel have been told over and over that judgment is coming. They did not choose to believe the warnings. Though for a while, under Josiah, there was a revival, but it did not last and finally God judged the nation. The whole process covered about four generations.

Now Isaiah is announcing the coming of the future salvation. Again, there is urgency in the message. Seventy years after the exile some would return, but it would not be to the level of the original glory of the nation.

Over 400 years would pass, and the true fulfillment of the message would arrive, Jesus. Daniel would hear the overall process that God would use to bring everything together. God would raise up and remove several empires until the times were right and God's message would be proclaimed at the right time.

We get caught up in wanting things to happen speedily based on our limited time and lifespan. God is working on an eternal timeline and the life span of all humanity. So, what seems slow to us is in fact speeding along.

Do we realize that God uses each of us at the right time to open the way for his salvation to come? Do we understand the consequences and blessings of His righteousness and how it will affect us and all of humanity? When God finally comes, whether sooner or in a time we cannot conceive of, it will arrive. For some, it will seem sudden. They were not prepared or paying attention. For others, it will be the long-expected fulfillment of all God's promises.

Day 304 Isa 51:6

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants will die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail."

Many are saying we live in dark times. But if you honestly look at history, there has never been a time that has not had a dark side. It may look good in one part of the world but something dark and terrible is occurring somewhere else.

We have had world wars, worldwide diseases, and catastrophes throughout history. It seems like we are always on the verge of destruction and that nothing in this world is permanent, and we would be right in thinking so. We are even told clearly by God here, and in other places, that a time will come when the heavens and the earth, the universe as we know it will vanish along with all its inhabitants.

That sounds dark and gloomy. It should, and we should take heed of the warning and the hope. The warning is that the world will not last. The hope is that the two most important things, the salvation God provides, and His righteousness will survive all of this.

The question to us, then, is where will we invest our energy and resources? Will we clearly see the truth that is always evident, nothing of this material world will last? Will we see the truth and invest our lives in being righteous and following God? Will we seek His salvation which is eternal like God?

Day 305 Isa 51:8

“For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations."

Does this passage sound familiar? It should. It is reflected in Jesus’ comments about where we should store our treasure when He talks about seeking treasure that will not be destroyed by moths or rust or be stolen.

In verse 6, we were told that in the end, all we think of as important and permanent will disappear. Now we are being told that, even before that final time of judgment and renewal, we need to be thinking clearly about the value of what we have and focus on in the meantime.

All that we think is of value in this time and place is susceptible to destruction and ruin at any moment. We cannot depend on what we possess or hope to possess. It can fail and come apart without warning. That is the impact of moths and worms on clothing. They eat away at the material and leave behind a fragile shell. When you finally decide to use it, it simply collapses into so much dust and waste.

If we choose to depend on this world and its structures, eventually the same thing will happen, it will all fall apart. Instead, we should be focused on God’s law and the structure it creates for us. It is based on the righteousness of God and His plan for salvation. They are both eternal in nature and indestructible. We can build a life of hope and faith in them if we are willing to heed the warnings.

Day 306 Isa 54:14

"In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you."

This Psalm takes time to review God's acts of judgment of the past and future. Isaiah refers to the judgment in the time of Noah. Then he talks about how the current times are like those of Noah, times of judgment. God's response is to say even as He promised not to judge the world with floods again. He makes a promise that when these times are past He will make a similar promise.

The focus will be on salvation and not judgment. The basis for future actions will be God's unfailing love and the covenant of peace that He has made. He will have compassion. God will now work to teach them and as they learn they will know peace.

The basis for this teaching will be the righteousness of God. This will be used to establish them and protect them from any terror that may come.

Sadly, Israel did not listen, but God did not abandon this promise. We see its fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus, who lived a righteous life and offered a peace the world could not offer. He offered salvation. A salvation that was based on God's love.

There is a final word in here. It is that there will still be a struggle, but God will not be the source. Instead, God will provide protection and, more importantly, vindication to those who accept the teaching offered and live accordingly. (take a moment to read Ps 55 for encouragement)

Day 307 Isa 56:1

This is what the Lord says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed."

Do I believe that God's salvation is close at hand? Do I expect him to reveal His righteousness at any moment?

When these words were written Jesus' arrival was still almost 500 years in the future. But the blessing and hope were already available to those who believed, in faith, that God would provide the answer to sin and the separation it caused.

The message is still the same. We need to faithfully proclaim it as did Isaiah. Why?

Consider this. Isaiah had a deep and profound relationship with God. He received many prophecies concerning the coming Savior. He chose to believe that God would provide salvation to all who would seek God and live accordingly. He chose to proclaim the message so that others could also believe it. He did not know who would respond and when. He did not know the fruit his words would bear in his present or in the future. He did not know the details of the life of the one to come.

He chose to live according to the law he knew, maintain a life of justice, and do what was right.

What will we choose today? Will we choose to maintain justice and do what is right? Will we do this because we know the fulfillment of God's plan in Jesus? Will we tell people what has been revealed?

Day 308 Isa 57:12

"I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you."

Legalism, pharisaism, cultism, and similar concepts and ideologies represent the attempts of man to create his own system of righteousness. This passage in Isaiah deals with the hypocrisy they represent. We create a standard to display to the world while behind the scenes in hidden places, we practice idolatry. We serve ourselves.

The questions asked are crucial and they focus on why. Why have you abandoned me? Why are you following false gods and false paths? Is it because you have lost hope? Is it because you think I have been silent? Is it because you are not doing the important work of examining your falseness in the light of who I am?

The true answer is that we choose not to seek God. We choose to establish our own standards, standards that will allow us to do as we please and yet convince the world that in some way we are righteous.

This will not last, and this is the warning that is given. God will expose the reality of the falseness of righteousness based on our preferences and our standards. In the end, they will bring no benefit only judgment. All you have done, all you have built, will be blown away. Because it is so useless and unstable it will only take a small thing to accomplish this. The prophet says a mere breath will carry it off.

Then we will know those who truly seek God. They will remain. They will receive healing, comfort, and guidance. So be sure that your standard is based on God's righteousness and not on man's thinking.

Day 309 Isa 58:8

"Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard."

The subject of this passage is the proper way to fast. Apparently, the people are fasting in an attempt to influence God. They think that this outward action is enough and that God should respond to their petitions. They wonder why God has not seen their action and how they have humbled themselves.

God responds by declaring that He sees clearly what they are doing. He sees that it is only a show. He sees that in their hearts they have not changed. He calls them to a different type of fasting, fasting from injustice and selfishness. He calls them to look around them and take a fast from caring for themselves first and consider the needs of the poor.

If they can do this - If they can see their hypocrisy and change, then He will listen to them. Then He will respond to them. Then they will see and learn righteousness. Then the Lord will provide and protect.

So now the big question. Why do you fast? Do you fast to impress God and get his attention? If so, that is not good enough. Do you fast so that God can work in your life and change you so that He can use you for His purposes? Then that is true fasting. How often do we use fasting, giving, and other actions to try to influence God instead of allowing God to influence us?

Day 310 Isa 59:9

"So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows."

Do we really understand the impact of our self-centeredness, of our selfish self-interest, of our preference to sin?

It would appear we don't. If we did, we would not ask why justice is so far off or why people are so cruel in their treatment of each other. If we did, we would not need to ask why the world is so dark and why there is no light to guide us. If we did, we would not ask why there is no peace in the world or why people are so quick to destroy one another.

Instead, we tend to blame God. We blame Him because we expect Him to fix everything and make it right. We blame Him because He claims to be a loving God and should not allow such injustice and evil to exist.

But how can He fix anything if we are constantly determined to break everything? How can He demonstrate His love when our every thought is of evil? How can He bring about justice and demonstrate His righteousness when we refuse to follow the path He reveals to us?

We want to blame God. We can't and it is because the real problem is the lack of love and desire for righteousness in our own hearts. If we want God to do any of this, then we need to let God change our hearts and open our eyes to the truth of who we really are.

Day 311 Isa 59:14

"So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter."

Isaiah continues his comments on what has happened to righteousness and justice. Why they cannot be found. Why they are at a distance, and we will not like the answer.

We often believe that the problem lies with the wicked. Their actions, their desires, and their focus is on the destruction of all that is righteous. To some extent that is true. They do have an incredible impact on the presence of all that is righteous and whether truth can be found.

But behind all of that, there is a greater problem. It is our sin. This is what makes it easy for the wicked to drive out the truth, prevent justice from arising, and obscure the meaning and purpose of righteousness.

We don't like to hear such an appraisal of the situation. It is always easier to blame someone else, and the easiest target for this is the ones who are obviously wicked. But, as has been pointed out by many, when you point your finger at someone else keep in mind that there are at least three fingers pointing back at you.

If we really want justice, righteousness, and truth to prevail, then we will need to take a long and serious look at our own lives first. We need to consider if there is anything in ourselves that would displease the Lord and hinder his desire to restore truth, provide justice, and see righteousness flourish in our lives and then impact others.

Day 312 Isa 59:15-17

“ 15 The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. 16 He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. 17 He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.”

This is a frightening image. God putting on armor and readying Himself for a battle. A battle that has us as the object of His fury and anger.

Now consider the constant complaint of so many about why God allows such suffering and destruction in the world. Why God does not act and deal with the evil in this world? We think we know how He should respond, and we do so from a position of smugness and egotism. As if we would somehow be excluded from what God would do if He responded to our cries and complaints.

The truth is that if God were to respond, we would not survive. We would have events like the flood that destroyed all mankind save the few who are truly righteous. Is this what we really want?

We need to realize that if God was not merciful, and there was no grace, the result of His response would be as devastating as the flood. The world would not survive His righteous vengeance. It would not survive His zeal in carrying out justice.

Now consider this, are you as righteous as Noah?

Day 313 Isa 60:17

"Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones. I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler."

This passage describes God's hopes and plans for those who follow Him. The clear focus is on the people of Israel. But it can easily be applied to the people of God then and now.

The promise is that a time will come when there will be peace. A time when there will be no violence. A time when God is the center of life. A time when there will be no shortage of what is needed to live.

Central to all of this is this passage. When peace is what governs our lives and when righteousness provides the guide for us to live then we will have all we need.

What we need is broken down into two areas. The first is the material goods that are needed to live and peace with the nations so that these material goods can be enjoyed. The second is the presence of the Lord. He will be their light by day and night. He will bring an end to sorrow. He will make it possible for the people to be righteous.

But in both of these, the material goods and peace, and the ability for God to be present among them, the key is in living according to God's righteousness. If this happens, then there will be peace.

Day 314 Isa 61:3

" ...and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."

This is the last part of a very well-known passage. Jesus quotes the first part as He begins His ministry. He will preach good news to the poor and so on. In the first part, He uses the words poor, brokenhearted, captives, and prisoners to describe those who will hear His message. His message will comfort those who mourn and provide all that is mentioned in the passage above.

What is notable is that the people who have been poor, broken, captive, and prisoners are now described as the oaks of righteousness. They have gone from weak and frail to powerful and useful. They have gone from hidden and forgotten to those who display the splendor of the Lord.

They will be filled with gladness. They will be a source of praise. They will be crowned with beauty. All the pain and sadness will be removed because of the good news that has come.

One final thing to note is that this is all made possible because God has chosen to act. He has chosen to take the sinful broken people of the world and display His righteousness through them. He has done this for us and when we preach the good news, we make it possible for others to experience this blessing as well.

Day 315 Isa 61:10

"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

Isaiah reflects on the words of the one who will proclaim the year of the Lord announcing God's plan of restoration. This news brings to him joy and an awareness of what this means for those who will receive this blessing.

God will make it evident for all to see what He is doing in their lives. It will be apparent that they have received this blessing. The impact of God's salvation will be visible in their lives. He uses the terms garments, robe, and jewels, things that we put on that everyone can see.

But not just any clothing. Not work clothes or common everyday clothing. These clothes are the type of clothes that are worn for special events. They declare for all to know that the people clothed in this way are celebrating a special event. They wear these clothes to declare to all what is happening in their lives.

It is like that of a wedding. The bridegroom and the bride array themselves in unique garments, and jewelry so that all know what is happening in their lives.

God desires to do the same for us. He wants to array us with garments that will declare to all His righteousness and our relationship to Him. The question is are we letting God cloth us, and can the people see the garments we have received?

Day 316 Isa 61:11

"For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations."

If you know anything about farming, you will know how much work goes into preparing the soil for planting. There are several steps in the process, and they all involve breaking the ground. First opening it, then step by step breaking it down until it is possible to plant the seeds.

Isaiah has given us quite a picture of what God has been doing to prepare the world to receive the Messiah and what that person will do. We also get a picture of the results that the Lord expects from this process.

Now we see the process. We are the soil that God is preparing. The goal is to plant the seeds of righteousness and praise in our lives so that they will grow and be visible to all the nations. This fits well with Jesus' command to go to all the nations and proclaim the good news. Its fulfillment is seen in Revelations where we have the description of a great gathering of people from every tribe and nation sharing together in praising the Lord for all He has done in their lives.

So, as you review your life is there evidence that God is preparing you so you can be the soil where righteousness and praise can grow? Are you in a place where God has sent you, a place where people can see these seeds grow and praise God as well?

Day 317 Isa 62:1-2

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. 2 The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow."

In the previous passage, we considered a more passive action, that of letting God work in us to plant righteousness and praise. Now the tone is definitely more strident. The person in this passage is more active and more involved. He is not just allowing God to work but actively participating in what God is doing.

There is a clear goal in mind, not just developing righteousness in one's life, but doing so in a way that makes it clearly visible to others. So evident that it results in a new name being given.

Now jump forward to the New Testament and we see what this means. Jesus came and declared God's salvation. He declared how to be restored and become righteous. As those who heard the message and responded, and then lived and proclaimed this message, they were given a new name. They were called Christians because they were followers of Jesus.

Step by step through the years, this new name has been proclaimed and people of every nation are being shown the righteousness of God in and through their lives. They do not remain silent and seek to reach all nations with the message of God's salvation.

Wherever we are, we are to make evident God's righteousness and His glory.

Day 318 Isa 63:1

“Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save."”

Do we truly understand the cost involved in defying righteousness? Do we understand the consequences of such rebellion?

The image here is frightening. As you read the rest of the chapter it is a description of violence and vengeance. It is an image of wrath and a judgment that is severe in nature. It is frightening. And if that were the end of the story, then we would be left with no hope of surviving such a righteous act as God carrying out His judgment on all of us.

But it does not end there. Instead, the author shifts the focus to the kindness of God. He looks, not at the judgment that is coming, but at the good things God has done, the compassion He has shown. He reminds the reader that God has shown love and mercy to them.

It is good to know that for those God calls his own there is another path that results in God’s protection and salvation. But only if we do not harden our hearts and fail to revere God. For those who respond, there is tenderness and compassion waiting to be given. For those who listen guidance is available to stay on the correct path.

But for those who refuse. The passage makes it clear that God will judge them.

We need to do the work of the prophet and call people to choose wisely. But they will only hear us if we have chosen wisely.

Day 319 Jer 9:24

“ …but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.“

So, what do you boast about? What do you talk about when you want people to know who you are? Is it your family, your work, your hobbies, or something else? But how important are those things in the scope of eternity?

Okay, that is a good point.

So, if we are thinking about eternity what do you boast about? Do you talk about the church you attend? Do you talk about how you participate in the ministry of the church? Do you make a point of letting people know you are a Christian? But how important are those things in truly defining your relationship with God?

That is the point of the passage. The moment we focus on ourselves and our activities, our stuff, then we say nothing that has any eternal value. They only have value if they are built on the three things listed above and how they help us focus on God who gives value to everything else.

Kindness – the ability to see and respond to the needs of others. God’s sacrifice of His own son.

Justice – the ability to see sin and correct what is wrong. God’s desire to restore us.

Righteousness – the ability to do what is right and lead others to God. God’s desire to make us part of His family.

Again, what are you boasting about today?

Day 320 Jer 23:6

"In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."

In the midst of the promise of God to gather the people of Israel back to their pasture (which has two possible interpretations – the usual one being the promised land and another one, The Lord) we have this declaration. It is the conclusion of the prophecy declaring that God will raise up from David's line a righteous branch.

If it is the promised land, then the title being given here does not seem to fit. What would make more sense is something like the Lord Our Conqueror or the Lord Our Deliverer. But it is not, it is the Lord Our Righteousness. While the land and returning to the land has its place, there is a greater picture, a greater kingdom being envisioned.

There is a greater kingdom being planned and prepared. The Israelites did not see this, and when Jesus came, they did not understand, and the rest is history.

What about us? Do we focus on our territory? What does that look like? My church, my denomination, my understanding of key theological points? My form of worship?

Instead of focusing on Who is coming and the focus He will bring to the kingdom, we are distracted and can easily fail to understand what it means to be led by One who is righteous. In the end, we sacrifice all He is and represents on the altar of our desires and plans.

Take time and think about what you call the King of Kings in your heart and not just with your lips.

Day 321 Jer 33:16

"In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.'

This promise is so important that Jeremiah repeats it. The first time was in Je 23:6. But what is more significant is what follows in vs 19-21.

This promise of the coming Messiah is absolute. Nothing will change God's intended plan. The prophet reports the following comment of God about what it would take for God to fail to fulfill this promise.

It states that the entire structure of the universe would have to be overthrown. It states that the cycle of day and night would have to come to an end. That is not possible unless you bring to an end all that we know. Short of the sun going supernova or a massive comet smashing into the Earth, that will not happen. If either of those happens, then the Earth no longer exists.

If the Earth no longer exists, then the promise no longer has purpose or meaning. Do you understand what this is saying? Nothing short of the cataclysmic ending of our entire existence will prevent God from fulfilling the promise of sending a Messiah to save us and restore our relationship with Him.

Such a day is coming. Judgment is promised, but not until the Lord - our righteousness - comes and provides for the restoration of what God intended.

Sit down and think about the power of God and how He has focused it on bringing about your salvation and how nothing will stop Him from making it available to you.

Day 322 Ezek 3:20-21

"Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood."

Does this judgment seem harsh? A lifetime of service was erased because of a decision to abandon truth and follow evil. Does that seem right?

But think about the consequences of such a decision. The decision to abandon the truth, yes abandon, to satisfy some sinful desire. Such a decision and its actions will call into question everything that was done before. All the righteous acts and words will be nullified. Does that sound harsh, over the top?

But that is what happens. Everything that was done and said will be questioned. People will wonder what the motives were for living righteously. People will wonder if what is finally revealed has not been the truth about the person from the beginning, which further undermines any truth that was contained in them.

Let's be clear - this is not about stumbling. This is not about a momentary failing. This is about a clear choice to abandon truth to follow sinful desire, to deny the truth. They do not think of the consequences, not just to them, but to all who follow them.

Paul's focus was Acts 20:24, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Day 323 Ezek 14:14

“ ... even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.

There is only one association or relationship that will make a difference in what happens to us. Knowing a great person may seem beneficial. It may appear to give access to resources and security, but that is a false concept.

This is made so clear by this passage, which is repeated later in verse 20. The presence of these three incredible servants of God, men who truly knew God and walked with God, will not be able to save anyone other than themselves.

We are told that each person will be judged for their own sin and accordingly for the nature of their relationship with God. We all will stand alone, and saying we knew this person or were part of their ministry will not be enough to shield us from being judged. It is how we walk with God that matters.

The hope is that our relationship with God will influence others to seek such a relationship for themselves. Imagine if Noah, Job, or Daniel were to speak to you and share with you about their relationship with God. How would that influence your life and your decisions? Would you make changes?

We cannot save someone by just being with them. But we can provide them with the truth and most importantly a living example of what it means to be in a relationship with the one Person that can save you. Only that relationship has that power.

Day 324 Eze 18:24

"But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die."

Every time I read this passage; I find myself struggling to understand one key thing. Why would a righteous person turn from God and begin to live a life of indulgence and sin? What could have happened for that person to abandon God, and all that God has promised for a brief time of self-gratification?

People may say that some tragedy has occurred in their lives, and they feel God has abandoned them, so why not abandon God?

Yet if we study the Word, we see men like Job, who suffered greatly and did not abandon God. We see men like David, who were pursued and hunted like wild animals and did not abandon God. We read of Daniel and his friends who risked their lives and chose not to abandon God, even in exile and in the face of death.

The only answer I can find is that the one who abandoned God, who appeared righteous to others, was a fake. They put on a cloak of righteousness to fool others and themselves. Then, when a time of testing came, the truth was revealed.

A person who truly knows God and walks with God will_____.

Read the whole chapter and fill in the blank. What does it mean to be truly righteous and remain faithful?

Day 325 Ezek 33:12

" Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness."

This is the fourth time Ezekiel has brought up this truth. He repeats it three times in this passage, in verses 12, 13, and 18. He states that if a righteous man chooses to do evil, to become disobedient, his righteous acts of the past will not save him.

Righteousness is not a bank where you save up your good deeds to cover for your sinful and evil actions. There is no point at which a person has done enough good to save themselves and cover any sin they may commit in the future.

Ezekiel has repeated in every one of these passages the reverse idea. If a wicked person turns from their sin and chooses to live in righteousness, then their past evil will be forgiven. Again, like righteousness, evil is not something that is accumulated like debt requiring a payment of an equal amount to clear the debt.

Do we really understand this truth? Wickedness and righteousness are not commodities that we can use to trade on or pay for. They are a description of how we live and think. They are a description of the state of our relationship with God. You either are in a correct relationship with God or you aren't, and your life and desires will reflect the state of that relationship.

Day 326 Dan 9:24

“"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.”

This is one of the better-known prophecies related to the Messiah which gave a time frame for His arrival. But listen to the focus of the prophecy. It is not about political conquest. It is not about restoring the kingdom of Israel. It is about bringing an end to the power of sin. It is about atoning finally for the wickedness of man. It is to bring about the possibility of true righteousness in our life.

The unending round of sacrifices for sin will come to an end. There will be one final act. What it is is not specified here, but today we know how this prophecy was fulfilled. We know that Jesus came as promised and He conquered sin and the grave once and for all.

When He came the leaders forgot why He had come. They were oppressed by the Romans and wanted political freedom. They ignored the deeper need for forgiveness and settled for something less critical. They sacrificed the hope of this passage for a transient and fragile concept.

Do we do the same today? We replace the wonder of forgiveness and eternal peace with God for what is temporary and fragile. We want personal comfort over seeking to be made righteous. We want a king and not a Savior. We want the freedom to do what we want instead of learning what God has for us.

Day 327 Dan 12:3

"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

So how do you know if you have been successful in your life? Is it by the list of things you possess, cars, houses, clothes, etc.? Is it based on your success in your work, total income, position, power, etc.? Is it based on your family, how many children you have, how successful they are, and how your relatives are doing?

We have so many ways in which the world tells us to measure success, but you won't find them in this scripture. Real success is what is found in this passage. The people who will really shine are the wise and the wise are defined as those who lead many to righteousness. Those who help people find their way back to God and a restored relationship with their creator.

We need to keep in mind that these words are coming from Daniel, a man who was successful in the world. He was the top advisor to several kings. He probably enjoyed many things as a result of his position. In the end, he sets all of that aside, and risks it all, to keep his eyes on God. What we remember about him is not his work, his possessions, or anything of this world.

What we remember is his complete focus on following God, even when it meant risking his life to do so.

So, take time to reflect on your life. Why are you shining in this world? How are you doing at being wise and leading others to righteousness, to God?

Day 328 Hos 2:19

"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion."

Have you ever thought about how to measure God's commitment to us and our restoration?

In this passage, Hosea suggests to us a way to understand God's level of commitment and willingness to be part of our lives and to make us part of His life.

He uses the image of marriage. Scripture tells us that marriage is the deepest of commitments. It talks about how two people become one. They leave behind their family and cleave to each other. That word, cleave, is an old word. Most of us know the modern meaning which is to divide or split something. But there is a deeper meaning. To cleave to something is to hold on to it no matter what happens.

This is God's commitment to us. He will cleave to His promise to unite with us. He will work towards this goal even though it seems to be a hopeless case, completely unredeemable. He will do this in righteousness, in a way that cannot be questioned or altered. He will do it in justice dealing with all the debt and sin that we carry. He will do it in love, He desires to unite with us, to cleave to us no matter what the cost, and in compassion He paid that cost.

So, it is clear how much God wants to be with us and for us to be with Him. But what about us? Do we want to have this? Are we ready to cleave to God no matter the cost?

Day 329 Hos 10:12

"Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you."

One of the errors we often make is to believe that we can be righteous. That, in some way, we can create the character of God in our lives. That we can, by our way of life, become acceptable to God. But to do this we have to create our own rules and guidelines. Rules we think we can fulfill.

But this passage indicates that it is not something that comes from within us but must come from an outside source. The seeds of righteousness must be sown and there is only one source of this, and there is only one way to obtain them. We must seek God.

As we do this, we must prepare our lives to receive what God wishes to plant in us. We must humbly open our lives to His work in us. It is not a simple process as is indicated by the idea of breaking up unplowed ground. To take untilled soil and make it ready to receive seed is a great deal of work.

The question is, will we see our need for God to plant His life in us and will we do the work necessary so that our lives will be ready to receive the seed? Then, if we are sincere in this desire, God will supply the rain so essential for those seeds to grow in our lives.

Break up the unplowed ground and open up your life so God can work.

Day 330 Joel 2:23

"Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before."

So often God uses the mundane and normal to try and teach and reveal to us a deeper reality, a deeper purpose.

This passage has as its obvious focus a time of restoration of the people in the land. A time when there will be plenty so that all will be satisfied. In the midst of this passage is one of the great prophecies about what God plans to do in the future. His plan to pour out His spirit on all, both young and old, and both men and women, even servants.

The one challenging phrase is "the autumn rains of righteousness." One can wonder about the connection between farming and righteousness. An alternate translation is "God will send the teacher of righteousness and He will bring the rains." This helps us see the connection and a deeper spiritual truth.

We have the benefit of time and history to see this. Jesus came as the teacher of righteousness. He provided new insight, showers of truth, to grow hope in our hearts and prepare us for the full outpouring of God's spirit which occurred at Pentecost.

God's purpose is much more than just adequate food. It is about making available to us His presence and so removing the shame of our sins. It is about making it possible for us to experience the full blessing of His presence. Abundant showers, autumn and spring rains, until we overflow with his love and presence.

Day 331 Amos 5:7

"You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground"

This is the judgment against every person. This judgment has dire consequences for those unwilling to see the truth.

For me, the key question is what does it mean to turn justice into bitterness? What action on my part makes this possible? How do I cast righteousness to the ground? What attitude exists in me that would prevent righteousness from being damaged or even ruined?

Most often my mind goes to great evil, to great acts of sin. It does not think about the minor sins. I will let you decide what these are because each person seems to have their own definition and therein is the real problem. We all try to define what actions on our part cause the loss of justice and the ruin of righteousness.

The issue is not the nature of the sin. The issue is that I am not seeking the good as defined by God. I do not seek the Lord first and let that relationship define what is evil. That is the moment in which justice is lost and righteousness is ruined. It is at that moment that the standard for both becomes me and not God. It is at that moment that I become nothing and become the object of God's judgment.

Thankfully God has revealed this to me and has shown me the right path to follow to escape His judgement and be restored. It is not complicated. It is simple and is found in Amos 5:14-15.

Day 332 Amos 5:24

"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

How often do you consider that God is watching everything you do? God knows why you do what you do and whether you are honest in seeking Him or just making a show of your love for Him.

It is a frightening truth. You cannot hide from God. You cannot deceive Him. He knows exactly why you are reading your bible. He knows exactly why you are in church each Sunday and on other occasions. That is what this passage is about. It reveals this truth and how He rejects false worship.

Amid the judgment of those who are false in their worship, this verse appears and it brings hope. No matter how false we may be, God is faithful. His love, His justice, who He is does not change and cannot be altered. You cannot block a river. If you do so, it will simply find another path.

It is a reminder that God's love, His righteousness, and how He responds will always be working in our lives. It is like a spring that is inexhaustible. The waters that supply it well up and are sufficient to quench the thirst of all who seek God.

God is watching. He knows the truth about us. He also knows when our hearts truly seek him and for that moment all His resources, all His being are available to help us overcome our falseness and so stand before Him in true worship.

Day 333 Amos 6:12

"Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow the sea with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness— "

If you have never read the seven woes Jesus pronounced on the Pharisees, then take a moment to read Mt 23:13-32. The focus of these woes is on what happens when we as humans decide to define justice and righteousness.

The Pharisees took the law of God which was meant to guide people to God and twisted it until only a select few could hope to find God. It was designed to keep people out of their select group of wealthy powerful people. Which meant it was a poison, killing hope in the lives of those who could not afford their lifestyle.

Their form of righteousness created a bitterness that twisted God's love into a hateful thing. Except for very few, the people did not seek God. How could you seek God with such spiteful examples of righteousness?

But what does this have to do with you and me? It is quite simple. Are we creating a path to God that is impossible to walk? Are we behaving in a way that will prevent the truth of God from growing in the lives of others? Are we, by our words, actions, and expectations making people bitter toward God? Are we feeding people a poison that will kill any possibility of hope that God could love them?

Each of us needs to hear these words and review our lives to be sure we are walking with God in a way that brings health and hope.

Day 334 Mic 7:9

"Because I have sinned against Him, I will bear the Lord's wrath, until He pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see His righteousness."

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and his message was not a pleasant one. There are consequences for sin. God will judge and there will be punishment for the sin that has been committed. Our sin, no matter what it is, is against God. David said the same thing of his sin in Ps 51:4. He had committed adultery and as he contemplates his actions he realizes that at its heart all sin is against God.

As a result, no matter what we say or do, we stand judged and must face a God who is angry about our sins. This would be a hopeless situation for no one can stand before a righteous God and not be judged guilty and bear the consequences of that verdict.

Job knew this when he cried for a go-between to speak to God on his behalf. Micah knows this and reveals to us who can plead our case. Only God Himself can do this, and because He is righteous, He came for that very purpose so that we could have an advocate, one who could bring us back into the light, back into relationship with God.

This is the focus of He 4:14-16. We, as stated by Micah, have one who will plead our case and bring us back into the light so we can see God and know his righteousness.

Day 335 Zep 2:3

"Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."

There is a critical word in this passage. Many would say it is the word 'seek'. It is used several times. But there is a word that is much more critical. It is the word 'humble'.

Consider this: In the world, people want to believe they are good enough to get into heaven. They believe that if they do enough good, then God will not judge them. This is not an attitude of humility. This represents pride and a belief that I can determine what is necessary to please God. These persons seek God on their terms and expect God to respond accordingly.

Sadly, this attitude is pervasive in the church as well. I go to church, I read my bible, I treat others correctly, and so on, but done on my terms. Again, this is not an attitude of humility.

A truly humble person knows there is nothing they can do that can repay God for their sin. They know the true value of all their thoughts and actions. They know that only seeking God in humility and with an attitude that desires the righteousness of God to guide them is the only way to stand before God on the day of judgment.

Humility is the guide that will help a person do what God commands. Humility is the only scale that gives an honest measure of the value of our thoughts and actions. Only humility can provide adequate shelter and allow us to stand before God.

Day 336 Mal 3:3

"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,"

This passage is about the coming of John the Baptist. He will be a refining fire and a cleansing soap. These are potent images. Fire and soap. Both involve the application of external forces to get rid of the internal impurity and the external stain that prevents our offerings and our lives from being acceptable.

This passage also contains a scathing judgment of how the people are robbing God. It is a harsh passage, but its focus is to open the way for our restoration and return to God. In verse 17 it states that once this process is complete and the people have been restored, God will add their names to a scroll of remembrance and they will be once again His treasured possession.

The critical step is our being willing to be refined of the impurity within, our thoughts and desires, and be cleansed of the stain without, the visible proof of the impurity of what is within.

God is speaking, God is acting, but are we listening and are we submitting to his action? Are we willing to let God show us the distinction between what is righteous and what is wicked? Do we want to know if we are serving God or only ourselves?

For this to happen, we need to hear and respond to the messenger of God. We need to hear the truth about who we are and let God work in our hearts.

Day 337 Mal 4:2

"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall."

There are two interesting phrases in this passage. The first is 'who revere my name.' The dictionary defines the word 'revere' as **'**to show devoted deferential honor**: to** regard as worthy of great honor.'

I wonder if we really understand what devoted deferential honor means. Do we defer to the Lord in all things? Are we devoted in all aspects of our lives to honoring God? What does it mean to regard someone as worthy of great honor?

When we do begin to grasp what these phrases mean and begin to apply them to our daily lives and actions, then we will be able to experience true healing of our soul. It will lift us on the wings of life and hope.

The second phrase is 'leap like calves.' Have you ever seen calves that have been just set free from being penned up for a long time? They jump and leap and cavort and enjoy the freedom they have just been given. They have pent-up energy and leap for joy.

This should be the effect of revering God in our life. Such an action does not burden us, it frees us to experience joy. It frees us to display, not in solemnity, our love for God - our reverence but - in exuberant joy. True reverence brings healing and joy and frees us to express it freely in exuberance.

Day 338 Matt 3:15

"Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented."

Public acts that confirm inward realities.

But there is a reality where we act publicly in ways to cover or hide what is truly inside our hearts and minds. The key is the right action that reveals to us and others the reality that lies within, our sinfulness. This was the focus of John's baptism. He proclaimed the need to confess and to do so in a public manner.

It also was a declaration that what John was teaching was true and that there was a need to respond to his teaching.

Now imagine Jesus appearing to be baptized. Jesus, who was without sin and so did not need to be baptized as an act of confession. Instead, His action of submission reveals a deeper aspect of the public act of confession and baptism. It reveals a commitment to the truth. It was a confirmation that what John was teaching was truth and there was a need to submit to this truth and live by it.

This was the focus of Jesus' choice on that day, to submit to the word of God and declare His commitment to live accordingly.

Do we realize that righteousness is based on two critical choices and actions? The first is the need to confess our sins. The second is the need to publicly commit ourselves to God's work and direction. Baptism does that and symbolizes our rebirth and fulfillment of God's plan.

Day 339 Matt 5:6

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled".

Do you know what your favorite food and drink is? Some people call this comfort food. Food that is linked to good memories and sentiments. In the good times and the bad times, we desire this food because it helps us focus on something good and enjoyable.

Do we think of righteousness in this way? Something that brings comfort to our soul. Something that reminds us of what is good and enjoyable. Do we desire the food and drink of righteousness for our soul?

One thing about comfort food and drink is that we never tire of these foods and beverages. We may not have them available all of the time, but if someone asks we quickly remember these and state our preference for them. When we are enjoying these items we want to have as much as possible. We want to be satisfied because we so enjoy them. If possible, we will eat until we are satisfied.

Now think about righteousness. This is how we should think of righteousness as something we hunger for. It should be the comfort food for our soul, something we desire and enjoy.

Jesus says that if this is our desire, then we will be blessed and have all that we need. We will have enough so that we will be satisfied.

Now the question is do we think of righteousness in this way? As something that we hunger and thirst for? As the first thing we think of when our soul needs to be fed.

Day 340 Matt 5:10

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

There are many reasons why people mistreat others. Most of them have to do with selfishness and pride. We want to feel superior and mistreat even persecute others we consider inferior in some way. This is the basis of racism, bullying, profiling, etc. of why one person mistreats another person.

Hair color, skin color, social status, political position, clothing, and place of residence, are all used to identify who we don't like, who we consider inferior, and a target of such mistreatment.

Religious belief is another one and has been the reason for a great deal of, not just mistreatment but outright persecution. Of finding ways to destroy, even kill people who hold a differing view of truth about ultimate realities and faith.

Jesus said it would be no different for those who chose to follow Him. They would be persecuted. But not because of the usual list nor for holding a different view of spiritual matters. They would be persecuted for doing what is right. That is the basis of righteousness - to know what is right and then do it.

You would think it should be the opposite. That we would honor those who know what is right and do so. Yet, it is not the way the world reacts to the truth found only in God. Such living exposes the falseness of all concepts of superiority and reveals the truth that we are wicked.

Those who are righteous have a truly eternal reward, the kingdom of heaven. In the end, they will be honored by God for following the truth at any cost.

Day 341 Matt 5:20

"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Can you imagine what the people thought when they heard Jesus make this statement? In a few words, he condemned to hell the group of people who were considered the truly righteous in the land. And in the same statement, He declared that no one could, in their own power, be righteous enough to enter heaven.

In the rest of the sermon on the mount, He explained what He meant. Breaking any law is enough to condemn you. Breaking the law in your thoughts is enough to condemn you. Failure to resolve a conflict with another person is enough to condemn you, and the list goes on.

Any righteousness defined by man, any plan devised by man to declare himself righteous will fail and you will be condemned to hell.

Today we call these people the legalists and the ultraconservative. They, like the Pharisees have created systems they believe will convince God and others they are righteous. It is all false and will always be false. We cannot, in and of ourselves and by ourselves, be righteous enough to convince God we deserve to enter heaven.

It is not about what we do that makes us righteous. It is our relationship with God that makes this possible because it will be Him working in our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls to create in us what only He can create, a person in His likeness.

Day 342 Matt 6:1

“"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

You hear it in their voice, you see it in their eyes, you watch how they act, and you know that they are not bragging, not displaying themselves but revealing the why behind how they live and breathe. Then you realize they are humble people. People who act not so they can be seen, but so God can be seen.

Jesus says, ‘be careful’ and that is important. The line between humility and pride is very narrow. It is so easy to cross over that line and instead of honoring God, you are honoring yourself. Instead of revealing that the source of what you do is God, you slip into using I with a giant capital and bold **I.**

That leads to another dangerous way of presenting myself and how good I am by telling others what I do and, often more importantly, what I don’t do. Now we are into legalism. My actions and words are not about loving others and presenting God, but about proving I am worthy of honor and respect.

Now I want to be seen by others and have lost sight of God. If I gain the attention of those around me, Jesus tells me that is all the reward I will ever receive. There is no place for braggarts and the proud in heaven. So, be careful, keep your eyes on God, and do what He desires, not what you or others desire.

Day 343 Matt 6:33

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

What do you want or hope for? Do you want the finest cuts of meat or is ground meat good enough? Do you want the latest and best in designer clothes, or are a T-shirt and jeans good enough? Do you want a mansion, or is a simple house that provides protection from the elements good enough?

This passage puts all of this into perspective. Placing the kingdom and God's righteousness first will change your perspective on what you need, or at least it should.

Consider the birds and the flowers. They are dressed and fed in wonderful ways but each according to its purpose and need. Many times, the form and color of flowers have a specific purpose in attracting the right bird or insect to be fed and to pollinate other flowers. Birds do not plant what they eat but it is provided in so many ways.

One other thing to keep in mind. Have you ever seen a fat bird, one that is grossly overweight and so unable to fly? How long does the beauty of a flower last? It is not a permanent feature but one designed to allow it to reproduce.

Only we seek more to have more than is needed to live and be what God designed us to be. So, consider again the importance of placing the kingdom of God first and seeking his righteousness before anything else. It will change your perspective on what you truly need.

Day 344 Matt 21:32

"For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

Nobody likes to be told they are wrong. The Pharisees were no different.

They wanted to be in control of their world and of the way to God. As a result, they made the law more important than God. John saw this and condemned them for it. The people understood and responded.

Even worse is to be wrong and for everyone we think is wrong to see this fact and do the right thing. Even the worst of this group saw it and confessed their sin. The Pharisees saw this and worked harder at following the law. This only proved John's teaching.

It is not hard to get caught up in this type of thinking. You think about being more faithful in going to church, attending bible study, participating in events, and similar ideas. Instead of thinking about how to spend more time with God.

When we spend more time with God, we will probably decide to be more faithful in the above activities, but our perspective will have changed. It will not be about what we do but about sharing our relationship with God with others. It will not be about what I do but about what God is doing in me and through me to others.

So which way are you going? Down the path of law, or the path of relationship? Only one of them results in true righteousness.

Day 345 Luke 1:74-75

"and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."

John the Baptist has just been born and his father Zechariah finally speaks after being struck dumb for his disbelief. The focus of his prophecy is on the coming of the promised one and the work his son will do.

Both of them will be involved in bringing about the promise of salvation made by God. The one will be the source of this salvation and John will prepare the way by giving people knowledge of salvation and the fact that it will come through the forgiveness of sin.

In the middle of the passage is the above text. This salvation has a purpose: to make it possible for all who hear to serve God without fear and to be able to do so in holiness and righteousness. There is no mention of establishing an earthly kingdom. No mention of a life of prosperity. These will not provide what is needed.

What is critical is the knowledge of salvation and our need for forgiveness. What is needed is the mercy of God that will open the way for us to walk in the path of peace. What is needed is the light of God to dispel the darkness of death, of separation from Him.

The question is do we see this as clearly as did Zechariah on the day of his son's birth? Do we see what God wants to do in our hearts? Which do we want, a comfortable life, or true peace with God? Do we want to serve God in holiness and righteousness?

Day 346 Luke 18:9

“ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:”

If I am the measure of myself then I will never see my sin clearly. If I fail in some manner it will be seen as the result of some outside influence and not because of sin within me. Foggy vision.

This statement of Jesus is the opening to a parable about a rich man and a tax collector and the way they approached God. The tax collector in humility and repentance, the rich man in smugness and self-importance.

The moment we begin to tell others how good we are we become the self-righteous man in the parable. The only person that will be listening to us is ourselves. Others may hear us speak but will not be listening. No one enjoys listening to a braggart, except the braggart. Those who listen do so out of fear and dishonesty, not respect.

If that is true in this world, then how much more true is that of God, who knows exactly who we are and our real state? We are not respectable. We are not righteous. We are sinners. There is only one honest and respectable action for us and that is what we see in the actions and attitude of the tax collector. Humbly bowing and confessing our need for God’s work of forgiveness in our hearts and lives.

Take a moment to reflect on who you are and your opinion of yourself. Are you on your knees in humility or trying to stay on your feet and strut before God?

Day 347 John 16:8-10

"8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;"

Revivals start because people seek the Lord, not a great preacher. A great preacher is effective not because he is eloquent or has a magnetic personality. People are convicted of their sins not because we are right and so righteous.

Are you listening?

We should not desire revival. We should not seek out a great preacher. We should not try to correct others. What we should seek is the presence of the Holy Spirit. He stirs hearts to revival. He gives power to the preacher. He convicts people of their sins.

People will choose to not believe, but the Holy Spirit can show them their error. People can choose not to listen, but the Holy Spirit can give power to even the simplest words. People can choose not to see their sin, but the Holy Spirit can reveal the truth.

It is when we seek out the power and presence of the Holy Spirit that true change can occur. The Holy Spirit will change us and move us to live as citizens of heaven. The Holy Spirit will work in the lives of those we touch so they can see Christ and know their need.

We have been given an incredible gift. The question is will we let the Holy Spirit do His work in and through us?

Day 348 Acts 24:25-26

"As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

Let's do a quick review of the story. Paul has come to Jerusalem and is peacefully praying in the temple when his enemies lie about him, and he is seized. They try to kill him, but he is rescued by the Roman soldiers. He is taken to Caesarea for trial. In the end, he appeals to Caesar to avoid death at the hands of his enemies.

During this time Felix meets with him often. Paul's teaching on righteousness and other topics causes fear in Felix but not enough to overcome Felix's desire for money. That is the key point. Such a discussion should cause us to be fearful. But we must choose our response to this fear.

Some will understand the point and seek to repent and be forgiven, and that is why Jesus died on the cross, to make this possible. But all too often, though it may cause fear in a person, the person's desires and preferences overcome the fear. In this case, there is hope of a bribe by Paul. How much of a bribe is uncertain.

Day by day we have been studying what it means to be righteous. Have you, like myself, been convicted of the truth of sin? Have you been seeking God, or desperately desiring a way to keep living the same old way with the hope that there may be some way to have both? Truthfully there is no escape clause.

Day 349 Rom 1:17

“For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." “

Do you truly believe that God loves you? Do you believe that He can cleanse and purify your life? Do you believe that one day you will be in His presence for eternity?

I think of Abraham who had no idea of what God was planning. He followed God’s directions to leave his country, leave his family, and move to a foreign land. He struggled to understand how he would be the father of nations. But step by step he listened to God and the instructions given to him.

I could list many others who, with no idea of what God was doing, chose to follow God’s directions and faithfully do as they were instructed. It was in this act of faith they were able to see and know God. It was in this act of faith that they learned how to live as God intended. It was in this act of faith that they became the beacons to guide us in how to walk by faith and learn how to be righteous.

This is the crucial point. Do we want God to reveal Himself to us? Do we want to see how to live and be called righteous, not by the world, but by God?

If so, then take the steps of faith and go where God sends you. Take the steps of faith and do what God tells you to do. Take the steps of faith and be changed.

Day 350 Rom 3:5

But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)

So why do people wear glasses? Obviously, it is because they want to see clearly. Who wants to walk around in a world that is blurred? Who wants to be at risk every time they take a step because they cannot see clearly the danger that may be right at their feet? Who wants to depend on others to tell them what is happening and what is being written?

That would be like returning to when we were children but different. As a child our vision was clear, but our understanding was, not blurred, but incomplete. Same effect but a different context. As children we had people read to us, but that was because we didn't know how to interpret the symbols properly.

God is trying to make it possible for us to see clearly who we are and what we need. The sad truth is that too often we try to say we are children and don't understand. But we are not. It is not that we don't know or understand. It is that we need a pair of glasses or some mechanism so that we see clearly what is right before us.

God provides that by being God. We need him so we can see clearly the truth and avoid false interpretations of the reality around us. The key is, are we willing to let God be our glasses so we can see the truth?

Day 351 Rom 3:21-22

"21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference… "

This passage is filled with well-known phrases, like verse 23 "for all have sinned…", verse 20 "Therefore no one will be declared righteous through observing the law…", and Verse 10 "a quote from Ps 14:1 "There is no one that is righteous, not even one;".

These are hard statements and are filled with the reality of the hopeless state sin creates in our lives. But God has not abandoned us. In Christ, a new way to satisfy God's law has been found and it is not based on a legalistic adherence to the rules. It is not based on our efforts to convince God we are worthy.

It is based on the love of God expressed in and through Christ. It is based on faith in the sacrifice of Christ and that it is sufficient and able to bring about the restoration of our relationship with God. If we believe what God has done, if we confess our sin, and let God work, He will create anew in us what was lost in Adam and Eve.

This brings us to verse 24 "and all are justified freely by his grace…" Yes, we have sinned. Yes, we are not righteous. But yes, God has provided and freely offers to each of us the opportunity to be restored and made righteous through Jesus Christ. This leaves us free to keep the law because of love, and not out of fear.

Day 352 Rom 4:3

“What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." “

Was Abraham a good man? Maybe. Was he a perfect man? No. Read the story of Abraham and the times he lied, the times he tried to intervene in God’s plan, and the times he failed. He was like us all in that we are all sinful.

The one thing that Abraham did right was to believe God and submit to God’s correction and direction. It was this faith, that God was present and leading, that overshadows all the errors and failures.

And yet, even with this example, we tend to think of life as if it were a bank account. If we put enough good things into the account, then we will be justified by our works. As if what we do would be enough to convince God to overlook our debt.

The reality is that our debt grows faster than our ability to cover the debt and so day by day we fall further into debt. We can never be justified. As if we could stand before God and boast about the good we have done when looming behind us is a huge screen projecting all the bad.

It is a frightening image, and it should be.

This means we have a choice, try to boast before God or humbly kneel and believe in His promises. Boasting will only leave us hopelessly in debt. Trusting and believing will put God in control.

Who do you really want in control of your life? You, with your limited results - or God with His unlimited resources?

Day 353 Rom 4:6

"David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works"

For Paul, two people stand out as examples of how God works and how we can be restored. It is all about what God does in response to one act on our part. It is all about our faith in God's willingness to credit us with righteousness, and this has nothing to do with our works. Works are those things we do to convince ourselves, others, and even God that we are worthy.

Verses seven and eight clarify this truth. They focus on God's willingness to forgive our sins. This only happens as we confess the truth about ourselves and place our lives by faith in God's hands. This humble act is the door to God's bounty and being deemed righteous.

David knew this at a personal level. He knew that he was a sinful person and many of his psalms contain confessions of this truth. One that is most familiar is found in Ps 51:4, where he declares the truth that it is against God that he has sinned and that he has been sinful from birth. At that point, he calls on God to cleanse him, and we find another well-known phrase, 'wash me and I will be whiter than snow."

Each of us must come to this point. A point where we humbly and honestly admit to ourselves that only God can purify our lives and make us righteous. If we can do that then we will be blessed.

Day 354 Rom 4:9-11

“ 9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. 10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.”

Tell me who can be restored? Who can be a full member of the kingdom of God?

How many groups have tried to establish the idea that they alone are the true church of God and that only those who follow their line of thinking, or doctrine are true believers? Far, far too many have gone down this road.

Let’s be honest, each of us in our own way decides who is acceptable and who is not. Both in our little worlds and along that line who we believe God will accept.

Paul spends a great deal of time on this idea making it very clear that God is not interested in our pedigree when deciding how to respond. He is interested in our faith in Him. He wants to see our commitment to believing in Him and His promises.

And so, Paul can state in Gal 3:28-29 “ 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Day 355 Rom 4:22-24

“ 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Today I am wondering if I truly believe in God’s promises. Is there enough evidence for God to say, “Yes this person believes and has faith in me?” This was the subject of James when he talked about faith and works. When he said faith without works is dead. Then he followed it with the idea that one demonstrates their faith, their belief in God, by the works they do.

Abraham was fully convinced that God would keep His promises and we have his story to show the decisions he made and what he did to reveal this truth.

So what evidence is there in my life? What decisions have I made that reveal that I am convinced that God will keep His promises to me? Can people see that God is working in me? Can they see that God’s righteousness is active in my life?

These are not easy questions. Further, how they are answered will be different in each person’s life because God speaks to us as individuals. What each of us will be asked to do to demonstrate our belief will be based on who we are and what God wants us to do.

Think through today what God has asked you to do. Are you responding, believing he will keep his promises to you?

Day 356 Rom 5:17-18

“ 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”

Have you ever heard people talk about pivotal or critical points in the life of a person, the history of a nation, or how a war is going? We are like that, always looking for a key moment when things change for the good or the bad. We look for these points in time in our relationships, our work, and in many other areas.

But the two most critical points in all of history are these two. The one that took all of mankind down the road of destruction when Adam and Eve sinned. The other was when the power of that choice was finally broken by Jesus on the cross.

One thing is common in all of these. A critical choice or decision is made, and it becomes the point at which all else hinges either for good or bad. We often don’t realize the impact of such choices.

Take a moment and think about this. One little sin, changed the course of the entire human race, alienating us from God. At that point, God made a simple choice, a choice not to abandon man to his sin but to make the sacrifice needed to restore what was lost.

Consider carefully the choices you make today. They could bring despair or hope.

Day 357 Ro 5:21

“ ...so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Consider this thought: ‘Grace is an offer to be selected, not a tax to be levied.’

On the other hand, sin results in a tax of the worst kind. One that cannot be paid for even in a lifetime of effort. Further, every day it remains unpaid it compounds interest and grows at an alarming rate.

The one is a dictator of the worst kind. It takes absolute control of every aspect of life. It has little concern for the impact it has on any aspect of the person’s life or of the lives of others. Its unstated goal is the absolute ruin of the person it dominates.

The other creates life which results in a person becoming a child of God.

In one case, all choice has been removed. You are under its domination because you sin. It will cause trouble and suffering in this life and death. Then it will result in trouble and suffering for eternity and death again.

Grace restores the possibility of a choice. God, in an act of mercy, opens the way to be released from the domination of sin and the restoration of the reign of righteousness in our lives. We are freed from the trouble and suffering of sin. And though we will die a physical death, we will enter into eternal life.

So how are you doing with your choice of life and death? Are you allowing God’s grace to do its work in your life today?

Day 358 Ro 6:13

"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

Do you remember this old song? Be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little ears what you hear. It has the same theme as the three monkeys representing see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. The focus is on what not to do.

This passage has that but also suggests that our ears, eyes, mouth, and so on can be used by God as instruments of righteousness.

We can see God and help others find their way to Him. We can hear God's work and let it guide our lives and help others do the same. We can speak and share what we have learned with others. We can have our hearts renewed so we can love others the way God loves them. Hands can be used to care for others. Feet can be used to take us to God's house and so on.

John says this in another way in 1 Jn 1:1-4. He wants to let people know what he has seen, heard, and touched so that they can have the same fellowship with God as him.

Every day and every moment we have the opportunity to let God use who we are and what we have to lead others to God.

Let us be sure that what we see, hear, and speak comes from God so that God can use us.

Day 359 Ro 6:16

"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Do you realize that at every point in time, you are deciding who your master will be?

We don't want to believe this, but it is the reality in which we live. The sad thing is that being a slave to sin is so easy to do. It takes so little action on our part. We have to do very little for this to happen. Then we make excuses trying to convince ourselves that we are not responsible for our decision and the consequences of that decision.

There are no excuses because at the heart of everything that happens exists the reality that we have chosen who our master will be. The sad truth is that our tendency is to choose sin as our master and allow it to make slaves of us.

Paul reminds us of this truth but also that it does not have to remain the final word. There is an option. We can choose to obey a different master. We can choose to place Jesus at the center of our life. We can choose life over death.

The question comes down to this, who do you want to have control of your life? Yourself, a person prone to failure? Or Jesus, the one Person who has overcome sin and death and can lead you to righteousness?

Day 360 Ro 6:18

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

Why would anyone choose to be a slave and not go free? Christ's death on the cross opens the way for a person to be set free from sin. It also opens the way for a person to choose to be a slave to righteousness.

But why would anyone choose to become a slave to anything, even something as good and beneficial as Christ who set them free? What, if any, good can there be in being under the complete control of anyone?

In Exodus 21, there are some interesting guidelines and ideas about servants and slaves. It talks about a person selling themselves to another person as their slave/servant. At the end of the seven years of jubilee, they are to go free. What follows is interesting.

Now comes the key phrase, but if the servant decides that he loves his master then they are to take him to the doorpost and punch a hole in his ear. With this act, he declares himself a slave forever to his master.

The master has provided finances so the person can pay their debts. So why choose to become a slave again? Think about it.

Now consider how many people want only the salvation that God offers through Jesus but don't really want to take the next step and give themselves to God. They want the quick fix but not the long-term blessings. They forget why they were in debt. They forget what it means to be free from fear.

Once again, I ask why would someone willingly choose to become a slave to God?

Day 361 Ro 6:19

"I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

This point is so important that Paul uses the idea of offering ourselves as slaves twice, here and in verse 13. We have been slaves to sin and our desires and that has only increased the wickedness in our lives. The challenge is to offer yourself as a slave to righteousness. Through this action, we will find the path to holiness. A path that brings us ever closer to God.

This highlights the reality of who we are. We all want to be considered good. We all want to do what is good. We all want to believe that we can be good enough to stand before God. That is not going to happen. In fact, it is the opposite that happens, ever-increasing wickedness. Why? Because to believe we are good means hiding the evil within, which will allow it to grow unchecked. We do not have the capacity to be truly good.

For this to happen we need an outside control. Someone who can see what is hidden. One who knows what must be done to find and follow the path. The only way that works is through complete submission to that person, slavery, if you will.

The beauty of this is that there is no downside to what God will do if we submit, becoming a slave to righteousness. All God's promises and blessings become available in that moment. Paul is so sure of this that he takes time to repeat himself. Please take the time again to listen.

Day 362 Ro 6:20-23

“ 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You think you are free. You think there are no consequences. You think you can do good. But all of the time you are actually in slavery to sin, and you will receive the wages of this false freedom, death.

Paul clearly states that anything, when we are outside of God, only brings us shame. We may think we appear good in the eyes of those we seek to impress in this world. We may think that God will consider their opinion of how good we are. That is what we think.

The reality is that our opinions and the opinions of others have little value when talking about eternal truth. Only one opinion matters and that is God’s.

The one thing that will change all of that is to submit ourselves as slaves to the control of righteousness. A choice that puts us under the authority of God. That authority never errs in guiding us correctly and will never result in our being ashamed. It will result in holiness and eternal life.

Day 363 Ro 8:10

"But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness."

Do you believe in hopeless causes? Do you believe in miracles? Of course, you do. You believe in God who specializes in the most hopeless cause of them all: your salvation and restoration.

Having said that, there is one hopeless cause that is truly beyond hope. Even God has declared that it is beyond the existence of even the possibility of occurring. In all of human history, there are only two examples of it even occurring and there is no promise in all of scripture for it ever occurring again.

Your body will not survive. Sin has guaranteed this reality and God only set aside this reality on two occasions for Enoch and Elijah. Not even Moses was granted this possibility, that of not dying. And yet we invest incredible resources and time in caring for and protecting this shell which will not survive. It will die.

Yet within this shell exists something that is eternal and can be rescued. Sin will not destroy it, only separate it from God and for all eternity. Here is the good news, the righteousness of Christ means our spirit can be totally alive now and for eternity.

Sadly, we invest so little effort in caring for our spirit. We worry about the food, clothing, and safety of our bodies and invest the majority of our time and resources in this. What we should be doing is investing in caring for our soul and preparing it for eternity with God. Now consider what will you do today to refocus your energies so your spirit can be alive.

Day 364 Ro 9:30-31

"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it."

There are clearly two paths that one could follow. There is the path of law and the path of faith. Both have the same goal in mind, righteousness. Better yet, a righteousness based on the person and character of God which will result in a restored relationship with God.

History has shown us that the path of law does not function. The history of the Jews reveals this and the life of the Pharisees confirms it. Jesus' comments were quite severe in relation to those who thought they could gain righteousness by using the law alone. Further, when we look at those who were approved by God in the Old Testament we discover that they also had faith. They believed in God and following the law was an expression of that faith.

Now Christ has come, and faith is the focal point. It is now possible to pursue true righteousness through faith in what Christ did for us on the cross. This faith in Christ results in a change in heart and a desire to do all that the law intended and the ability to live a truly righteous life.

In a nutshell. The law alone is not enough, and the law does not create faith in God but faith in one's ability to accomplish what sin has made impossible. Faith in Christ changes us and makes it possible to obtain righteousness which then helps us fulfill the true purpose of the law, relationship with God.

Day 365 Ro 10:2-4

"For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

Paul uses a key word in this passage, zeal. The complete focus of one's life to a belief, activity, or relationship. People are zealous fans of a team, they are zealous in a relationship, and they are zealous followers of a belief system.

On the surface, it looks great. Such focus suggests that the person is truly committed to whatever they are focused on. That may or may not be true. The Pharisees were zealous in following their interpretation of the law and condemned any who disagreed with them. In the same manner, being zealous may mean something similar. It may be about a goal to have what you want or prove to others you are the one who is right or does what is right. It is now a competition to be more zealous than others.

Jesus was zealous. He followed the heart of the law and opened the way for us to know God. Jesus was zealous and showed us how to love and obey God. Jesus was zealous and was approved by God as the one true sacrifice that could save all who believed.

Tell me then, does your zealous behavior draw people to God or are you simply trying to get people to notice you?

Day 366 Ro 10:5-6

“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)”

Paul has been slowly explaining many aspects of righteousness. He has clearly described that the law, though based on God’s righteousness, is beyond our reach. We cannot keep it externally (correct action), or internally (correct thought).

Further, we are not capable of causing God to turn from who He is and alter what He has given. We cannot control God’s response or judgment. It was not any action on our part that brought Christ to earth. Truthfully, it was our abject failure to follow the law that caused God, out of the vastness of His love, to act.

The only way to obtain this blessing is not by fulfilling any new law, something we cannot do. Something we should have learned from trying to keep the law as written. The answer is found in verses 8-11. It is an act of faith. We know the problem; we know our needs. If we admit it the words are in our hearts and available to be spoken.

What we need to do is confess that God is in control, and Jesus is Lord. In that action, we place our trust in all that God has done. We believe not just with our words but with our hearts. The confession is based on the belief that God will save and restore. Ah, the wonders and immensity of God’s love for us, and it is always available to those who call.

Day 367 Ro 14:17-18

"17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men."

In righteousness, the issue is not what you eat or drink. It is not about law and anger. That is what you get with law, anger. That is because you will have to judge anyone who does not follow the law and how you interpret and apply it to life.

Righteousness is about peace and joy. That is because it is God who guides your choices about what to eat and drink. Those choices are not about what everyone should be doing but about what you need to do to be at peace with God and know the joy that comes with that knowledge and lifestyle.

With God as your guide, you know what to eat and not to eat. Included in that is why you make those choices. He guides you in your choices related to what to drink and not to drink. Thus it goes in every aspect of your life. These choices are for you and are designed to help you become what God desires you to be. They are not always the same for everyone. Paul saw that and touched on one's freedom and being sensitive to the choices of others.

The key focus is our ability to please God and at the same time know that because we have the right attitude others will approve and be drawn to God. It is not what you eat and drink, it is the why, and the why must come from God, not man.

Day 368 1 Co 1:30

"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption."

Paul has just finished a discussion on comparing the wisdom of man with the wisdom of God. Plot reveal: We lose to God at every level and in every situation.

If you have done even a limited study of philosophy, you will see how inadequate the wisdom of man is. It doesn't matter how smart or complete the view of one philosopher may be there is always a flaw or many, if you will. As soon as that person finishes their version of the truth about everything, a line forms of people who will challenge it and, in the end, prove what Paul has just told us. Man's wisdom is completely inadequate at all points and levels.

Now for the big reveal. God chooses what is rejected by the wisdom of man to reveal the truth. He chose Jesus to reveal to the world the truth about life, sin, and the true way to wisdom. The best part of this is that you do not have to be erudite, or have great knowledge or learning, to understand and receive the truth. You just have to trust God.

This wisdom of God in Christ restores us and makes us righteous, and holy. Something the wisdom of man can never accomplish because it is always flawed. God provided Christ, an unflawed person, to provide us with the perfect way. So as Paul says, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

As a result, we have access to the eternal infallible wisdom of God to guide our lives.

Day 369 2 Co 3:9

" If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!"

Paul is comparing and contrasting the ministry of Moses and Jesus. Moses' task was to receive and teach the law of God. It revealed the glory and righteousness of God and revealed the nature and depth of sin in us.

The problem with the law was not the law, but the way in which the law was used. The spirit of the law was to lead people to their need for God's presence and forgiveness. Those who understood this realized that it was not the sacrifice itself that was the key but the attitude of the heart in the bringing of the sacrifice. A broken and contrite heart was more important (Ps 51:17).

Jesus' ministry and life brought clarity to this reality. He brought God's love and forgiveness to the forefront so that we could see more clearly what God truly sought. The call is to confess our sins and seek forgiveness, thus allowing the sacrifice of Jesus to fully work in our hearts. Jesus fulfilled the purpose of the law and opened the way for God's righteousness to work in our hearts and make us righteous.

Now comes the hard question. Today we have choices to make. A key one is, are we seeking to lead people to be members of a church, a new form of law? Or are we seeking to help them become followers of Christ, the true ministry of righteousness, bringing them into a relationship with God?

Day 370 2 Co 5:21

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In verse 20 Paul declares that we are Christ's ambassadors. Further, that God is making His appeal to the lost through us.

Consider this. What are the qualifications needed for one to become an ambassador in this world? Here is a short list.

Political science studies, prior experience in some field of politics, some level of success in the world of politics, and the right connections.

Which one do you think is most important? We would think the first ones but often it is as much about who you know as who you are. Do you see where this is going?

In truth, we may know the bible, be able to teach the bible, and may look good on paper but none of that matters in the end. What matters most is our relationship with the one calling us to be His ambassadors. We have heard repeatedly that what we do is not enough. We cannot do enough to be a true ambassador.

The critical step is dependent on our willingness to let God reconcile us through the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. If that happens and we are reconciled, then we can be a channel for others to be reconciled as well. We can become ambassadors not just because of what we know but because we have been made righteous and can honestly represent God to the world around us.

Day 371 2 Co 6:3-10

*"3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; **with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left**; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."*

Sometimes one can feel like they are unable to defend themselves from the wicked. Yet Paul, after listing the struggles he has faced, then follows quickly with a list of responses to those struggles. He calls them the weapons of righteousness.

These weapons give him the power to overcome all the attacks, all the opposition, all the isolation, and ignorance of those who oppose the work of God.

These weapons mean that he lives with power and strength. So much so that he can rejoice and make others rich and see that in God they possess a wealth the world can never provide. This passage reminds us that no matter what the world does we are the victor in God and we can help others find this same life in God.

Day 372 2 Co 6:14

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

This seems so obvious and yet it seems that all too often we try to have one foot in both worlds. We want to be seen as righteous but… You fill in the blank with whatever attracts you to the world and keeps you from truly committing all your heart, mind, soul, and body to the Lord.

Nobody can truly love anything completely if they do not commit themselves completely to what they love. That which you love controls all of who you are. Any division in your loyalty means you will not gain what you desire.

Why does the bible say that in marriage two become one? It is this very thing. As soon as something detracts from a total love and commitment to one's marriage partner then the door is open for trouble to enter.

In Paul's example, light and darkness, we see this even clearer. Darkness will swallow the light if allowed to remain. Does that make sense? Only if you realize that for darkness to remain a person needs to construct barriers to hinder the presence of light in areas of their life. If not dealt with, over time, the darkness will grow. More barriers will be created with one single purpose, block any light from entering.

The goal of light is to reveal the areas of darkness so they can be removed, and we can be fully committed to seeking righteousness.

Day 373 2 Co 9:9

"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

In this passage, Paul is talking about sowing and reaping. It is part of a discussion on giving. The focus is we should give willingly and joyfully. This will please God and result in His making grace abound. It is this gift of grace that allows us to be fruitful and increases our ability to do good work.

The background for the passage is the offering being collected to help the people in Jerusalem. But the focus is much larger. Giving financially is only one expression of what true generosity is. There is a more important currency at work behind this offering and it is the giving of grace which produces righteousness.

We are told that true generosity flows from our ability to share the grace we have received from God with others. If we will plant this seed, it will produce righteousness in us and those who receive God's grace through us.

The promise is that God will make this grace abound in those who are generous in sharing it with others. In fact, we will become so rich in God's grace that we will never lack the ability to share it with others and so bring honor to God.

The promise is the more we sow the more we will receive. The warning is that an unwillingness to sow will result in limiting God's work in us and through us. The key to this chain of supply and demand is us. The promise is there will never be a shortage of grace. The demand will never be greater than the supply. Those who are righteous understand and are generous.

Day 374 2 Co 11:15

"It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

Paul uses this chapter and the following chapter in Corinthians to expose those who are false apostles, people serving Satan, who masquerades as an angel of light. He explains what he sees as a key difference. Their teaching is a deception. They take instead of give, they seek an easy way to God, a way without sacrifice on their part. They enslave the people with their teaching and the people easily give in.

Paul instead shares what it has cost him to serve. He talks about the price he paid so they could hear the truth. He boasts about his weakness. He talks about his struggle with the thorn and how he learned that the power of God is made perfect in our weakness.

The false apostles want us to accept a lesser form of righteousness, one that depends on our strength. A righteousness that is easy and allows us to boast about what we have accomplished. Which is a lie.

But that is the way of a lie, to lead us away from dependence on God for our righteousness, into a dependence on ourselves and a false truth. It is an issue of pride. We want to appear strong and able to succeed in this world. We don't want to admit we are weak and dependent so that we can boast about who we are and what we have done.

Instead, we should delight in the truth that without God we do not have the strength to be righteous or live a righteous life.

Day 375 Gal 2:21

"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

One of the strange and unsettling realities of righteousness is that it reveals sin to us at two levels. The first is what happens when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the fact that we are sinful and need to deal with our sins. Thankfully we are not left to our own devices, wisdom, and strength to accomplish this. Jesus' willing sacrifice paid the debt of our sins.

What happens next is that as we grow in our new faith and relationship with God more of the truth is revealed. That contact with what is truly righteous begins to open our eyes to the true depth of sin. At this point, one of two things can happen. We can mistakenly think that now that we are forgiven and made whole we can deal with this.

Once again we think that by establishing the correct guidelines, the correct attitudes, and the correct behavior we can deal with the sin in our life. Now there is nothing wrong with being correct in all of these areas. The error is that if we think we can solve our problem with sin then we have regressed to living by law and as Paul says Christ died for nothing.

The correct response is to let go of it all and fully submit to Christ. This is called entire sanctification. The point at which we allow God to have complete control of every aspect of our life.

Day 376 Gal 3:6

“Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”

The Galatians were struggling. False teachers had arrived, and the people were being confused and misled. Jesus warned that there would be false Christs and false prophets. Paul warned the people about them, and they appeared.

The key word in all of this is what you believe.

We have three key sources for the information we must select from as a basis for what we believe. The first is our self. We create our own patterns, habits, customs, and ways of living. If we aren’t careful, we can begin to believe that this is how one must live to be righteous and please God.

The second is others. This source can be good or bad depending on whether they are true or false. The false sources are what concerns us here. They start with themselves as the source of what should be believed and then teach others to follow their example and teaching.

These first two can be a good source of information and example to others. They don’t have to result in false teaching and a return to establishing a system of law or legalism as the basis for righteousness. To do so they need to depend on the last source.

The third is God and His word. This is the point of Paul’s discussion of law and belief. When we deviate from the truth of God, then we end up with a false righteousness and we are no longer the children of God. It is not our works that save us but our faith, our belief in what God has done for us.

Day 377 Gal 3:21

"Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law."

This is part of a passage where Paul explains the relationship between the covenant, the law, and the promise. The covenant was given to Abraham. It established a relationship between God and Abraham that God would use to fulfill the promise. Before the promise was fulfilled the law was given.

As has been said many times by Paul and again in this passage, the law was given to guide the people in understanding sin and how we can never fully repay the debt that is caused by our sin. The promise is fulfilled in Christ who was sent to pay the debt fully.

The sacrifices of the law were never enough. They had to be repeated. The sacrifice of Jesus is all-sufficient for everyone and all time.

Now comes Paul's comment that if the law could restore life and so make righteousness possible then there was no need for Jesus. That is clearly not possible.

The law was given to reveal our sins and to reveal the need for the promise. In Jesus, the promise is fulfilled and as stated in the covenant be a blessing for all the nations. We can be righteous because the promise opens the way for us to know life and righteousness which can only come through the grace of God.

Day 378 Gal 5:5

"But by faith, we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope."

Have you ever been frustrated by someone reminding you one more time of something you promised you would do? Or someone checking to see if you completed the work you were assigned before it was due? Of course, you were frustrated.

Yet that is what Paul is doing. And each time he reminds the Galatians about the inability of the law to restore their relationship to God and allow the righteousness of God to live in them he adds another layer to why he feels this is important. Much like the person reminding you of why you need to keep your promise or get the task done as assigned.

Usually, each reminder contains stronger reasons to encourage the person, though it may not feel like encouragement, to keep working. Here Paul gives a powerful reason for leaving behind legalism and the LAW. If we could be restored by the law then Jesus' death on the cross was unnecessary.

Another reason people feel we need to remind us to do what was promised or assigned is also to be sure what we are doing is done right. No mistakes, no shortcuts. You can't leave anything out if you are going to do it right. Paul is saying the same thing. But in this case, keeping the law is hopeless and will alienate us from the one person who did it right so that we could, through the power of the Holy Spirit, receive the righteousness we all hope for.

Be thankful for the reminders. They help keep us on track so that God can do the work in us.

Day 379 Eph 4:24

"and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

We have heard over and over that who we are and what we are, because of sin, makes it impossible to be righteous. It is a stain that cannot be removed by any means available to us. That stain makes any attempt at righteousness on our part tainted and there is no way for us to hide the evidence of its presence.

In Christ, there is an answer. We can be created anew. This is called the new self. This new self is something that God makes available to us through the action of Jesus on our behalf.

Here is the key. We have to first admit that the old self exists. All too often we live in denial. This denial permeates every aspect of our life. It even hides in what little good we do using that to convince us that we are not that bad.

Until we admit there is an old self, one corrupted by sin, we cannot move forward. Until we confess our sin and lay it aside, we cannot receive this new self. Secondly, we must also admit that in our own strength, we cannot even accomplish that task. Thankfully the Holy Spirit has been given to us and one of the key works the Holy Spirit has is to help us see our sin, confess it, and put aside the old self.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we conform to the plan God originally intended and can become new and so be righteous and holy reflecting God to others.

Day 380 Eph 5:9

"(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) "

This chapter in Ephesians is best known for the section on how husbands and wives should treat each other. But before that, Paul discusses the attributes of a person who is a child of God. He tells us to be imitators of God and that we should live a life of love. Then he proceeds to list the things that should not be part of the life of one who imitates God.

In the middle of this list, he pauses and then tells us what the fruit of such a life should be. It is a short list, but each item is critical.

Goodness – to have the capacity to treat others correctly from a heart that is aligned with God. There is a knowledge of what the right thing to do is, what is good for another person, and at the same time good for me. Think that 'what' through. Such an attitude causes one to pause before responding. Pause to listen and understand.

Righteousness – to have the capacity to live as a child of God and as a light to others. Life is lived rightly and what is right is not hidden but seen. What is right does not cause fear and anguish but hope and joy.

Truth – to have the capacity to see the truth, hear it, and speak it, in a way that reveals the truth that we are imitating God and that the life we live is truly patterned after how Christ loved us.

Day 381 Eph 6:14

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,"

We have all heard messages regarding the armor of God. Two pieces of that armor are clearly for our protection, the helmet to protect the head, the part we use to process information and make choices. The breastplate to protect the body, the part that provides the energy needed to carry out the choices we will make.

Failure of either will be disastrous.

What is more important is the purpose of these two pieces of armor. They are designed to protect the person as they enter into battle. Wearing them means you are ready for whatever conflict may come, whenever it may come.

The question is, is that how we live? Are we ready to engage the world, because we have the truth and know that it can and will protect us as we proclaim the truth that we have been given to those around us?

It is good to keep in mind that Paul was not a person who lived in the shadows. He was not a person who isolated himself from the dangers around him. He was actively involved in proclaiming the truth and he knew the danger involved. It is not a surprise that he would use the Roman soldier's armor to explain how we should live and serve. He knew the danger, but he also knew what he had to protect him as he carried out the mission.

Each of us needs to put on the armor and enter the battle for the souls of the lost.

Day 382 Phil 1:11

"filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God."

Paul is finishing up his prayer for the church in Philippi. As he ends his prayer, he prays that they will grow in love and abound more in their knowledge and depth of insight. The goal is to discern what is pure and blameless. The result of this will be that a person will be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

The conclusion of that line is very critical. The righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, and only this righteousness, will produce that which brings glory and praise to God. There is only one type of righteousness that will produce this fruit and only one way to be able to produce it, and that is in a deepening relationship with God.

It is not our relationship with the church, with other Christians, or with a key teacher that will make this possible. They may help guide us and encourage us, but they cannot produce this type of fruit.

This is the point of the prayer. That they will go deeper in their knowledge of God. That this will result in a deeper insight into what God is doing and can do in their lives. The key is the desire to know God, and His word, and so grow in our ability to know God's love and express this love to others.

It is a short prayer. It is a crucial prayer. It is what we should desire. It is the key to being filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Day 383 Phil 3:4-6

“ 4 …If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

How many of us could even come close to making the claims Paul made about living according to man’s concept of righteousness and the law? I doubt that any of us could. He was the ultimate Pharisee. Ideal in the eyes of his peers. Highly respected in the religious world of the Hebrews and given a great deal of authority and power. He was going places and rising to the pinnacle of fame and honor in that world.

And then it all came crashing down as he met the Lord and realized the emptiness and futility of the life he was living. He had it all and as he states he saw it as a loss, a wasted effort. To know Christ became the center of his desires and everything else faded away. No, they didn’t fade away he abandoned them, treating them as rubbish is the word he uses.

The question before us always is, what is there in our lives that we think has value, but when we focus on Christ is revealed to be rubbish?

Actually, the deeper question is: will we allow Christ to reveal to us the rubbish in our lives so that we can know Him?

Day 384 Phil 3:9

"and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

Have you ever been to a costume party? Have you ever worn clothes from another culture? Have you ever put on clothes that represent a different lifestyle or line of work? All of us have done this and for a little while and in a limited way try to take on the appearance and manners of whatever costume we are wearing.

Now think about this: How often do we do something similar when it comes to creating the appearance of being a Christian? We put on new clothes in the form of our activities, our words, and our outward behavior when in fact nothing has changed behind the mask of the costume.

Look at it the other way. How many people use a costume to avoid being recognized? Why would someone do that?

Paul is challenging us to evaluate our appearance, in our own eyes and in the eyes of others and especially of God. Righteousness is not a costume you put on. It is about building a relationship with God that will renew you from within so that whatever you are wearing will allow you to reveal one thing above all else - your relationship with God. Not your relationship with a church, a system of law, or a particular theology.

The most important clothing we need to wear comes from God based on our faith in Christ who will provide the correct attire so the world will see him and not me.

Day 385 1 Tim 6:11

" But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."

I have noticed that there are two kinds of people when a potentially dangerous situation is occurring. There are those who flee and those who, like moths to a flame, are attracted to or drawn to the danger. In my mind, it makes little sense to run to a place of danger unless you have a specific function, like a rescue worker or police, etc. It makes more sense to find a place of safety.

I realize that there are many types of danger and how we respond to each one can and will be different. But in general, it is wiser to flee and evaluate. There are some though for which there is only one option, like a tornado, or a tsunami, to flee.

In this passage, Paul is telling Timothy what to flee and why. There are traps and temptations that are just not worth checking out. There is no better option than to flee.

More important though is where one flees to. If your goal does not make it possible to escape the danger then it will overtake you. Sometimes you can't run far enough. Again, Paul helps Timothy not only to flee but also to know where to flee to in order to be safe from the danger. In the list of places, he is told to pursue righteousness, which is the first on the list.

Pursuing God and what He desires in our lives will provide us the safety we need from any and all dangers, both physical and spiritual. Flee to God to find shelter and hope.

Day 386 2 Tim 2:22

"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

When you make lists do you consider the order of importance of what is in the list? Do you think that I need this first and this last? Paul is making a list. He starts with these positive items and in the next verse a list of negative things to avoid. Then finally how putting things in their proper order will make it possible to help others.

There are two other features of the first list that are worth noting. He first states two options, flee the evil desires in order to pursue what is good. Righteousness heads up this list. Then he makes another very important point. Do this in the company of others who also call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

This makes it clear that you can appear to pursue what is good on the surface in order to appear righteous, a common problem as we have seen. Or you can pursue what is good for the correct reasons. There is one way for us to keep things in focus and that is to be in fellowship with others who have the same goal and direction.

When we seek out others who desire to be righteous, they will help us evaluate our motives, help make critical changes to keep us on track and be an encouragement to us in those times when we are struggling. Most important they will help us avoid the pitfall of self-righteousness.

Day 387 2 Tim 3:16-17

How many of us like to read the training manual for anything? How many of us receive a box that says, 'requires assembly' and are excited to read the instructions? If you are like me, you groan at even the sight of these materials.

But we all know that if we want to assemble the item, then reading the instructions is critical. And if it relates to the job or work we are doing, we will soon realize that most of our questions will be answered in the manual and we will receive clear guidelines, so we can be effective and productive in the work.

Of course, that depends on the quality of the instructions or manual. There are those who need another manual to interpret or understand what has been given to guide us and those who create frustration. There are also those that are so detailed and long that it seems hopeless to ever get through them much less understand them.

In this passage, Paul reminds us that we have a manual that tells us everything we need to know about how to live and reflect the righteousness of God. Better yet, it is a perfect manual that has been prepared by the creator who knows everything about us and exactly what is needed for the manual to be our perfect guide. The key is we need to study it thoroughly if we want to receive all that it can provide.

Day 388 2 Tim 4:8

"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

Paul is nearing the end of his life. As he contemplates the days that are left to him, he uses phrases like fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. He talks about pouring out his life as an offering and then reflects on what lies ahead, a crown.

We have no idea what this crown will be or look like. There are passages that suggest the crown is those who have heard and responded because of the life Paul has lived (Ph 4:1, 1 Th 2:19). James and John call it the crown of life (Ja 1:12, Rev 2:10).

What is clear is that in some way those who have been faithful will be honored. Those who long for Christ's appearance will receive special recognition from the Lord.

Stop and think about your life. Not about how close death may be but how close life is. It doesn't matter where you are in the race, at the start, midway, or nearing the end. What matters is how you are doing in being faithful to the One who has called you. What matters is your willingness to pour out your life in service to the One who called you.

We all should take time on a regular basis to be sure the race we are running is the one that will result in the crown Christ is preparing for us.

Day 389 Heb 1:8-9

“ 8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

How does one decide who has the right to be the ruler? Does one rule because they were born into the right family? Does one rule because all the people have voted and agreed to let that person rule? Does one rule because they have gathered the power necessary to force people to submit?

Make it more personal. Who rules in your family, in your small group of friends, or at your place of work? In every situation in life, we are faced with this reality, of finding the right person to rule or lead.

In this passage, the author is establishing the right of Jesus to rule all of the universe. He covers birthright, You are the Son of God. He covers power, You laid the foundations of the earth. He covers the right to lead in the fact that all the angels are His servants.

Then the author adds another feature. Jesus loves righteousness above all else, and this will be the basis of His rule and it will open the way for those who accept His right rule to experience joy. A joy that is only possible when righteousness is the basis of authority.

Do we understand this? Do we desire this? Will we join with the author and proclaim Jesus as Lord?

Day 390 Heb 5:13-14

“ 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

What kind of person are you? Are you a child that needs someone to tell them what to do and how to do it? Are you a youth who wants to make their own decisions and often rebels against the authority of others? Are you an adult capable of understanding what is happening and able to make wise decisions? Or Are you a mature adult, one who is able to guide others in the process of exploring and understanding the world around them? A person who is training themselves to see the truth and is then able to help others discover it as well?

There are a lot of questions to think about here. Are you waiting for the food to be prepared for you or are you the one preparing the food for others?

When we understand righteousness this will open the way for us to become mature, and able to handle the deeper truths that God has prepared for each of us. Not only that, it will help us see how to guide others; from being fed, to feeding themselves, and then being capable of feeding others.

In the next chapter, the author presents the challenge. Leave behind the elementary teachings and go on to maturity.

It is like this. Who would ever consider only eating once a week? If that is their decision then that person is dying or dead. Instead, we need to be fed daily. And yet, how many people choose to feed their souls only once a week? And we wonder why we are weak and righteousness is not to be found.

Day 391 Heb 12:11

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

How many of us enjoy exercise? How many of us have a routine that allows us to exercise? How many of us actually plan to exercise? Unfortunately looking at the waists of the people around us the evidence is clear that not enough of us are concerned about exercise and its importance in maintaining our health.

There is a key reason that so many don't benefit from regular exercise. It takes work and the results are not usually seen immediately. We tend to want to see change in days when it will probably take weeks and months before real change is seen. It also means making significant changes in how we use our time and resources.

All of this requires discipline. Now the passage uses the concept of correction when referring to discipline and that is important. We need to be corrected in our attitudes but that also means having the discipline to accept the correction and make the changes necessary to benefit from corrective discipline.

The author tells us that true discipline that yields a disciplined life will produce a harvest of righteousness. Living a life of righteousness will require exercise, and a change in our lives to allow for us to develop in this critical area. Like all exercise for the body, there is no quick way to the righteous life. It takes practice, it takes a disciplined life that knows that the benefits to be gained far outweigh the effort involved.

Day 392 James 2:23-26

“ 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Tell me, would you put Abraham and Rahab in the same paragraph while talking about faith and being righteous? The one called by God to bless all nations and a prostitute who chose to protect the two enemy spies.

It is not a comparison we would usually make but James does. He is trying to make a point that true faith, the type that actually produces righteousness, results in actions. For Abraham, the list is filled with mistakes and steps of faith. Day by day learning what it meant to believe in God and how to live according to that faith.

For Rahab, it meant listening to all she was hearing and deciding if the God of the Israelites was truly worth following. She chose to believe, put her life at risk, and then became one of the women listed in the genealogy of Jesus.

Step by step we need to do the same. We need to decide what we believe and then in faith live according to that faith. That is what will produce righteousness that is real and visible.

Day 393 James 3:17-18

“ 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

There are two types of wisdom. There is wisdom that is from man. It may appear to be good and useful but behind the façade, it is selfish and filled with envy. There is always an ulterior motive. It may be hard to detect but it is there. Altruism is its most lofty form but even that word suggests that one person is looking down on another.

True wisdom is what is described in this passage. These words will judge our motives and purposes and clearly reveal if what we offer is from heaven. This list of words starts with pure, which means untainted by sin. Only God can provide wisdom with this quality. This means each of the following is dependent on whether it is God working in and through us, or just us trying to appear wise.

The conclusion is critical. Such wisdom will produce people who are peacemakers, and they sow a unique and special seed, reconciliation with God. Cared for properly, which only can be done using the wisdom from heaven, and this action on their part will produce righteousness.

Think again about the terms used to describe the wisdom from heaven. These are all terms that describe a person who is reconciled with God and lives a righteous life. This person will produce the harvest mentioned here in their life and the lives of others.

Day 394 1 Peter 2:24

" He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

So many sermons. So many programs. So many devotionals. They all try their best to convey to us the incredible price, and the incredible suffering that Jesus experienced in order to pay for our sins and open the door to reconciliation with God. So that we could die to our sin and all its destruction. So that we could live a life of righteousness.

The focus is on the physical pain and anguish. But what about the emotional and spiritual cost of such a choice? Jesus had to live in the public eye without break. He had to be open to all so that all could determine if He was hiding anything. He had to make no slip-ups in words or thoughts during His entire life. And especially during those last days, hours, minutes, and all while He was tormented by His enemies and everyone else.

He broke all those chains. The chains that bind us to a lifestyle of deceit and scheming to hide the truth. We cannot live for five minutes without some kind of protection to hide the truth.

Jesus' life, yes all of his life, made the death even more powerful. He showed what it meant to live free of deception, scheming, and bondage to sin. It was His life that gave His death its power. And that is the power made available to us so that we could live unchained.

Day 395 2 Peter 1:1

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:"

Have you ever struggled to write the right introduction for a letter? Have you ever thought through the purpose of what you are about to write and how those first words could be critical in helping the reader desire to read what follows?

The right introduction is so important especially if what you will be sharing involves teaching on how to live as a Christian. The truth is we make a big deal of the introductions of speakers and guests. We want people to know how important what will be shared is by setting the stage for what lies ahead.

This is quite an introduction. It puts everything in perspective and the key point is that all who are or will read this short letter have been redeemed by Jesus' act of sacrifice. More importantly, all they enjoy is because of the righteousness of God. It is through this act that Jesus came. It is through this act that we have access to faith in God. It is through this act that we can receive the teaching we need so that we can honor the gift that has been given.

The righteousness of God means that all we have received is perfect and so is precious. Now that we know clearly what we have, we can hear the words we need to hear to maintain our lives in accordance with what we have received.

Day 396 2 Peter 2:5

"if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;"

Most of the time when we think of Noah we focus on the ark and the flood and of course all the animals. It is an incredible story.

What we miss is the back story. Noah was considered a righteous man and God saw this and chose to save him and his family. We don't know much about the family, but one thing is clear they listened to the words of Noah and likely helped him build the ark, gather the food needed for all the animals, and care for them. They also had to suffer all the abuse directed at them because of their association with Noah. This we all know and hear about.

What we don't often hear in the stories is what is mentioned here in this passage. Noah was not only the builder of the ark, but he was also a preacher of righteousness. He was not focused only on saving his family but on trying to convince others of their doom if they continued to live the way they were living in rejection of God.

It must have been incredibly disheartening to watch the people reject the message. But this passage is a reminder that we all have this responsibility as well. In the midst of all we do to care for our lives, we need to be sure we are telling others of their need for God. Even when they will not listen.

Day 397 2 Peter 2:21

"It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them."

Do we understand the word regret? Do we understand the idea that we knew the right thing to do, the right way to go, and yet chose the wrong way? Do we understand the cost of knowing what is right and yet choosing to do it our way instead of the correct way?

How much do we lose in this process of going, doing, saying, and acting what is wrong when we know what is right? What happens in our hearts and minds when we finally realize what we have done, and worse realize that what has been done cannot be undone?

The words cannot be taken back. The time wasted in the wrong activity cannot be recovered. The time, energy, and finances used cannot be recovered. The relationships cannot be restored except at great cost. The trust lost will be difficult to restore. The list of losses is long and disheartening.

How much worse for the person who discovers the path of righteousness, the way back to God, and yet chooses to follow their own path? Much worse, the person who starts down the right path and then decides to abandon it? All in the name of doing what I want instead of what the Lord wants.

The Bible tells the way to avoid this. Keep your eyes fixed on the author of our faith (He 12:2). Take time to stop and make sure that is where your focus is today.

Day 398 2 Peter 3:13

"But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

The topic of this passage is the coming day of the Lord. It is coming but according to God's plan. It is coming and though it seems delayed it is not. It is coming and will bring sweeping changes. The earth as we know it will be swept away. The sin associated with it will be brought to an end. There will be judgment. Even the heavens will be destroyed.

In all of this judgment, there is one thing that will remain, righteousness. The new earth and heavens will be the home of righteousness. That means all of those who have sought God and lived according to his plan for righteousness can look forward to entering into this place that God promised he would prepare for the faithful.

Be patient - God is working and has you in His heart and mind. He is moving forward with His plan and we that are faithful and righteous will one day enjoy the full blessing of righteousness