



## Daily Devotionals – August 14 to August 20, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

### August 14 - Isaiah 63:15-19 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *A Prayer of Penitence*

<sup>15</sup> Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me.

<sup>16</sup> For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. <sup>17</sup> Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.

<sup>18</sup> Your holy people took possession for a little while; but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. <sup>19</sup> We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name.

#### **Devotion:**

Have you ever felt as if you were all alone? (Probably yes, due to the Covid-19 invasion of our lives). Have you ever felt as if no one cared for you? Have you ever felt helpless? If you answered yes to one of these questions, then do not despair because many people are voicing the same issues.

How does one move from a close connection to being completely left out? The writer of Isaiah includes this short snippet detailing the challenges of this time, which are many.

This passage begins with the people having a conversation with God -- or shall I say a directive to God. If you read carefully, you might become convinced that God caused all of the people's troubles. It was as if they had no part in receiving the challenges, and like most of us, they wanted the challenges to disappear immediately if not sooner.

They instinctively knew that God was able to reverse their situation and return them to their normal. If you read closely, you will discover a sense of desperation.

What does this portion of Isaiah teach us? Among the lessons for us today are:

- 1) Even in rebellion, they remembered God's mercy (V7).
- 2) When our actions are rebellious, we grieve God's Spirit (V10a).
- 3) Grieving God's Spirit will feel like God is our enemy (V10b).
- 4) Even though they were not living in harmony with God, they remembered and asked for God's intervention for them.
- 5) As a result of the people's actions, God's sanctuary has been trampled down.

6) They continue to seek God and God's deliverance.

Today we can learn much from Isaiah's text. They learned that through the length of their difficulties, God remained true to them. They also learned that God hears and answers every prayer, often not as quickly as is our preference. Perhaps the most important lesson that they learned is that no matter what, God remains faithful to God's character. God's character is to love and embrace, to forgive and give mercy and to bless the people.

I believe that, unlike the people in today's lesson, that the present situation will not last forever. I also believe that God will reveal God's blessing soon. The challenge for me, and for you, is to imagine how life will look when we move beyond Covid-19. I invite you to join me as we dream about life and ministry in the days to come.

**Prayer:**

God of infinite love, encourage us to remain faithful to your call, even if it appears like no one else is paying attention. Hear our cries for help and forgive our foolish ways. Equip us to be your people during this most challenging time. Amen.

**August 15 - Genesis 42:1-28**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt***

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" 2 He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

3 Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. 5 So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.

6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 7 As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." 8 Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. 9 Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

10 "No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies." 12 "No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected." 13 But they replied, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more." 14 Joseph said to them, "It is just as I told you: You are spies! 15 And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16 Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" 17 And he put them all in custody for three days.

18 On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. 20 But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do. 21 They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us."

22 Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." 23 They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

24 He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. 25 Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, 26 they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. 27 At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. 28 "My silver has been returned," he said to his brothers. "Here it is in my sack." Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?"

### **Devotion:**

What a fascinating story this is. Christians get nervous when anyone jokes about "Karma." Most people we hear say this word don't mean it as associated with any particular religion. That is a formal usage of it, as found in Hinduism or Buddhism. No, most people use the word as slang, a more informal usage to denote that a lot of what we do in life has a way of adding up or coming back to us. Sometimes, it even comes back AT us!

We are more comfortable with this notion when it is worded differently and comes directly from our own scriptures. "What you sow, you shall also reap." (Gal 6:7) Maybe you recall "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matt. 7: 2) How about when Jesus said, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." (Matt. 26: 52) When our own sacred words speak poetically of this notion, we own it then.

The brothers were wealthy (because their Dad was wealthy) and feeling like nothing could slow them down. Except perhaps their nagging, spoiled younger half-brother. You'll recall that when we last saw Joseph he was languishing in slavery, housed in an Egyptian prison. His life constantly seemed to encounter hardship, mostly of someone else's making.

Time has passed. The family has all the money in the world, possessions too, and yet is helpless. They might starve to death. They have no choice but to go and beg to purchase grain from the Egyptian governor or "Vizier," the highest official to serve a Pharaoh in ancient Egypt.

Of course, they don't recognize this middle-aged man as their annoying little brother. We often don't see what is right in front of us if we're not looking for it. Now, the one whom they had wanted to kill... the one whom they had sold into slavery...the one they had treated with such hate...holds their fate in his powerful hands.

Yes, Joseph has risen once again in the Egyptian ranks as ch42 unfolds. God has moved in his life. Now, he is the second most powerful official in all the Egyptian empire. He spotted them the minute they walked in the door. Now, like a cat, he will toy with them for a time. You can hear the voice of guilt in Reuben as he speaks up in v22. V21-23 would be downright comedic if Joseph hadn't been overcome with emotion about that time. "They did not realize that Joseph could understand them..."

Where I want us to learn, though, is right at the very end. V28 says, "Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, 'What is this that God has done to us?'" Yes, God seems to have moved mightily in Joseph's life. He had made the most improbable of comebacks in a rise to power. But what had God done to the brothers? Among all that God had done, God had let time pass until they stood begging ironically -- in dire need -- in front of the one human being whom they had wronged so terribly. They did this to themselves, perhaps before God ever made a move.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, forgive us sometimes when we think we have been victimized but we really haven't. Our choices, our actions, our words can occasionally put us in vulnerable places. We truly can pay for our sins in this life. Humble us in your presence, and lead our ways. Amen.

**August 16 - Genesis 43**  
**by Dr. Charles Qualls**  
***The Second Journey to Egypt***

43 Now the famine was still severe in the land. 2 So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food." 3 But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.' 4 If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. 5 But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'" 6 Israel asked, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?"

7 They replied, "The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. 'Is your father still living?' he asked us. 'Do you have another brother?' We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'" 8 Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. 9 I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. 10 As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice."

11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift -- a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. 12 Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. 13 Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. 14 And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved."

15 So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon."

17 The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. 18 Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, "We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys."

19 So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. 20 "We beg your pardon, our lord," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. 21 But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver -- the exact weight -- in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. 22 We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks." 23 "It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them. 24 The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. 25 They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there.

26 When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. 27 He asked them how they were, and then he said, "How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?" 28 They replied, "Your servant our father is still alive and well." And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him. 29 As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be

gracious to you, my son.” 30 Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

31 After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.” 32 They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. 33 The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. 34 When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

### **Devotion:**

If you’ve missed a couple or three days with us in these devotionals, do yourself a favor. Don’t try to dive in today. Go back and catch up on these Genesis narratives with Joseph. It’s worth it. Then, read today’s scripture as though you were a movie producer. How would you film this? Where would you place cameras to get the best portrayal? What a fascinating scene.

You know things as a reader that our main characters do not yet know, if you know how this story is going to end. Don’t forget that. Actually...DO forget what you know. Try reading this through the brothers’ eyes, for instance. How scary would it be, lured into this much power and might? Feeling vulnerable that all of this was a setup, and that your doom is about to happen?

What would it be like to be Joseph? Maybe he knew already that he was going to forgive them. Maybe he was glad he’d had some time in order to think things through. Maybe he would punish these scoundrels he had for brothers. Maybe he wouldn’t. But what if he didn’t yet know what he was going to say or do?

All of this is real life.

We don’t get a script, a user’s manual nor a dress-rehearsal for times like this. We simply have to follow God’s leadership and do the best we can. Family gets awkward sometimes. How will we handle things? Workplace dynamics get tricky sometimes. What will we do? That person in the community drives you crazy, but how will you get relief? Longtime, deep-seated differences can grow us apart from even those dear to us. What will guide us?

### **Prayer:**

God of our living, and Lord of our hearts. Lead us with wisdom that only your Spirit can provide. Help us to see the bigger picture in similar ways to which you see life. Amen.

## **August 17 - Genesis 44:1-34**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

### ***A Silver Cup in a Sack***

44 Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. 2 Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said. 3 As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. 4 They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? 5 Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’”

6 When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. 7 But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! 8 We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from

your master's house? 9 If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

10 "Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame."

11 Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. 12 Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

14 Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. 15 Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

16 "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves -- we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

17 But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

18 Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' 20 And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.'

21 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' 22 And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' 23 But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' 24 When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

25 "Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' 26 But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

27 "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. 28 One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. 29 If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.'

30 "So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, 31 sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. 32 Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'

33 "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. 34 How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."

### **Devotion:**

Yes, that was a long story. And we are close to wrapping up our time with Joseph and his interesting family. Why are we investing so much time with this larger narrative? There are several reasons. First, this is one of the major movements of the "judeo" part of our judeo-Christian heritage. Second, the human lessons are compelling. They should caution us about short-cuts, or about how important our ethics and integrity are. Next, forgiveness and restoration are illustrated both in our relationships and in God's sight.

Finally, I believe this story provides us with a fascinating laboratory with which to work on our beliefs about God's mystery and providence. God is at work in our lives, I am convinced. But Christians would differ widely about how God works and what God will do. Also, on what God won't do. Here, the hand of God moving in and ahead of this family seems to be a central focus.

Let's add up what is happening here. The brood of children born to the great deceiver of the Old Testament have sold off his favored child and then lied to him (or deceived him). Parents...grand-parents...be careful what you do. Your children may sometimes become what you are. "The sins of the fathers visited upon the children and their children..." and all. Now in the presence of their powerful brother, he turns the table on them with some deception of his own. The irony is thick, as they are tortured with his set-up. Suddenly, being deceived doesn't feel so good to those who have spent their lives conniving.

We see the brothers beginning to crack a little. We notice them feeling some guilt at moments. Whether or not we are convinced of this, we definitely see them confronted with the long-term results of their behaviors and choices. That is life, yes? By the way, doesn't it still seem as though they haven't come clean with their aged father (Jacob) on everything that happened back in Egypt? A new generation of deceivers are still deceiving.

Ahhh...the contrite spirit on display here is noticeable. Bargaining goes on, forcing us to evaluate how much of our prayer life with God is spent bargaining as well.

- "God, I know I didn't study for this test...but if you'll just let me make a decent grade, I'll..."
- "Lord, I know I lied at work. But please don't let me get in trouble."
- "God, I know I mistreated my family member but they had it coming. Now, please fix everything and stop them from being mad at me and I promise you I'll..."
- "God, I understand I haven't been a nice person. But if you'll help them to show me some mercy in this case I'll be a better person. I promise."

**Prayer:**

Lord, we can't fool you. Oh, we probably don't fool most of the people we think we're fooling either. Help us to know ourselves as you know us. May our contrition be genuine before you. Amen.

**August 18 - Genesis 45:1-15**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Joseph Revealed***

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks,

your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there -- since there are five more years of famine to come -- so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.

12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

**Devotion:**

I love how today's part of the story ends. How do you think that conversation went (v15)?

Awkward...curious...careful. These are some words that come to mind. Now, the brothers have returned to Egypt. They had no choice but to come back and buy more. Thus, they had complied with Joseph's instructions.

How do you react to Joseph's amazing display of grace here? I find this scene both inspiring and hopeful. What if I were one of his brothers, so badly in need of forgiveness? But, I also find his grace a little tough to relate to. Joseph's willingness to reveal himself and welcome his family astounds me. I'm not sure what I would have done in his shoes. How do you think you would have handled this same circumstance? I'm not sure we can study this text without asking ourselves those kinds of questions.

Maybe you just feel conflicted sometimes when you hear this story, but can't quite put your finger on why. Do you ever hear this story and feel as though Joseph let them off a little too easily? Perhaps it's because we want to see them pay some kind of price for what they did. Joseph's forgiveness challenges us, but it also leaves some of us feeling a little unsatisfied.

I struggle mightily with forgiveness. Maybe you do, too. Sometimes even forgiving myself can be a tall task. Then, there are the times I need to forgive someone else. Maybe they've asked for forgiveness. Maybe they haven't. Either way, the task can be tough and risky. Explore Joseph's story to see what the upside of his forgiveness practice may have been. What became possible here that would not have happened otherwise?

When we forgive, we risk. Joseph did not have to reveal himself. It is likely he could have delegated the handling of his family and never encountered them if he wished. Did Joseph "let them off the hook" by forgiving them? Do we hear him assigning blame to God instead of to his brothers? (Not so fast -- see Genesis 50!)

Here's another issue: does forgiving someone mean that we obligate ourselves to resume a toxic or dysfunctional relationship with them? These are just some of the questions you may choose to tackle as you explore this text. When we forgive someone, maybe we let more than just them out of our personal jail. Maybe God has powerful new possibilities to work with when we extend grace. What say you?

**Prayer:**

Lord, expand our hearts and minds. Help us to consider our own needs, and to weigh the costs as we are faithful to your nudges of forgiveness. May we trust you more and more. Amen.

**August 19 - Psalm 130**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Waiting for Divine Redemption***

**A Song of Ascents**

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. <sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

<sup>3</sup> If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.



<sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

<sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**Devotion:**

Psalm 130 is categorized as a lament or prayer by an individual seeking help. As such, it begins in a typical fashion. If we take a peek at verse 3, then we begin to understand that “the depths” have a connection with the psalmist’s sinfulness.

Depths refers to the chaotic forces often associated with life, namely the three D’s: Destruction, devastation and death. This scene would recall the times when God was not stymied by water. (Remember the exodus of Israel where God made a way for Israel to escape through the water. This pattern is replicated throughout the Old Testament -- when difficulty comes, the people cry out to God for deliverance.)

Verses 1-3 outline the depths of one’s sin and verse 4 serves as a turning point for the psalmist. It is almost as if the psalmist in a fleeting moment remembers God’s forgiveness and repeats the cry that had been used before. In the midst of despair, the psalmist cries out to God and renews their trust in God.

The mood changes in verses 5 and 6 as the psalmist recalls God’s nature and character that is profoundly gracious and forgiving. Even in the midst of trials and troubles, we are called to wait. We are also to encourage others to wait. While we wait, we hope in God and stand on God’s word. We equate God’s word with God’s grace, so to hope in God’s word is to hope in God.

The Psalm ends with two verses of encouragement to the psalmist and also to others. Perhaps the psalmist learned that Israel’s future does not depend on its own worthiness to save themselves, but solely on God’s faithful love and ability to redeem.

Psalm 130 testifies to the depths that Christ endured for us on the cross. It is comforting that the psalmist believes that God is present in the depths. Psalm 130 testifies to the inexhaustible love of Christ, a love so deep and so complete that Christ would willingly endure the agony of the cross. The Psalmist believes that even in the darkest depths of our souls, God is there. The good news for us is that we will never be out of the range of God’s voice. When we find ourselves in “the depths” we confess that we turned away from God. But, sisters and brothers, rejoice because God is not easily rejected! Even when we find ourselves deep in “the depths”, we find God there also. God’s presence and power are present in our depths of our existence, even on the cross!

The love of our creator knows no bounds. This same God was in Christ reconciling the world to God, while on the cross! Because God desires a relationship with us, God’s sovereignty is exercised in the power of committed love.

Even as the pandemic continues to grow in our area, we wait and hope in God’s word. Even as the pandemic strengthens, we remain and wait to see God at work. The faithful life includes waiting upon the Lord and hoping in God’s word. Because we are empowered by faith and hope, we can relate with the Apostle Paul as found in II Corinthians 12:10, “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

**Prayer:**

Persistent God, we give you thanks for always searching for us, even when we find ourselves in a dark place. Renew our faith and encourage us to wait and hope for you. Amen.

**August 20 - Psalm 124**  
**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**  
***Thanksgiving for Israel's Deliverance***

**A Song of Ascents. Of David.**

<sup>1</sup> If it had not been the Lord who was on our side -- let Israel now say -- <sup>2</sup> if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, <sup>3</sup> then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; <sup>4</sup> then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; <sup>5</sup> then over us would have gone the raging waters. <sup>6</sup> Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. <sup>7</sup> We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. <sup>8</sup> Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

**Devotion:**

If you are student of the Psalms, you recognize themes that run through multiple chapters. Israel seems like it cannot stay out of trouble. The pattern of tranquility, followed by sin and its consequences, is followed by tranquility once again. When we read this Psalm, verses 1-5 outline a portion of Israel's troubles. The litany doesn't include every instance of trouble, but it includes enough.

Israel had been attacked by their enemies and but for the Lord being on their side, they would have perished. If the Lord had not been on Israel's side, their enemies would have prevailed and Israel would have been swallowed up by their anger. If that were not enough, the flood, the torrent and the raging waters would have surely overcome them. What would have happened to them if the Lord had not been on their side? The difficulties that Israel encountered would have been enough to crush others. But Israel continued to hang on and not give up. At some point, they remembered that God had acted on their behalf in the past and from that small spark, their situation turned around. They recalled that the Lord had not given them over as prey -- they had escaped being eaten by their foes. Their snare had been broken and they escaped. Once the immediate threat was neutralized, their focus returned to the praise of God -- the same God who made heaven and earth. What a turnaround from the depths of despair to remembering the source of their help!

**Prayer:**

Faithful God, we give you thanks for our memories and the ability to recall your vast love for us. When we become disillusioned, point us to the assertion of your unfailing love for all people. Amen.