



KINGDOM POETRY

Forty Daily Devotions
from the Books of
Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations

(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

Ecclesiastes

The Book of Ecclesiastes is included in the section of the Bible known as the Poetic Books. There is no specific language in the Book of Ecclesiastes to help us determine the actual date that it was written. However, there are several verses that strongly suggest that Solomon was the author (See 1:1, 12, 16; 2:4-9; and 12:9). Many believe that the words of 1 Kings 4:29-34 suggest that Ecclesiastes was a part of the “three thousand proverbs” and the “one thousand and five songs” that were “spoken” by Solomon. There is also no specific date given in the book, but a careful look helps us see that this was written by someone who was experiencing the more mature years of his life. The theme of this wonderful book is the comparison of a life that is filled with material pleasures and successes and the life that is filled with the joy that comes from living in obedience to the Word of God.

Song of Solomon

Like Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon is a poetic book. The entire book is actually one lengthy, poetic work. This book was incredibly significant to the Hebrew people in that it was read annually at the Passover. The book may be interpreted literally, allegorically, or typically. We will use all three of these approaches as we write the devotionals from this beautiful book. This book is titled “Song of Songs” in some translations and “Canticles” in others. The first verse of this song clearly states that this song was written by Solomon. Since several verses in this song will refer to Solomon directly, and since several other verses will refer to “the king,” some think that the story may have been written *about* Solomon and not *by* him. Whichever the case, the song may be considered as being about God and Israel, Christ, and the church, or even a husband and wife. In any case, it is a story of love and devotion, and there are many spiritual applications to be gained from its reading.

Lamentations

Although the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon make up what are known as the Poetic Books of the Bible, the Book of Lamentations is included in this devotional because it is actually a collection of five “poems” or “songs” that lament the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian captivity. In the reaction of the Israelites to their trials and persecutions, we learn some great lessons about trials and the lessons they can bring into our lives today. Lamentations is a book of *warning* and a book of *mourning*. In its few pages, we see life from the perspective of those who are experiencing God’s chastisement for their sin and rebellion.

Daily Reading Schedule

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
1	Ecclesiastes 1:1-11	2/17/2024
2	Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:5	2/18/2024
3	Ecclesiastes 2:6-14	2/19/2024
4	Ecclesiastes 2:15-26	2/20/2024
5	Ecclesiastes 3:1-8	2/21/2024
6	Ecclesiastes 3:9-22	2/22/2024
7	Ecclesiastes 4:1-12	2/23/2024
8	Ecclesiastes 4:13-5:7	2/24/2024
9	Ecclesiastes 5:8-20	2/25/2024
10	Ecclesiastes 6:1-12	2/26/2024
11	Ecclesiastes 7:1-14	2/27/2024
12	Ecclesiastes 7:15-29	2/28/2024
13	Ecclesiastes 8:1-9	2/29/2024
14	Ecclesiastes 8:10-17	3/01/2024
15	Ecclesiastes 9:1-18	3/02/2024
16	Ecclesiastes 10:1-20	3/03/2024
17	Ecclesiastes 11:1-10	3/04/2024
18	Ecclesiastes 12:1-14	3/05/2024
19	Song of Solomon 1:1-10	3/06/2024
20	Song of Solomon 1:11-2:3	3/07/2024

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
21	Song of Solomon 2:4-17	3/08/2024
22	Song of Solomon 3:1-11	3/09/2024
23	Song of Solomon 4:1-8	3/10/2024
24	Song of Solomon 4:9-16	3/11/2024
25	Song of Solomon 5:1-16	3/12/2024
26	Song of Solomon 6:1-13	3/13/2024
27	Song of Solomon 7:1-13	3/14/2024
28	Song of Solomon 8:1-14	3/15/2024
29	Lamentations 1:1-12	3/16/2024
30	Lamentations 1:13-22	3/17/2024
31	Lamentations 2:1-10	3/18/2024
32	Lamentations 2:11-22	3/19/2024
33	Lamentations 3:1-14	3/20/2024
34	Lamentations 3:15-27	3/21/2024
35	Lamentations 3:28-40	3/22/2024
36	Lamentations 3:41-54	3/23/2024
37	Lamentations 3:55-66	3/24/2024
38	Lamentations 4:1-16	3/25/2024
39	Lamentations 4:17-5:6	3/26/2024
40	Lamentations 5:7-22	3/27/2024

Day 1: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’ What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3)

The Book of Ecclesiastes contains many questions, and we encounter the first of those questions very early in the book. Verse three finds the writer asking, “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” A careful look at that first question reveals that the man writing these words is not simply frustrated with some things *in* his life, but with his life in general. He speaks of “*all* his labor in which he toils” and then uses the all-inclusive phrase “under the sun” to signify further that he is speaking about his whole life and not just parts of it. Since we believe that Solomon is the writer (or at least one of the writers) of this book, I cannot help but notice that a man who was known to be one of the richest and wisest men of his generation found himself frustrated with life in general and struggling to find purpose in his existence. It is important to note that the writer did not question the existence of God. The writer includes God throughout the book. However, he seems to have authored this book from the perspective of one who has somehow lost sight of God’s purpose in his own life due to his infatuation with material things. As you read through this book, you will see it is written by a person who was obviously a believer in God, but you will also notice that you will not find the writer referring to God as “Lord” even once in the entire book. Understanding that may help us to better understand the writer’s frustrations.

Prayer Emphasis: **Commit** to a daily reading program and **be faithful** to spending time in God’s Word every day. **Watch** for signs that the writer is a believer who has become disillusioned with a life lived without knowing God as his “Lord.” **Ask** God to help you avoid making that same mistake.

Day 2: Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:5

“And I set my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.” (Ecclesiastes 1:13)

At first glance it might seem that the words “seek” and “search out” are synonymous and that repetition might have been used here for the purpose of emphasis. However, the Hebrew words that are translated “seek” and “search out” in our focus verse each have their own, different meaning. Both are verbs. The first means “to seek or enquire.” This same word is sometimes translated “enquire” or even “require” in the Bible. It is a word that means “to seek with a demand.” It implies that the person doing the “seeking” is committed to finding answers to his questions. Thus, the phrase “I set my heart” that precedes “to seek and to search out.” It is a search that will not be denied. The “set heart” of this believer was determined to find the answers to his questions about life and its divine purpose. The second verb, “search out,” comes from a Hebrew verb that is first found in the Bible in the Book of Numbers. There it is used to explain how the Israelites “departed from the mountain of the LORD (Sinai) on a journey of three days...to *search out* a resting place from them” (Numbers 10:33). It is then used to describe the mission of the spies who were sent to “*spy out* the land of Canaan” (Numbers 13:2). In a sense, Solomon was saying that he considered it time to closely examine what he had done with his life and see where it all fit into the God’s plan for life.

Prayer Emphasis: **Set** your own heart to “seeking” and “searching out” the things of life and their purposes. **Examine** carefully the individual parts and pieces of your life and then **enquire** as to how they fit into the larger picture – the Lord’s plan! **Ask** God to help you live with His purposes in mind.

Day 3: Ecclesiastes 2:6-14

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor...I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

It is obvious that Solomon first sought value and meaning in life through the things which he *accomplished*, as well as through the things he *acquired*. In chapter two, verses four through six, you will find the words “I made” or “I built” several times. Then, in verses seven and eight, you will see words such as “I acquired,” “I had,” or “I gathered” at least three times in most translations. In verse nine, Solomon then declared that, as a result of all of the making and building and getting and gathering, “I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.” It is clear to see that, although Solomon wasn’t blind, he definitely had an “I” problem! His “I” problem then led to an “eye” problem. He went on to say, “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them” (v. 10). Verse 10 goes on to state that Solomon found “pleasure” in his work and his “heart rejoiced” in his labors. However, verse 11 reports that Solomon then “looked on all the works that (his) hands had done and on the labor on which (he) had toiled” and then declared it all to be “vanity” and there was “no profit” to be found in it. In essence, when Solomon said, “I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem” (v. 9), he was saying that he had done more and acquired more than any man who ever lived before him and yet he found no eternal profit in all that he made or acquired.

Prayer Emphasis: Recognize the foolishness of seeking self-worth through possessions or accomplishments. **Avoid** having “I” trouble in your own life by keeping your “eyes” on God and His purposes.

Day 4: Ecclesiastes 2:15-26

“Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.” (Ecclesiastes 2:17-18)

One can only imagine how frustrating it might be to have acquired more and accomplished more than anyone who ever lived before him and still find it all to be “distressing” and “vanity” to the point that you “hated all (your) labor in which (you) had toiled.” The word that is translated “distressing” in the NKJV and other translations is also translated “grievous,” “troublesome,” and even “loathsome” in some other versions. And what was the most “distressing” part about it? I believe it was the fact that Solomon realized far too late that it was all done for this life and that not much of what he had acquired or accomplished counted for the life to come. In other words, I believe Solomon came to the end of his life and sadly discovered that – based on the little eternal value found in his works – he could not take it with him! In verse 17, Solomon concluded that his trying to find self-worth in his “stuff” was like trying to grasp the wind! In other words, it just couldn’t be done! How sad it must have been for the richest and wisest man of his day to conclude that the results of all his labors meant so little to him here and that it counted for virtually nothing where eternity was concerned.

Prayer Emphasis: Seek to live for the eternal and not for the temporal. **Realize** that it is wise to invest in the future – but it is even wiser to invest in the eternal! When someone says - “You can’t take it with you!” – remind them that it really depends on what “it” is! If “it” was done for God’s glory, then “it” will probably be seen again in heaven!

Day 5: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Psalms 31 was written during a time when a terrible plague had come upon God’s people during which, over a three-day period, at least 70,000 men died (See 1 Chronicles 21). In that Psalm, David cried out to God saying, “I am in trouble...my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing...I am like a broken vessel” (Psalm 31:9-10 & 12). However, during those terrible, trying times, David declared, “My times are in Your hand” (Psalm 31:15). David knew what it was like to experience good times and troubled times, and he knew how to allow God the privilege of determining those times for him. The word that David used in Psalm 32 to express his willingness to accept both good and tough times from God’s hand is the same word that Solomon used here in Ecclesiastes 3 to discuss the different “times” that come into a person’s life. Solomon created a list of 14 “opposites” to help us see that life moves back and forth between that which we might consider to be good or bad. Although we do not know the definite meanings of all the sayings, we do know that “a time to be born” is the opposite of “a time to die.” The same can be said about planting and harvesting, killing and healing, weeping and laughing, and mourning and dancing. The list goes on. Solomon is helping us understand exactly what David meant when he said, “My times are in Your hands.” Life cannot always be about what we want. At some time, we must learn to accept all the times and seasons that God introduces and allows into our lives.

Prayer Emphasis: Believe that God has a purpose for every “season” of your life. Like Paul, **learn** to be content in whatever conditions (or “time”) you are experiencing in your life right now (Philippians 4:11). **Trust** that God knows what is best for you and that He will do what is best for you at all “times.”

Day 6: Ecclesiastes 3:9-22

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

While most translations use the word “beautiful” in our focus verse, some have used such words as “appropriate” or “fitting.” The Hebrew word that is found here is found in only one other verse in Ecclesiastes, but it serves well to help us better understand its full meaning. Ecclesiastes 5:18 says, “Here is what I have seen: It is good and *fitting* for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good in all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.” Rather than “fitting,” some translations use the word “appropriate,” “proper,” or even “comely” here. In either case, the idea is clear. It is absolutely fitting, appropriate, and proper for a person to enjoy the fruits of his labors. In the same sense, our focus verse declares that God has brought all the different “times” or “seasons” into our lives at the “appropriate,” “proper,” or “fitting” time! When the believer is living in full submission to the will of God, the challenging times are accepted and understood to be in our best interest at the moment. I have often said that I would rather be, at God’s direction, in a boat tossed back and forth on the stormy seas than to be experiencing smooth sailing outside of the will of God. A careful look at the first part of today’s focus verse will reveal that the Bible does not state that “everything (is) beautiful in its time” but that “*He has made* everything beautiful in its time.”

Prayer Emphasis: Trust God to always know and do what is best for you – and at the best and most appropriate time! **Read** Romans 8:28 today, and if you haven’t already done so, **commit** that wonderful verse to memory!

Day 7: Ecclesiastes 4:1-12

“Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 4:4)

As we read through the Book of Ecclesiastes, we are going to see at least seven places where Solomon deems the pursuit of material gain as being like “grasping for the wind.” The word that is translated “grasping” here in the NKJV is translated several ways in other translations of the Bible. In other versions, you will see this word translated into words and phrases like: “pursuit of the wind,” “striving after the wind,” or even “chasing” after the wind. The KJV translates the word as “vexation of spirit.” Those words clearly express how Solomon was feeling as he lived out the final years of his life. He was a man who had been everywhere and seen everything. Remember, this is the man that said, “There is nothing new under the sun!” and then asked, “Is there anything of which it may be said, ‘See, this is new?’” (1:9-10). Solomon had reached the sad conclusion that he was never going to have enough possessions or power to fulfill the longings in his heart that had been unfulfilled since the days that he removed God from being first in his life. We will find this word for “grasping for the wind” only in the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is interesting that we will then see it exactly seven times. Seven is a number associated with completeness and totality in the Bible. What Solomon is teaching us is that, even if we do and have so much that people are envious of us, we will still discover that our hearts are not fulfilled and the fulfillment we so desire is as elusive to us as the wind. One need only try to catch the wind in his hands to see exactly what Solomon was trying to tell us! Since the word “grasping” expresses continuous action, Solomon was saying that, no matter how often we try, we will always come up empty when we look to anything but God for true meaning in life.

Prayer Emphasis: Refuse to believe that joy, peace, and contentment can be found in earthly possessions! **Make sure** you are pursuing the right things and you are seeking to please the right Person!

Day 8: Ecclesiastes 4:13-5:7

“Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.” (Ecclesiastes 5:1)

The word that is translated “prudently” in the NKJV is an often-used word in the Bible that is translated in several ways, with “keep,” “observe,” “watch,” and even “beware” being some of them. Some translations use phrases such as “guard your steps,” “keep your foot,” or “watch your step” here. To “walk prudently” is to do exactly that! It means we are to “be aware” (hence “beware”) of our practices and purposes when we come to the house of God. We assemble for many reasons, but “to draw near to hear” is the most important purpose for attending worship. Hearing the word of God is to be our primary purpose for attending our church services. Without God’s Word to direct us, we will soon find all our good works and religious efforts to be no more than “the sacrifice of fools.” Most scholars believe that Solomon had the story of Saul’s foolish sacrifice (1 Samuel 15) in mind when he wrote these words. In that story, we read where Saul offered sacrifices to God from material things, which God had clearly told him to destroy. Any sacrifice (or religious work) that is not based on obedience to God and His Word is clearly deemed to be “foolish” in His eyes! When our *works* do not align with His *Word*, then God equates those works with the doing of “evil.”

Prayer Emphasis: Be aware that it is possible to do the right things in a wrong way or at the wrong time! **Remember** to allow no action, no matter how well intended, to take priority and precedence over what is clearly stated in the Bible. **Make sure** that you “draw near to hear!”

Day 9: Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?” (Ecclesiastes 5:10-11)

If any man could have ever obtained happiness, peace of mind, and contentment from power and possessions, it would have been Solomon. When we read through 1 Kings, we saw where God told Solomon that He would give him “riches and honor” to the point that there would “not be anyone like (him) among the kings all (his) days” (1 Kings 3:13). The Bible reveals several means by which God gave those riches to Solomon. 1 Kings 10:14 reveals that the revenue from just one source of annual income alone would be the equivalent to approximately \$1.1 billion dollars today. When we remember that Solomon reigned over Israel for 40 years (1 Kings 11:42), we must assume that his net worth was an extremely high figure! Yet, Solomon here declared that the person “who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver.” In other words, Solomon was trying to teach us that, when it comes to money and material possessions, it is quite possible that we will never feel that we have enough! One of the richest men in American history was once asked, “How much money is enough?” His sad reply was, “Just one more dollar than what you already have!” The word that is translated “satisfied” in our focus verses is translated “filled,” “full,” and even “enough” in other places in the Bible. One of Solomon’s sayings in Proverbs provides us a clear understanding of how he learned to feel about the value of money. Proverbs 3:13-14 says, “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold.”

Prayer Emphasis: Learn the lessons that the wise man is trying to teach us! **Forsake** the idea that fame and fortune will bring fulfillment to your life. **Desire** the Savior more than silver and God more than gold!

Day 10: Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

“All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied.” (Ecclesiastes 6:7)

Somewhere between Moses and Jesus, lived an extraordinarily rich and powerful man named Solomon who learned the value of some wise words spoken by both the former and the latter. Those words were, “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4). The Greek word translated “live” in the quote from Jesus means “to enjoy real life” or “to appreciate true life.” It took Solomon many years to learn the lesson that he tried desperately to share with others in his spiritual writings, that being: “Money, power, prestige and possessions hold no real, lasting benefit to our spiritual man!” Several translations render the word that is translated “soul” here in the NKJV as “appetite.” However, I must point out to you that those same versions usually translated that word as “appetite” in no more than two places while translating the same word as “soul” approximately 475 times! The point that Solomon is trying to make to us is that our “soul,” the inner, eternal person that lives within us, cannot be satisfied with that which mere human hands can provide. Since it was God Who “formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7), it is only God that can fulfill us. God gave man something that He did not provide for any other thing that He created. When God “breathed” into Adam’s nostrils, God imparted part of Himself into Adam. It is that “soul” which God has put within us that we must learn to nurture and for which we must live to provide. We must look only to God for that which our souls need.

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that we need to nurture and feed our physical bodies while being careful to provide for that part of us that is spiritual and eternal. **Read to feed** your soul – your inner man!

Day 11: Ecclesiastes 7:1-14

“A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth; better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart.” (Ecclesiastes 7:1-2)

The “precious ointment” that Solomon was referring to in this statement was known to be something of immense value to the people of his times. However, Solomon here reminded his listeners (or readers) that “a good name” (witness, testimony, or reputation) was something of much greater value. Most of us can read that statement and add to it a hearty “Amen!” But the statement that follows causes us to pause and reflect on what exactly Solomon meant by the words, “the day of death” is better “than the day of one’s birth.” Those of us who have the privilege of living with a New Testament perspective can most assuredly understand what Solomon was trying to say here. We live with the same understanding as the Apostle Paul. We know that “to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21) because “to be absent from the body” means that we are immediately “present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). When we think of the “house of mourning” and “the house of feasting,” we must remember that the One who inspired these words knew both “houses” very well. Our Savior knew how to enjoy a feast with friends and associates (such as the one He attended at the home of Levi in Luke 5:29), and He knew what it was to visit the house of the mourning (such as the case with the home of Lazarus after his death in John 11). I assure you, there is much more revealed about the power of God in the story of His visit to the home of the grieving family and the graveside of Lazarus than from the story of the great feast that was held in His honor in Levi’s home.

Prayer Emphasis: Thank God for the reality of Heaven and for the blessed hope of eternal life that God has given to those who simply believe on His name! If possible, **mention** heaven to someone that you encounter today.

Day 12: Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

“Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.” (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22)

During my Bible college training, one of the books I was assigned to read was Charles Spurgeon’s *Lectures to My Students*. It was a multi-volume book containing messages that the great preacher delivered to his many ministerial students. One of the lectures was titled “The Blind Eye and the Deaf Ear.” In that lecture (chapter), Spurgeon had this to say about critical comments and remarks: “Do not take them to heart or let them weigh with you, do not notice them, or act as if you heard them. You cannot stop people’s tongues, and therefore the best thing is to stop your own ears! There is a world of idle chit-chat abroad, and he who takes note of it will have enough to do. He will find that even those who live with him are not always singing his praises and that when he has displeased his most faithful servants they have, in the heat of the moment, spoken fierce words which it would be better for him not to have heard.” Solomon had something incredibly wise to add to these thoughts. Solomon suggested that, if we would only examine the testimony of our “own heart,” we would see that we have also been guilty of saying critical and hurtful things about others “many times.” How wise we would be if we would practice *tuning out* the things that others have to say *about* us while *turning up* the volume on what God has to say *to* us!

Prayer Emphasis: Refuse to allow what others have to say to discourage you. **Remind yourself** daily that God has many wonderful things to say about His children! **Refuse** to be distracted from your mission! Always **get** God’s opinion first before expressing any opinion about one of His children!

Day 13: Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

“No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.” (Ecclesiastes 8:8)

In verse 4 of today’s reading, Solomon declared, “Where the word of a king is, there is power (authority) and who may say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” But, as we get to our focus verse, we see there is a certain kind of “power” that “no one has,” not even the most powerful and influential person of his day. That power is the power, or authority, over life and death. Solomon clearly emphasized that “no one has power in the day of death.” Earlier, in verse seven, Solomon lamented that man “does not know what will happen” or when certain things might “occur.” As we come to these statements about death, it might occur to us that Solomon, with all his material possessions and great wealth, had found yet another thing that his money could not buy. Since we know that the Book of Ecclesiastes was written in the latter years of King Solomon’s life, it is certain that he was beginning to think about death and the hereafter. In spite of all of the power that he had as a king, he knew that when it came to his day to die, he would be as powerless to prevent that event from occurring as the poorest, most humble man in his kingdom. Hebrews 9:27 declares that “It is appointed for men to die.” At the time of the writing of this book, Solomon was obviously becoming convinced that his “appointment” was something beyond his control. In 3:2, he said there was “a time to be born, and a time to die.” Then, in 3:20, he said, “All are from the dust, and all return to dust.”

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that there are certain rules and laws to which there are no exceptions. Unless the rapture of the church takes place in our lifetimes, we will all someday face our appointment with death. **Examine** your own spiritual life and be sure you are ready to face death, and ultimately, God.

Day 14: Ecclesiastes 8:10-17

“There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 8:14)

In verses 12 and 13, Solomon stated it had always been his belief “that it will be well with those who fear God” and it would “not be well with the wicked...because he does not fear before God.” The idea of the word “fear” in verse 13 implies that the wicked lived with no “respect” for God whatsoever. Because of that, Solomon always believed that life would repay them for their wrong attitudes and actions towards God. However, the longer Solomon lived, the more perplexed the wisest man on the face of the earth became with some things that he observed. One of those perplexing things in Solomon’s life was that he witnessed some “just men” who experienced things he had been taught were associated with the punishment of evildoers while, on the other hand, he had seen some “wicked men” who seemed to enjoy the blessings that he once believed were only allocated to the righteous. Solomon’s struggle with these types of issues only magnified his opinion that life was filled with “vanity” and that virtuous deeds were often done in vain. This same concern still plagues believers today. Often, we simply cannot understand why righteousness is not openly rewarded or why wickedness sometimes seems to go unpunished. We should all remember that we are only seeing things from an earthly perspective and we do not have the privilege here to view God’s records in Heaven.

Prayer Emphasis: Review Isaiah 55:8-9 today and **accept** God’s explanation that His “thoughts” and “ways” are higher than ours. **Trust God** when He says that “all things work together for good to those who love” Him (Romans 8:28). **Believe** that you are not an exception to that rule!

Day 15: Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

“All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.” (Ecclesiastes 9:2)

The above statement, and others like it found in Ecclesiastes, is all part of what I call Solomon’s “under the sun” mentality. Depending on which translation of the Bible you are reading, you should be able to find the phrase “under the sun” as many as 28 times in Ecclesiastes. There are some who believe that this phrase simply meant something like “on this earth.” However, many believe that it means much more than that. It was more likely a term that Solomon used to express all he had seen and heard in life – no matter where he was or who he was with. It came to represent an expression that Solomon used to say that some things were universal, that it was always going to be the same no matter who or where you were. However, Solomon then concluded that there was one, major, defining difference between the believers and the unbelievers. That difference is found in verse four and it is found in the word “hope.” The Hebrew word that is translated “hope” here, is found only a few times in the Bible. In the NKJV, and other translations, two of the three times that this word is found in the Bible, it is translated “confidence.” This great possession (“hope” or “confidence”) is something that lives within those who are “joined to all the living” (v. 4). That expression simply means that “hope” belongs to those who have a personal relationship with the living God!

Prayer Emphasis: Refuse to believe that it is “hopeless” or “meaningless” to live for God and to do the things God has called you to do. **Remember** that the success or failure of the Christian life is found in obedience and not so much in what we might consider fruitfulness or blessings.

Day 16: Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.” (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

Perhaps no other section of the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us more of the Book of Proverbs than the tenth and eleventh chapters that we are reading today and tomorrow. To truly understand the first verse in this chapter, we have to look back at the closing line of yesterday’s reading where we were told that, “But one sinner destroys much good” (9:18). This point is expanded by the saying that something as small as dead flies could corrupt an entire batch of fragrant ointment. Just as one, small fly in the ointment can pollute the entire batch and render it unusable, so can “a little folly” destroy the reputation of “one respected for wisdom and honor.” The word that is translated “folly” in today’s focus verse is a word that is only found seven times in the Bible, with all seven of those times being in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The final time that we will see it will also be here in chapter 10, where we read that “the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; the words of his mouth begin with *foolishness*” (vs. 12-13). So, by divine design, we see a definite progression here. First, we read of what just “a little folly” can do to damage one’s reputation for being a person of “wisdom and honor.” Then, we see that, at least in the eyes of others, “the words of his mouth *begin* with foolishness.” The word “begin” in that phrase denotes that foolishness, or foolish talk, becomes the foundation for everything that the person is known for, and his testimony for God is damaged.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that one foolish word or remark can make a lasting impression on others and on their opinion of you and Christianity as a whole! **Guard** your words by first guarding your thoughts. **Fill** your mind with something good from God’s Word today and **pray** for an opportunity to **share** what you have learned with someone that you meet along life’s path.

Day 17: Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

Ecclesiastes 11:1 is one of my favorite verses and one of the first bits of Scripture that I ever memorized. It is a special verse to me for several reasons, and two of those reasons come to my mind every time that I read it. First, this verse is one of the signature verses for The Gideons International. I found it in the first little Gideons Bible that was placed in my hands when I was in the fifth grade in elementary school. It was that same little Bible that I relocated in my home when I was a troubled teenager and turned my heart and life over to Jesus Christ. A second reason that I love this verse is because it always reminds me of God’s laws of sowing and reaping. Anytime that I can mention those laws, I am careful to do it. The first law is that *we always reap exactly what we sow*. Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, *that* he will also reap.” Therefore, if we want to reap good things in our lives, we must be careful to sow only good things into the lives of others. The second law of sowing and reaping is that *we always reap later than we sow*. In today’s focus verse, we see the image of a man casting bread upon the waters and then again finding it, but only “after many days.” This verse supports the idea of our reaping exactly what we sow (“you will find *it*”) and then expands the teaching to show us that the reaping will always come at some time “after” (or later than) the sowing. The last of the three laws of sowing and reaping is that *we always reap more than we sow*. This is true in the natural world, and it is also true in the realm of the spiritual. Hosea 8:7 teaches us that, “They sow the *wind*, and reap the *whirlwind!*”

Prayer Emphasis: Live every day with God’s laws of sowing and reaping in mind. **Remember** these words of Jesus: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12).

Day 18: Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Today’s focus verse is another little piece of the Book of Ecclesiastes that holds some wonderful memories for me. Not long after I was saved in my teenage years, I began to speak in my own church and to other groups of young people around my city. One of my first sermons was titled “When God Says ‘Remember!’” The main point to the message was found in this verse where God (through Solomon) urged His people to “remember” Him “in the days of (their) youth.” Even back in those “days,” I often reminded young people that those wonderful, early years of their lives would seem like only “days” in their later years. (If only I had known how right I was about that!) But Solomon was saying more than “life is fleeting”. He was saying that life may very well become more “difficult” for us in our latter years. Hence, this urging to remember God now and do for Him in our *present* what we might later regret not doing when our present eventually becomes our *past*. I think that the next few verses contain some hints about how life will be for us in our latter years. In verse three, he spoke of “the day when the keepers of the house (the hands) tremble, and the strong men (the legs) bow down; when the grinders (teeth) cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows (the eyes) grow dim.” Verse four continues to say that this will be a time where “the doors (the ears) are shut in the streets and the sound of grinding is low.” Look for several other allusions to the aging process in the closing verses of this wonderful book!

Prayer Emphasis: Read and heed God’s plea for action now – while we can serve Him with our full strength. **Praise Him** for allowing us to live long enough to serve Him on a more *full-time* basis long after our *full strength* is gone. **Do** all that you can with all that you have been given.

Day 19: Song of Solomon 1:1-10

“The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.” (Song of Solomon 1:1)

As I mentioned on the introduction page, some Bibles list this book as “The Song of Solomon,” while others refer to it as “The Song of Songs.” The opening line of this poetic book helps us to understand the importance of this book to the Jewish people. This poem was read, or perhaps even sung, annually at the Passover Feast. When we read 1 Kings, we read that Solomon “spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:32). The opening line to the little book that we are reading now leads us to understand that of all of Solomon’s 1,005 songs, this was perhaps his greatest hit! Before we delve too far into what *is* in this little book, let’s take a moment to consider some of the things that are *not* in it. You will not find the word “faith” in any form (faith, faithful, faithfulness, etc.) anywhere in this book. You will not find the word “God” or “Lord” anywhere in the Song of Solomon. In fact, God is not referenced by any name or title anywhere throughout the entire book. Suffice it to say that if we found this song (poem) anywhere outside the Bible, we probably would not have recognized it as being a part of the Bible. However, the Jewish people who read it, quoted it, and sang it, were tremendously blessed by its reminder to them of their intimate relationship with God and His divine love for them. For years I have offered one suggestion to those who desire to study this book: “You have to put yourself *in it* if you want to get something *out of it*!”

Prayer Emphasis: Read through this book with the idea that the groom is the Lord, and the bride is His church. **Allow** the Holy Spirit to show you how much God loves you and how much He desires to have an intimate, loving relationship with you.

Day 20: Song of Solomon 1:11-2:3

“Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes.’ ‘Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! Also our bed is green. The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir.’” (Song of Solomon 1:15-17)

The main theme of the Song of Solomon is the love relationship between a king and a lowly Shulamite maiden. The only references to this young woman being a Shulamite are found in Song of Solomon 6:13. It is not entirely clear why God chose the title “Shulamite” for this young woman. Some have suggested that “Shulamite” is actually the feminine form of the name “Solomon.” In any case, the king and this young woman are the main characters, and their love relationship is meant to resemble the love that our heavenly King holds for us lowly human beings. Other friends and associates of the maiden and the king sometimes speak, but most of the book is about the personal expressions of love between the king and his beautiful lover. Through the eyes and words of this king, God will use this little book to allow us a closer look at how He sees His children and how we, in return, should see Him. It will help us to understand that we are beautiful in His sight and we are always on His mind. Today’s focus verses contain just a couple of the early expressions of love that these two shared with one another. You will find the words of the king in verse 15 and the response of the Shulamite maiden in verses 16-17. He considered her to be “fair” (exceptionally beautiful) and she considered him to be “handsome.” They unashamedly paid those compliments to one another. From their relationship, we should learn how to express love to God and to the special person He has given us in love and marriage.

Prayer Emphasis: Practice the fine art of expressing love through words and deeds. **Live** and **speak** in such a way that God – and the special people that He has put into your life – know that you genuinely love and admire them.

Day 21: Song of Solomon 2:4-17

“He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.” (Song of Solomon 2:4-6)

As I struggle to write these daily devotionals, I am reminded that the great English pastor and preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) preached 59 sermons from the eight chapters of this little book. Not long after I marveled at that feat, I read where Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) preached 86 sermons on chapters one and two alone! Well, I may not know the meaning of every word or phrase of this book, but I can certainly see that the Shulamite maiden was very appreciative of all that her love, the king, had done for her. One thing is quite clear from her words – the king knew how to *tell* her that he loved her, and he also knew how to *show* her that he loved her! Her expression, “He brought me to the banqueting house” was a way of saying “he has filled me with the knowledge and awareness of his love for me.” Her expression “His banner over me was love” referred to the fact that he openly and unashamedly expressed his love for her and she believed that his love for her was evident for all to see. The reference to “raisins” and “apples” is yet another indication of how she feels “full” of the notion that she is truly and deeply loved. Her words “I am lovesick” imply that her thoughts, dreams, ambitions, and longings were only for him and that she was not complete when she was not with him. The idea of “his left hand” being “under (her) head, and his right hand” embracing her expresses the psychological and physical support that were derived from his expressions of love to her.

Prayer Emphasis: **Learn** how to express love and **practice** doing it on a daily basis! **Attempt** to be to others what God has always been to you by **being** very *visible* and *vocal* in your love for others. **Realize** that a sincere “I love you!” needs no explanation.

Day 22: Song of Solomon 3:1-11

“By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him but I did not find him. ‘I will rise now,’ I said, ‘And go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love.’” (Song of Solomon 3:1-2)

I will confess that today’s focus verses contain the only two verses in Song of Solomon that I have ever used for a text in a sermon. I have referred to this book often in my sermons, but as best that I can recall, I only used a verse from Song of Solomon as my main text that one time! (And, for the record, I have been preaching a *very* long time!) The words, “by night on my bed” imply that the Shulamite maiden, the bride to be, is either dreaming or imagining the time when she will share the marriage bed with her beloved. The verses clearly teach that she had a strong longing to be with him and that she missed him greatly when she could not share his company. The Song of Solomon has a lot to say literally about the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, but it also has much to say spiritually about the marriage of the church to the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. If we, as a church, desire to spend time with Christ, then we need to go to where He is! We, like the soon-to-be bride in this song, must say, “I will rise now” and get busy about the business of going to my beloved to spend time with him. Where did she expect to find him? Verse two states that she expected to find him “in the streets and in the squares.” We, like this young woman, must realize that Jesus is still out among the people – still seeking to save the lost – just as He was in the times of the gospels.

Prayer Emphasis: **Seek** to have a common interest with Jesus Christ by learning to love and pursue the lost. **Notice** that verse four states that the Shulamite maiden was eventually able to say, “I found the one I love.” Jesus is still busy seeking the lost – **go** and **join** Him in that mission!

Day 23: Song of Solomon 4:1-8

“You are all fair, my love. And there is no spot in you.” (Song of Solomon 4:7)

Since verses 6-10 of yesterday’s chapter describe a wedding procession, and since the last verse in that chapter (verse 11) speaks of a “wedding,” we understand that the words recorded from chapter four forward, are words now being spoken between a husband and his wife. Just a word of warning to all our male readers – the love language that Solomon used here might not be appropriate for us today! For example, I am not sure that our wives would be flattered if we compared them to “goats” (v. 1) or “sheep” (v. 2). However, there is one especially important thing that the bridegroom has to say to his bride, and he says it three times in today’s verses. In verse one, he twice tells her that she is “fair.” Then, he tells her that same thing once more in verse seven. In verse one, he complimented her “eyes” and her “hair.” In verse three, he compliments her “lips.” As you read the remaining verses of today’s scripture, you will see that he had other flattering things to say about her, but they seem kind of private to me! However, in today’s verses, you will see that he told her three times that she was “fair.” Many translations use the word “beautiful” to translate the Hebrew word that is found in the manuscripts. This word for “fair” or “beautiful” is found more often in Song of Solomon than any other book in the Bible. At least three times, he told her that she was the “fairest” or most beautiful “among women” (1:8, 5:9, 6:1). When he said, “There is no spot in you,” he was basically saying to her, “In my eyes, you are perfect!”

Prayer Emphasis: **Affirm** your love and appreciation for your spouse on a regular basis. **Be faithful** to compliment her (or him) and **express** your admiration for their many fine qualities.

Day 24: Song of Solomon 4:9-16

“How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices!” (Song of Solomon 4:10)

In chapter four, every verse except the final verse contains words spoken by the bridegroom to his bride. However, in today’s verses he moves from speaking about just her appearance by trying to describe to her the effect that she has on him and his heart. In verse nine, he stated that she “ravished” his heart. In the truest sense of that word, when put into today’s language, it would mean that she made his heart beat faster! Then, in that same verse, he told her that it only took “one look” from her to make him feel that way! In the second verse of the first chapter, the Shulamite maiden told her beloved, “Your love is better than wine.” Now, here in verse 10, we find him saying much the same thing to her. In a sense, you might say that the groom is telling his bride that she is not only very *lovely*, but that she is very *loving* as well. My mother was often heard to say, “Pretty is as pretty does!” It seems to me that this is remarkably close to what the Bible is saying here. Verse 12 contains some interesting statements that express an important issue. When the beloved stated that his wife was like “a garden enclosed,” “a spring shut up,” and “a fountain sealed,” he was stating his great appreciation that his bride had saved herself for him. To “enclose” a “garden,” shut up” a spring, or to “seal” a fountain meant to protect it from anyone but its rightful owner. We don’t hear much about “saving yourself” for your marriage partner these days, but it was important in Bible times just as it was important not so long ago in our times. It should still be important today.

Prayer Emphasis: Every marriage partner should be careful to **evaluate** their performance as a loving spouse on a regular basis. They should be careful to **communicate** their love without hesitation. And then, they should also be careful to **appreciate** the special person that God has provided them as a partner in life and in His service.

Day 25: Song of Solomon 5:1-16

“His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!” (Song of Solomon 5:16)

There are many important points to be made from the words found here in chapter five. Verse two seems to speak of some dream, or at least dream-like experience, that the newly married maiden had where she hears “the voice of (her) beloved.” If you look closely, you will see that the remaining part of verse two contains the words of the young bride, but much of what she says is her remembering, or quoting, the things that her beloved said to her. Men should never underestimate the value that women place on communication. The last verse of chapter five contains some particularly important advice for all married people. The bride says of her husband, “His mouth (probably meaning his words and his kisses) is most sweet.” She goes on to say that “He is altogether lovely.” The word “altogether” signifies that she was talking about more than good looks here. She was saying that her beloved *looked* good to her and that he *was* good *to* her and *for* her. She then referred to him as her “beloved” and her “friend.” Men (and women as well) should never forget the importance and value of being a true “friend” to their spouse. The word that is translated “friend” here is translated “companion” in at least five places in many versions of the Bible. The relationship expressed by that word is one far beyond physical love and attraction. It is used to imply a spiritual and intellectual connection that is absolutely necessary for any marriage relationship to be all that God has intended. Most married couples were good friends before they were marriage partners. If that sense of friendship has decreased, we should go to God and ask Him to restore it to what it once was and what He still desires it to be.

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for your spouse on a daily basis – several times every day. **Ask** God to show you how to be a true friend to them at all times and through all of the seasons and circumstances of life.

Day 26: Song of Solomon 6:1-13

“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine...” (Song of Solomon 6:3)

Earlier in the Song of Solomon (2:16), we heard the Shulamite maiden say something similar to this. However, at that time, she said the same thing, but in reverse order. There she said, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” This time, she reverses the order and first speaks of her sense of belonging to her husband and then his belonging to her. In either case – however you say it – this is a statement that expresses a sense of belonging. There is an especially important lesson about love relationships and marriage to be learned from this verse. As a couple grows together in Christ, each partner should become more aware of the needs of their partner and should begin to value those needs and prioritize them accordingly. Selfishness is an undermining root of evil in any relationship, and it can cause even the strongest of relationships to become weak and unstable. From this verse, we should learn something about the principle of mutual possession. One-sided affection is incomplete, unsatisfying, and unhappy, and it may even be disastrous. The basis for real friendship and a deeply committed marriage relationship requires a mutual love and reciprocal kindness. The marriage relationship should be a reflection of the Christian’s relationship to Christ Jesus. Just as the oneness that we have with Christ is the foundation of our spiritual life, the oneness in our marriage relationship is the foundation for our married life.

Prayer Emphasis: **Be unselfish** in your marriage relationship. **Support** your marriage partner at all times and in every situation. **Realize** that the path to marital happiness runs both ways and that you can only expect to reap love and devotion if you have first sown it into the life of your spouse.

Day 27: Song of Solomon 7:1-13

“How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince’s daughter! The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman.” (Song of Solomon 7:1)

It is almost humorous to read some of the “compliments” that the Shulamite maiden and her beloved expressed to one another in this song! Time will not permit me to review all those that we have read up to this point and still do justice to those that we see in today’s chapter. As the husband reviewed the beauty of his beloved bride, he described her from her feet up. In verse one he states that her feet are “beautiful” and that her “thighs are like jewels.” Then, in verses two through five, he describes her beautiful features literally from her feet all the way to the hair on her head. Some of the things that he said to her should contain the disclosure: “Do not try this at home!” For example, I am not sure that a woman today would be flattered by the thought that her husband considered her “waist” to be “like a heap of wheat” or that “navel” was as large as a wine “goblet.” I am absolutely certain that his comparing her “nose” to “the tower of Lebanon” would not be considered as a compliment to most women in our society. You can rest assured that his comparing her “head” to “Mount Carmel” was not a left-handed way of saying that she had a big head! However strange these compliments may seem to us today, the idea that this man was trying to get across to his wife then was that he considered her beauty to be a true work of art. In the last line of our focus verse, he compared her features to “the work of the hands of a skillful workman.” However inappropriate some of the “compliments” might seem for us today, one of them looks like something that might have been written in the present. In verse five, the beloved complimented his bride’s hair by saying, “The hair of your head is like purple.”

Prayer Emphasis: Remember to **express** admiration and appreciation for your spouse by telling them how beautiful (or handsome) they are to you. Note to all men: My father once told me that men fall in love with their *eyes* while women fall in love with their *ears*! Enough said!

Day 28: Song of Solomon 8:1-14

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I awakened you under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth...” (Song of Solomon 8:5)

In Song of Solomon 3:6, we read where the Shulamite maiden asked a very similar question to the one that is asked in today’s focus verse. Although we are certain that it was the woman speaking in chapter three, we are not sure who is doing the speaking in this one verse in chapter eight. The word that is translated “wilderness” here in the NKJV is translated “desert” in several translations of the Bible. In most translations, the actual Hebrew word that is found here is translated “wilderness” and “desert” in several places throughout. The wilderness or desert had several symbolic associations throughout the Scriptures, but they primarily represented times of trials or testing. We are first introduced to the “wilderness” in Genesis where Abraham was forced to send Hagar and her child away (Genesis 21:14). Then in Exodus through Deuteronomy, we read of the 40 years of trials and tribulations that Israel endured in the wilderness. As we come to the conclusion of this book, we are left with the idea that this young couple, with God’s help and through God’s grace, had found ways to overcome the many trials that threatened their relationship, their friendship, and their marriage. Thus, we are quickly redirected from the image of the dry and barren desert to the image of a fragrant and fruitful garden filled with “apple trees.”

Prayer Emphasis: As a married couple, **pray** together and **stay** together! **Ask** God to help you to see your way through the tough times that come against every marriage. **Allow** God to help you turn your deserts into fragrant and fruitful gardens.

Day 29: Lamentations 1:1-12

“How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave!” (Lamentations 1:1)

The first 12 verses of the Book of Lamentations certainly live up to the book’s name! In those verses, we read about loneliness, weeping, treachery, captivity, affliction, unrest, mourning, desolation, bitterness, and weakness. I am certain that I probably left something off that list, but it gives you a rather good idea of the state of mind that prevailed among the inhabitants of Jerusalem in those times. A lamentation is an expression of great grief or deep sorrow. The little Book of Lamentations is being included in this devotional titled **Kingdom Poetry** because it contains five poems (or songs) of grief that were inspired by the suffering that came upon Jerusalem because of her people’s sin and backsliding. The prophet Jeremiah had warned the inhabitants of Jerusalem that God’s wrath would come if they did not repent of their sins and return to Him. Then, in the form of an invasion and ultimate captivity at the hands of the Babylonians, that judgment fell suddenly and severely upon them. While the *curse*s associated with that judgment are mentioned in verses one through six, the *cause* is fully disclosed in verse five. There God said, “The LORD has afflicted her *because* of the multitude of her transgressions.” Then, we read the sad statement that “her children have gone into captivity,” and we realize the agony that must come from watching our innocent children suffer for our sinful attitudes and actions.

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that sin leads only to sorrow and suffering. **Refuse** to believe Satan’s lies and **remain faithful** to God and His Word in all your relationships and situations.

Day 30: Lamentations 1:13-22

“For these things I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life, is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed.” (Lamentations 1:16)

Today’s reading includes many lamentations for what God has allowed to come into the lives of His disobedient people. In verse 13, we see the pronoun “He” used three times to acknowledge that God allowed trouble to come upon His people. Then, in verses 14 and 15, we read about more things that “He” used to punish the people of Jerusalem for their rebellion and disobedience. In verse 15, the people cried out, “The LORD has trampled underfoot all (our) mighty men” and “the LORD trampled as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah” (Jerusalem). But in verse 20, we read where the people quit lamenting about what “He” had done and took a closer look at what “they” had done when they said: “For *I* have been very rebellious.” Then, in verse 18, we see the words “the LORD” once more. This time, they are used to exclaim that “The LORD is righteous.” As such, they were saying the judgment that God brought against them was justified, fair, and right. But people do not normally come to such an *honorable conclusion* without first making an *honest confession*. The full sentence that begins verse 18 reads, “The LORD is righteous, for *I* rebelled against His commandment.” Verse 19 explains that Jerusalem had “called for (her) lovers” only to find that they were only interested in their own lives and cared nothing for her life or her present troubles. In verse 21, we find her sad admission that “they have heard that I sigh but no one comforts me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it.”

Prayer Emphasis: **Remember** that sin leads only to ruin and destruction and **avoid** becoming entangled in Satan’s web of deceit and destruction. **Refuse** to trust in anyone but God for your emotional health and well-being. **Repent** of your rebellion and always **remember** that “the LORD is righteous.”

Day 31: Lamentations 2:1-10

“How the LORD has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel...” (Lamentations 2:1)

As Jeremiah’s lamenting continues, he begins to describe some of the effects of God’s judgment upon His disobedient people. As I write this devotional, I am reminded that Charles Swindoll once delivered a message from Lamentations 2 entitled “Words from the Woodshed.” In these verses, Jeremiah describes the anger of God and His systematic punishment against Jerusalem for her reckless ways. These words explain some very uncharacteristic (but honest) things that are said about God’s actions. He is said to have “swallowed up” the city and “thrown down” her “strongholds.” He is said to have “brought them down to the ground” (v. 2). In verse three, it is said that God “cut off” His people and that “His right hand” was “drawn back.” Since the right hand was a symbol of fellowship and protection, God was clearly saying that His fellowship with His people had been broken and He was, therefore, no longer going to protect them. In verse four, Jeremiah says that the LORD was “like an enemy” and “an adversary” against His people. In verse five, he again said that “the LORD was like an enemy” who “swallowed up Israel” and “destroyed her strongholds.” God’s anger was also directed toward His temple. He destroyed the buildings thereof “as if (they) were a garden” (v.6). Everything that once represented the LORD’s closeness to His people was destroyed or done away with, including the “feasts and Sabbaths” and the “king and the priest” (v. 6). The LORD even “spurned His altar” and “abandoned His sanctuary” (v. 7). All these things were done to cause God’s people to see they had lost their place of fellowship with Him.

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that God will be second to no one or nothing. **Commit** your heart to faithful worship and service and **refuse** to allow anything to come between you and your God!

Day 32: Lamentations 2:11-22

“My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled...because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city.” (Lamentations 2:11)

Jeremiah’s expression, “my eyes fail with tears,” would be much like our saying “I have cried until I can’t cry anymore!” In today’s verses, Jeremiah compares the suffering of God’s people to five desperate situations. The first is that of parents who cannot provide food for their children (vs. 12). In verse 12, Jeremiah said that his sorrow was like that of a mother who held her dying, starving child in her “bosom” while having no food with which to nourish its starving body. The second desperate situation is like that of a person who was trying to offer consolation and comfort to a grieving friend, but no words of comfort could be found (v. 13). The third was that of “prophets” that failed to “uncover” the “iniquity” of the people and had been satisfied to simply preach “false prophecies and delusions” (v. 14). The fourth desperate situation described conquering enemies that mocked and ridiculed God’s fallen people. Verse 16 clearly indicates that the enemies of Jerusalem – and God’s people – waited a long time to have the opportunity to gloat over a victory against them. However, God’s people knew something their enemies did not know. They knew “the LORD (had) done what He purposed; He (had) fulfilled His word...He (had) thrown down and not pitied, and He (had) caused an enemy to rejoice over (them)” and “He (had) exalted the horn of (their) adversaries” (v. 17). The final desperate situation that Jeremiah described was that of a broken and defeated people crying out to God for relief (vs. 18-19).

Prayer Emphasis: **Refuse** to wait until you hit “rock bottom” before you cry out to the Lord for help! **Run** to God and not *from* God when you have sinned against Him or have failed to be obedient to His Word or His expressed will for your life.

Day 33: Lamentations 3:1-14

“I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day.”
(Lamentations 3:1-3)

As I read the third chapter of Lamentations, I am always reminded of the day that “Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi” and “He asked His disciples... ‘Who do men say that I am?’” The disciples responded, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others *Jeremiah* or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:13-14). I have often thought that it might well have been some of the things that Jeremiah wrote in this little book of Lamentations that reminded the people of Jesus. In chapter three, we see Jeremiah taking the responsibility and punishment of the sins of the entire nation and bearing them personally. He likens the experience of God’s chastening to “darkness” and believed that God had “turned His hand against” him (3:3). As such, Jeremiah was saying that the hand that once reminded him of God’s *favor* now more resembled God’s *fist*. As you read today’s verses, note the words and expressions that indicate the misery that sin, and rebellion introduced into the lives of Jeremiah and the people of God. Verse four states that, “He (God) has aged my flesh and my skin and broken my bones.” That expression helps us see that Jeremiah knew that sin had ravaged his flesh and his spirit. The reference to his “bones” here is a picture of his inner brokenness. The Psalmist said, “As with a *breaking of my bones*, my enemies reproach me. While they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” (Psalm 42:10).

Prayer Emphasis: Compare the words of Psalm 42:10 to Lamentations 3:3 and you will see that both Jeremiah and the Psalmist considered that the punishment sin brought into their lives lasted considerably longer than any pleasure that they might have found in it.

Day 34: Lamentations 3:15-27

“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’”
(Lamentations 3:22-24)

In 1923, Thomas Obadiah Chisholm wrote the great hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” He was a man who once aspired to pastor, but after just one year of that work, was forced to take a time of rest and recuperation before eventually becoming an insurance salesman in New Jersey. He wrote some 1,200 poems and songs in his lifetime, with the best known of them being the one referenced above that is based on today’s focus verse. Many Christians are surprised to learn that such a hymn of God’s divine faithfulness to His people comes from the Book of Lamentations! Yet, here during his heartbreak and sorrow, Jeremiah is reminded not of God’s *forcefulness* but of His *faithfulness*! In his hymn, Chisholm chose to express the words translated “every morning” in the literal sense of the Hebrew language – “morning by morning.” Bear in mind that just yesterday we read where Jeremiah felt as though God’s hand had been turned “against (him) time and time again throughout the day” (3:3). Yet today we see that God never failed to refresh His servant’s spirit “every morning.” If Jeremiah, in the midst of all he experienced, could conclude that “His compassions fail not,” then surely we can claim that same promise in our times of trial and affliction.

Prayer Emphasis: Believe that God loves you and that His actions are always in your best interest. **Come** to God every morning seeking His gracious compassion for your daily walk. Like Jeremiah, **acknowledge** that “the LORD is (your) portion” and then “hope in him.”

Day 35: Lamentations 3:28-40

“For the LORD will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” (Lamentations 3:31-33)

There is so much that could be said about affliction and God’s chastisement for sin from today’s verses and throughout the Book of Lamentations, but I want to focus on just three things in today’s devotional. First, I want to help us to understand the *curse of affliction*. We would do well to remember that the same God who spoke about the *blessings* that accompanied obedience in Deuteronomy 28 is the same God who spoke about the *burdens* that accompanied disobedience later in that same chapter. First, we must be aware that there are *curses* associated with disobedience. Those curses are discussed throughout this little book in the Bible. Second, we must be aware of the *cause of affliction*. God’s people were suffering because they had turned away from God and His Word. Things never go well for us when we are going in the opposite direction that God has commanded us to go. Third, we must always be aware of the *compassion that accompanies affliction*. The same God who had “caused” the affliction to come upon His people is the same God that was willing to “show compassion” (v. 32) to those whom He was forced to discipline through affliction. Fourth, we must be aware of the *cure for affliction*. The only cure for what troubles our souls is found in verse 32 where God mentions “the multitude of His mercies.” It is never God’s will to “crush” His people (v. 34) or to “subvert a man in his cause” (v. 36). That same verse clearly states that God “does not approve” of such action against His people.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that “grace” is getting what we *don’t* deserve while “mercy” is not getting what we *do* deserve. **Understand** that God’s purpose for allowing affliction in our lives is not to *crush* us but to *cure* and *change* us.

Day 36: Lamentations 3:41-54

“My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes flow and do not cease...till the LORD from heaven looks down and sees.” (Lamentations 3:48-50)

Today’s devotional is more of an exercise than an exhortation. Read carefully through today’s verses and you will see a definite pattern that provides a good lesson for all of us. First, in verses 41 through 47, look again and circle all the pronouns such as “us,” “we,” and “our.” You should be able to find several of them. Then, in verses 48 through 63, do the same thing with every occurrence of the pronouns “my,” “me,” and “I.” Then, in verses 64 through 66 circle the word “them” every time that you see it. In this little exercise, you will discover a great truth. When he addressed the sins and failures of the people, Jeremiah did not say “you” but “us” and he did not say “your” sins but “our” sins. Then, as he continued to speak to the people, he began to use the more personal pronouns that emphasized his own reaction to those sins and seemed to be more willing to point the finger at himself rather than at others. Finally, he began to speak about “them.” The lesson for every preacher, teacher, or anyone else who desires to communicate God’s Word to others is that we should include ourselves in the failures and in the ways that we react to them, while refusing to view our own brothers and sisters in Christ as our enemies!

Prayer Emphasis: Employ the power of using the appropriate personal pronouns when you speak to people about the message of God. **Remember** that every time you point a finger at someone else there are always four fingers pointing back at you!

Day 37: Lamentations 3:55-66

“I called on Your name, O LORD, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: ‘Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help.’ You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, ‘Do not fear!’ (Lamentations 3:55-57)

In verses 48-50, Jeremiah vowed to continue praying and seeking God’s face “without interruption, till the LORD from heaven looks down and sees.” It is interesting to note that Jeremiah considered himself to be in the “lowest pit” or at the lowest place in his life when he called out to God. And, as we would expect, God heard his pitiful cry and “drew near” to him saying, “Do not fear!” Some scholars think that Jeremiah’s reference to “the pit” was allusion to the grave because he believed himself to be near death. That would certainly explain God’s exhortation for him to not “fear.” Like this prophet of old, we have all experienced times when we believed that things could not possibly get worse or that our personal “pit” could not get any deeper. But the same man who is crying out to God now is the same man that once received this promise from God: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3). Perhaps the most important thing to remember about that promise was that it came to Jeremiah “while he was still shut up in the court of the prison” (Jeremiah 33:1). So, Jeremiah had experienced some low times before, and he experienced God’s presence in those low times. Hence, there was no reason for him to think any less of God in this present moment of trial. Every believer should conclude that no situation is *hopeless* and that a believer is never *helpless*.

Prayer Emphasis: **Refuse** to *give in* to the temptation to *give up*! **Remember** that one of the first things God said to Jeremiah when He called him was, “Do not be afraid” (Jeremiah 1:8). **Allow** God’s promise of His presence to calm your heart in times of trials, tribulations, and afflictions.

Day 38: Lamentations 4:1-16

“How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street. The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter!” (Lamentations 4:1-2)

The references to “fine gold” and “clay pots” are an indication of how Jerusalem’s present situation compared to their glorious past. In their former glory, they felt as “valuable as fine gold,” but now they felt as common and as unimportant as a plain “clay pot.” Clay was a quite common thing in the land in which God’s people resided. As a result, clay pots were in abundance and, as such, of truly little monetary value. If a clay pot became damaged or broken, it was simply thrown out and replaced with another. Jeremiah was trying to get a message to his people. He desperately wanted them to understand that their personal value was only to be found in a right relationship – a personal relationship – with God. Jeremiah then addressed one of the saddest symptoms of a nation’s failure to remain in good fellowship with God by addressing how even the children were being neglected by their parents who were not meeting even their most basic needs (v. 4). Jeremiah then compared the people’s punishment to that of Sodom and declared that the affliction that came upon Jerusalem was “greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom” because Sodom’s judgment came suddenly, and that city was “overthrown in a moment” (v. 6). In contrast, Jerusalem’s punishment was protracted, and God’s people were not protected or spared from His sentence.

Prayer Emphasis: **Believe** that although God loves us, He hates sin. Willingly **accept** any chastisement from God that will restore you to a right relationship with Him. **Know** that God never punishes without a purpose, and that purpose is always to restore His repentant children to Himself.

Day 39: Lamentations 4:17-5:6

“Still our eyes failed us, watching vainly for our help; in our watching we watched for a nation that could not save us.” (Lamentations 4:17)

Of all the lamenting that is contained in this book, today’s focus verse may contain the greatest regret that God’s people might have experienced. That greatest regret was found in their looking to Egypt, rather than to God, for protection against the Babylonians. Jeremiah warned the people against trying to make a pact with Egypt, but to no avail. In his prophetic messages, Jeremiah asked his people, “Have you not brought this on yourself, in that you have forsaken the LORD your God when He led you in the way? And now why take the road to Egypt...?” (Jeremiah 2:17-18). He tried to warn them that the Babylonians would only return as soon as their Egyptian protectors left. In Jeremiah 37:6-8, we read, “Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, thus you say to the king of Judah...Behold, Pharaoh’s army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt to their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city and take it and burn it with fire.’” There is an abundance of sadness and sorrow to be found in the Book of Lamentations, but perhaps the greatest sadness is found in the fact that God’s people would turn to anyone but Him for their help in times of trouble. As our focus verse states, their “eyes failed” them as they were “watching vainly for (their) help” because they “watched for a nation that could not save” them. May we all pray that we will never be guilty of making this same error in judgment.

Prayer Emphasis: Establish and **adhere** to a “God First” mentality when it comes to seeking guidance, aid, or assistance. **Refuse** to make the mistake that God’s people made during Jeremiah’s times. **Trust** only in the Lord God as your Protector and Deliverer.

Day 40: Lamentations 5:7-22

“The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! Because of this our heart is faint; because of these things our eyes grow dim.” (Lamentations 5:15-17)

There cannot possibly be anything sadder than a Christian who has lost their joy. Jeremiah understood the power that was to be found in God’s gift of joy. In a time of great persecution in his own life, Jeremiah’s personal testimony was that he had found joy and strength from a right relationship with God and His Word. In a private conversation with God, Jeremiah said, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and *Your word* was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart...” (Jeremiah 15:16). The word “found” in that verse clearly implies that Jeremiah was seeking answers from the Word of God. The phrase “and I ate them” implies that Jeremiah took God’s Word into his own heart and soul and “digested” them to the point that they literally became a part of him. Above all other things, God’s Word became to him “the joy and rejoicing” of his heart. Perhaps Jeremiah, as a young man, had learned of, and from, the words once spoken to God’s people by Nehemiah the prophet, “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Early in Jeremiah’s ministry, God said to him, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). By God’s amazing grace, Jeremiah is still prophesying to the nations today, and more importantly, to people like you and me.

Prayer Emphasis: Avoid the heartbreak and sorrow that accompanies refusing to do God’s will by committing your heart and life to Him today! **Contact us** at 850-562-8069 or gary@seminolebc.com if we can pray for you or minister to you and your family in any way.