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Psalms 5

Meditation 1—Psalm 5.¹⁻²

¹O give ear, YHWH, to my words.

Give heed to my groanings.

²Give close attention to my call for help, my King and God,
for it is to You that I present my plea! (author's translation)

The Book of Psalms begins with two introductory psalms. In the next 5 psalms (3-7), all laments, the Psalmist is in trouble, as they are so often throughout the Book. Trouble seems to follow them, as it does most of us. For reasons that we have given previously, and we will review here, it does not seem impossible that those who ordered the Psalms wanted us to read these five psalms together almost as if they were a unit embracing the same or very similar situation. Whether they intended this or not, doing so allows for some interesting and inspiring insights.

Often in the Psalter, the Psalmists' troubles come in the form of accusation. They are accused of wrongdoing, lacking character, and being on the outs with God. One could make the argument that the enemies found in the Psalms are most often and most likely to be those who stand as accusers to the Psalmists and, through him, temple worshippers. Accusation, it seems to me, is the context of Psalms 3-7.¹

In Psalm 3, the first of the series, the Psalmist's foes claim that "He'll get no help from 'ēlohîm!" (vs. 2). This should not be read as if an atheist is expressing his disbelief in the existence of God and so views the Psalmist's faith as vain. Rather, this should be read as accusation. The Psalmist is somehow unsuitable for or unworthy of God's help. The sense of accusation is strengthened when one hears the Psalmist confess his faith that God is a "defender of my reputation" (vs. 3). It isn't that the Psalmist is perfect—he will make many confessions of sin in the course of the Book—but he is innocent of whatever the specific accusation of this psalm is.

Psalm 4 is also to be located in accusation. "How long," the Psalmist asks his accusers, "will you men of repute smear my reputation" (vs. 2). Whatever its nature, the accusation is false with deceptive evidence presented (vs. 2).

In Psalm 7, the Psalmist calls upon God to convene a hearing and to serve as witness and judge of his innocence (vss. 6-11). He then makes his opening appeal,

"YHWH, if I have done this,
if I bear responsibility for this wrong..." (vs. 4).

Clearly, he has been accused of something. We find out something about that something in the next verse. He stands accused of having "done intentional harm to one who befriended me" and treating them as "an enemy" (vs. 4).

¹ While no accusation is mentioned in Psalm 6, the Psalmist is in plenty of trouble. Given its presence in this series of laments, it is not unreasonable to assume, minus evidence to the contrary, that the trouble is the same as that found in the Psalms that join it in the series.

In Psalm 5, as we will see later (vss. 9-10), the Psalmist is once more under accusation, though his accusers present no positive proof of guilt.

“Nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven.”

Little wonder, then, that this Psalm begins with the thrice repeated appeal to God.

“Give ear, YHWH, to my words.
Give heed to my groanings.
Give close attention to my call for help, my King and God
for it is to You that I present my plea!”

The accusation is damaging. The need is great. The danger is real.

One might wonder what possible application such complaint and need has for us today. Perhaps we have been the object of false accusation, perhaps we have not. Perhaps we have been the accuser of another, perhaps we have not. If we have ever found ourselves, or ever do find ourselves on the receiving end of accusation and slander, Psalm 5 and the four Psalms that surround it can provide much counsel and comfort. If we have ever found ourselves, or ever do find ourselves on the giving end of accusation and slander, Psalm 5 and the four that surround it offer words of wisdom and warning.

But I suspect that most of us have heard the inner voice of accusation. Perhaps we can relate to this confession:

“I am familiar with the voice of that ‘slanderer.’ It is the voice that whispers to us, just when we most need to marshal all our abilities in order to perform an important task, ‘You’re no good, and you never will be any good.’ ‘You’re not smart enough, you’ll never succeed in this job.’ ‘You deserved this, you had it coming, this is what you get.’ ‘You’re ugly, fat (or skinny), and unlovable.’ Do you recognize that voice?... No doubt it gains leverage from every flaw, every grain of remorse, every impossible perfectionist demand and unachievable ego ideal we lay upon ourselves, and flays us with them.... The fact that in some this voice is raucous and shrill, and in others scarcely even heard, indicates that the structure of the individual personality or the extremity of the circumstances has a great deal to do with its effectiveness...”²

Like the Psalmist, none of us are perfect. There is plenty of room for improvement. But this voice of hopeless accusation, louder in some than in others, is often magnified by Satan—he who is called “the accuser of our brethren.”³ We see him in his role as accuser in Job.⁴ If he is skilled as a tempter, he is just as skilled as an accuser. Both are important tools in the satanic toolbox that is used to dismantle, deconstruct, and destroy.

Satan is portrayed as having been charismatic and vocal in heaven.⁵ He is no less so now as he whispers thunderously into our ears of accusation and worthlessness. Psalm 5, with its two accompanying psalms forward and its two accompanying psalms aft, has much to teach us about all accusation, whether satanic or otherwise, and how to resist it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: may 13, 2024*)

² Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, p. 27.

³ Revelation 12.¹⁰

⁴ See Job 1.⁶⁻¹¹

⁵ See Moses 4.¹⁻⁶

meditation 2— psalm 5.³

³YHWH, You'll hear my voice in the morning.

At first light, I'll present myself to You and anticipate Your response. (author's translation)

In previous meditations, we have attempted to demonstrate how Psalms 3-7, all laments, could, almost, be read as a single unit, addressing a single or similar experience or situation. In them, the Psalmist is under attack. The attack takes the form of accusation. The Psalmist accuses smear his reputation, accusing him of wrongdoing such that he has lost all right to or hope in God's help. Though his accusers rely on lies to level their accusations (4.²; 5.⁶), they are numerous (3.^{1-2, 6}), persistent (4.²; 5.³), and vicious, likened to ravenous lions (7.¹), or to hunters (7.^{12-13, 15}).

Under such circumstances, outnumbered and outgunned—among his accusers are those who are “men of repute” (4.²)—the Psalmist turns to God for defense against his accusers. This group of psalm seems to be temporally located during the night (See 3.⁵; 4.⁸; 5.³; 6.⁶) when the mind, lacking the distractions of the day, more easily settles on the worries of life. And so, much of the night is taken up with prayers for deliverance. At times during the night, the Psalmist tosses and turns on his bed, his mind active with worry (6.⁶⁻⁷). At other times, his mind finds comfort in God's faithfulness, giving him the calmness of mind that permits him to sleep (4.⁸). But, before sleeping, he assures God that when the morning breaks, it will find him once more in prayer.

“YHWH, You'll hear my voice in the morning.

At first light, I'll present myself to You and anticipate Your response...”

One might read these lines as an expression of the Psalmist's trust that God listens to prayer. He does, indeed, believe this. However, what I hear in these two lines is the Psalmist unwavering commitment to prayer. He has been praying all night. Finally, he will sleep, but before falling asleep, the Psalmist promises that after whatever sleep he is able to enjoy, his first act upon waking will be to return to prayer. One thinks, here of the Book of Mormon writer, Enos. He reports that “my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.”⁶ Apparently, both the Psalmist and Enos know what Jesus knows: “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”⁷

All prayer is not created equal. There may be times when prayer can become somewhat rote and repetitive without serious spiritual harm to the worshipper. There are other times, however, when serious, searching prayer is called for due to the seriousness of the challenges. Some life challenges require a heavier, more serious prayer effort than others.

The challenge of accusation facing the Psalmist in Psalm 5—and, indeed in each of the Psalms in this series of lamentations—is just such a weighty challenge. The challenge of accusation, whether simply internal or magnified by “satanic” influences, are appropriate and necessary reasons for intense and constant prayer. But whether the challenges are severe or mundane, a commitment to a meaningful and regular prayer life is necessary, rewarding, and rewarded. We would all do well to follow the Psalmist's example in his commitment to maintaining a meaningful and regular prayer life.

⁶ Enos 1.⁴

⁷ Mt. 17.²¹

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

(edition: may 13, 2024)

meditation 3— psalm 5.³

³YHWH, You'll hear my voice in the morning.

At first light, I'll present myself to You and anticipate Your response (author's translation).

As we mentioned in the previous meditation, all prayer is not created equal. There may be times when prayer can become somewhat rote and repetitive without serious spiritual harm to the worshipper. There are other times, however, when serious, searching prayer is called for due to the seriousness of the challenges. Some life challenges require a heavier, more serious prayer effort than others.

But, there are reasons for serious, searching prayer other than life challenges. Consider the following statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith. "The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out".¹

I do not know how often they should occur, but I suspect that all of us could benefit from more frequent serious and searching prayer over matters unrelated to and larger than this life and its challenges. I suspect God would be pleased if we engaged in at least the occasional "careful and ponderous and solemn" prayer that has God and the "things of God" as its principal objective. I suspect that He would be pleased if we used prayer to get to know Him better through the questions we ask Him and the pondering in which we engage. Among the meanings behind the Psalmist's "looking up" as the KJV has it, or in "awaiting" the Lord's response as I have it, I suspect that this personal and intimate inquiry after God was one of them. Elsewhere, the Psalmist confessed,

"When thou saidest, 'Seek ye my face,'
my heart said unto thee, 'Thy face, LORD, will I seek.'²

Perhaps, we could all devote a little more time and effort in prayer to explore not only the challenges of life but also the "solemnities of eternity."³ Perhaps we can more diligently and intimately seek to converse with Him as one man or woman converses with another, thus expanding our understanding and appreciation for God, Himself, until, finally, "he will unveil his face unto you... in his own time and in his own way"⁴ and we "behold the beauty of the Lord."⁵

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

¹ *TPJS*, p. 137

² Psalm 27.⁸

³ See DC 43.³⁴

⁴ DC 88.⁶⁸

⁵ Psalm 27.⁴

⁴knowing that You are not a God who takes pleasure in willful wrongdoing;
that cruelty cannot find safety in You;

⁵that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.

⁶that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual.

⁷But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.

I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;
bow in reverence to You (author's translation).

The Book of Psalms is many things. It is above all a prayer book. Because it is a book of prayers, its chief interest is God and how, when, where, why, and on what basis we approach Him. It has much to say about God, Himself. It is a veritable theological catalogue of God and His character. There are few, if any places in scripture where God's character is more deeply and consistently explored. The Book goes a long way in answering the question, "What kind of Being is God?"

It truly is a shame that our LDS culture has paid so little attention to this magnificent Book. Given, for example, that the Book of Psalms is roughly the same size as the Doctrine and Covenants, it seems imbalanced, to say the least, to devote an entire year of Gospel study on the latter and skim through the former in a mere two or three weeks.

Anyway, we think of the Book of Psalms' intense focus on God when we consider this reading from Psalm 5. We think of it, especially, as we contemplate the Psalmist's faith—a faith that moves him to action and to prayer—that God possesses "unwavering devotion." Our reading of a fundamental divine attribute as "unwavering devotion" reflects our translation of Hebrew word, *hesed*.

This word, used over 40 times in the Psalms alone, is central to understanding ancient Israel's understanding of God. Much ink has been spilt trying to capture this word's meaning. Few words have given me more trouble in translation. The King James translators decided that one word was not sufficient to capture its nuances and so settled on the oft used two-word translation, "loving kindness." The Septuagint's penchant for translating the word as *éleos*, has led many to translate, "mercy." Given the word's importance in characterizing God, we would like to make a few additional observations about this word and the infinite divine attribute that the finite word tries to capture.

First, as the Septuagint suggests, "mercy" gets at a core aspect of the word. Now, mercy is more than a feeling or sentiment. It is also an active response. It reflects a feeling and helpful response, especially, to the trials, hardships, and failures, great or small, of another. No one asks for "mercy" when things are going well, after doing something well, or when experiencing success. Only after doing poorly or failing does one feel the need and make a request for mercy—human or divine. Given the needs and failures of the object of mercy, the mercy cannot be said to have been "earned." Thus, "undeserved mercy" begins to capture the meaning of *hesed*.

But it is only a beginning. The merciful act suggested by *hesed* is notable for the basic "kindness" and "goodness" of the merciful individual and of the act toward the one in need of mercy. So, *hesed* becomes an "undeserved merciful action filled with kindness." The one feeling and acting upon *hesed*, also feels "sympathy" for the one undergoing hardship. They not only feel something within themselves, but have

the ability and willingness to feel what the other feels in their hardship. Now, in *hesed* we have a “sympathetic and undeserved merciful act filled with undeserved kindness.”

Still, there is a little more to the word. The word, *hesed*, also has an enduring quality to it. This brings us to “sympathetic and undeserved merciful act with enduring kindness.” Finally, *hesed* implies acceptance that a binding relationship exists between the parties, leaving us, finally, with “sympathetic and undeserved merciful act of unity with enduring kindness.”

Interestingly, the root is found as a verb only twice in the Hebrew Bible. It is a noun when used of God, suggesting to me, anyway, that it isn’t so much something God does as something He IS. In using the word, sometimes a passage implies all of it: “sympathetic and undeserved merciful act of unity with enduring kindness.” This is especially and most often true, it seems, when it is used in relation to God and His character. Sometimes a passage may focus on a narrower aspect of *hesed*. This must be determined by context. Either way, the word is comprehensive and multi-faceted in its meaning.

Obviously, we can’t translate, “sympathetic and undeserved merciful act of unity with enduring kindness,” every time we come to this word. Yet, the King James translators, it seems, were right in concluding that the concept behind *hesed* is too big for any single English word. After countless hours of thought and possible formulations, and, literally, many a restless night, I finally settled on the still inadequate, “unwavering devotion.” There are times when I translate with other words, especially when the word is applied to human beings and their relations or when the context seems to call for a narrower understanding. But, when talking about God, “unwavering devotion” comes as close to the idea and the fundamental aspect of divine character encompassed by Hebrew *hesed* as any. It seems to encompass both the emotional response and the committed action. Finally, it has within it the idea of compassion and love—as we sense when we speak, for example, of a mother’s devotion to her child or a religious devotee who both feels love for God and expresses that love in action.

As we mentioned earlier, the word is used some 40 times in the Book of Psalms. The Psalmists, whoever they were, cannot say enough of the devotion, commitment, fidelity to human beings that exists in the bosom of God. Over the course of the Book, the various Psalmists will go on and on about it. Nowhere in the Psalms, it seems to me, is there any better description of God’s unwavering devotion than in Psalm 103.

“But as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so overarching is his unwavering devotion toward those who revere him.”¹

God’s unwavering devotion to human beings is as boundless as the universe. That’s a very big universe out there. It goes on and on and on. We have yet to find its farthest edges, if it even has one. It goes on well beyond our ability to measure or identify. To think that God’s fidelity toward us is that expansive and goes that far beyond our knowledge and imagination is truly mindboggling. To think that this unwavering devotion is directed at frail and fallible human beings—and the Psalmists know and confess how very frail and fallible they and we are—is beyond mindboggling. For the Psalmist knows that God’s unwavering devotion is indeed undeserved.

“Compassionate and generous is YHWH;
slow to become angry and abounding in unwavering devotion.
He is not always condemning.
He is not always annoyed.

¹ Psalm 103.¹¹, author’s translation

He does not relate to us as our sins deserve
or deal with us as our iniquities might suggest.”²

Here, the Psalmist is specifically describing God’s response to human sin and spiritual failure. He does not become angry, does not constantly condemn, does not become annoyed. He does not treat us as we deserve. He sticks with us. Continues to work with us. Patiently and kindly. All of this represents aspects of his *hesed*.

All of this has a tremendous impact upon those who can see, believe, and feel these truths about God’s character. It dramatically impacts the Psalmist of Psalm 5. As we saw in our previous meditations, the Psalmist confidently enters the temple. There, he is committed to engaging in constant prayer. He has full expectation of receiving a positive response. The Psalmist’s confidence in entering the temple, his stamina in prayer, his assurance of a divine response, these are all based upon his awareness of, and his belief and trust in God’s *hesed*, His unwavering devotion.

“But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.
I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;
bow in reverence to You

In this meditation, we have discussed, all too briefly for such an expansive topic, God’s unwavering devotion. God’s unwavering devotion is the basis for the Psalmist’s confident entrance into the temple, his stamina in prayer, his expectation for a positive response. However, the Psalmist knows something more of the divine character. The Psalmist also knows something of God’s character in judgment. This too informs the Psalmist and contributes to his confidence in entering the temple and approaching God in diligent and expectant prayer. We turn to God’s character in judgement and its impact upon the Psalmist in the following meditation. For now, we can only say, as we so often do,

“Therefore, let us glory,
yea, we will glory in the Lord;
yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full;
yea, we will praise our God forever.
Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord?
Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy,
and of his long-suffering towards the children of men?
Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.
Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful?”³

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: may 13, 2024*)

² Psalm 130.⁸⁻¹⁰, author’s translation

³ Alma 26.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

meditation 5— psalm 5.⁴⁻⁷

⁴knowing that You are not a God who takes pleasure in willful wrongdoing;
that cruelty cannot find safety in You;

⁵that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.

⁶that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual.

⁷But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.

I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;
bow in reverence to You (author's translation).

As I understand them, Psalms 3-7 address attacks made on the Psalmist's character and the Psalmist's night-long pleas to God for help and deliverance in the face of those attacks. These pleas are offered in the temple precincts. Psalm 5 began with the Psalmist's thrice repeated plea that God hear his continuing pleas (vs. 1-2). In verse 3, the Psalmist doubled down on his commitment to prayer, assuring God that the morning would find him on his knees, pleading once more in expectation of God's positive response. In verse 7, we saw that the Psalmist's confident entrance into the temple, his stamina in prayer, and his expectation of a positive divine response were based upon his knowledge that "unwavering devotion" is central to the divine character.

"But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.

I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;
bow in reverence to You."

Yes, it is in the divine character to be devoted and committed to others. God's unwavering devotion gives hope where no hope could exist. But there is another basis for the Psalmist's confident entrance into the temple and pleas for help. That basis for confidence is found in the Psalmist's knowledge about God's character in judgment. God accurately assesses human behavior. It is part of his character to allow human behavior to play a role in whether an individual may legitimately enter the temple and expect a positive divine response to prayer.

"that You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;
that the evildoer cannot take asylum in You;
that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.
that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual."

The attitudes and behaviors catalogued in these verses are the exact opposite of devotion—divine or human. The Psalmist's statement is both tacit confession of his own innocence in regard to his behavior toward others, and condemnation of those who attack him. He has avoided being purposefully hurtful. He has avoided being intentionally abusive. He has avoided deceit and violence toward others. Thus, his confidence in approaching God in the temple is increased. His enemies, having engaged in all these behaviors in light of God's unwavering devotion to them, cannot legitimately enter the temple in anticipation of a favorable response from God.

Here, we are reminded of Jesus' parable in which a debtor, forgiven his impossibly gigantic debt by a generous king, would not return the favor and forgive a pittance that a fellow debtor owed him.¹ Those who have experienced the benefits of God's unwavering devotion to them must go out into the world and show that same unwavering devotion to others.

None of this should be read as if God's devotion to us is somehow part of a quid pro quo. God's devotion to us always surpasses our devotion to him. He is always devoted to us beyond what appears to be reasonable and deserved. Jesus' parable of the "Prodigal God" (usually called the "Prodigal Son") is a beautiful illustration of God's devotion above and beyond the call of duty or deserts.²

Nevertheless, God's unwavering devotion is not gratuitously bestowed. God has purpose in it. It comforts the worshipper, yes. But, in demonstrating his unwavering devotion, God means to serve as Exemplar to human beings. He shows how people are to be treated—or not treated as in this passage. He hopes, anticipates, expects that, however imperfectly, we will imitate in our relationships with others the divine devotion shown to us, a devotion that we so much appreciate and depend upon.

So, we are called to do something more with God's devotion than bask in it. We are to imitate it. We need not, indeed cannot imitate it to perfection. We are unlikely to even imitate to our own satisfaction. But to not try? To willfully act in ways that are exactly opposite divine devotion? To harm and abuse and violate and deceive? This has an impact upon our relationship to God. We cannot legitimately enter the temple or expect God presence and aid when we willfully treat others opposite to what God would treat them were He present.

The Psalmist's confidence in entering the temple and offering an expectant plea for help against his accusers is, then, based on his knowledge and acceptance of these truths. First and foremost, it is based on God's own character. God is devoted to us far beyond comprehension or deserts. Second, God's judgement is always appropriate and right. Third, the Psalmist knows that he is innocent of serious breaches of fidelity toward his fellow beings. Finally, the Psalmist knows that those who attack him are, themselves, guilty of serious breaches of fidelity toward him, against others, many others, and against God. Any appeal they may make of God in respect to the Psalmist, therefore, will go unheeded.

So, this Psalm is not only a call to trust God and rely on his unwavering fidelity. It is a call to follow Him. Imitate Him. Follow His example of devotion, fidelity, and commitment to others. This is one key that opens wider the temple doors. a confident approach of God, and God presence in our lives.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

¹ See, Matthew 18.²³⁻²⁴

² See, Luke 15.¹¹⁻³²

meditation 6— psalm 5.⁴⁻⁷

⁴knowing that You are not a God who takes pleasure in willful wrongdoing;
that cruelty cannot find safety in You;

⁵that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.

⁶that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual.

⁷But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.

I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;
bow in reverence to You (author's translation).

Under attack from enemies who defame his character, the Psalmist enters the temple and confidently prays for God's intervention and protection. The Psalmist can confidently pray in the temple and receive a favorable reception because of God's character and the devotion He has toward the Psalmist. The Psalmist's confidence is also based on his trust in God's judgment. He knows that God is

“not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;
that the evildoer cannot take asylum in You;
that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.
that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual.”

The Psalmist trusts that God will see that he is innocent of any wickedness that is intentionally hurtful, abusive, deceptive, or violent toward others. In addition, the Psalmist is confident that, notwithstanding God's natural devotion, those who attack the Psalmist will not receive a favorable reception or be granted success in their attacks against him because, far from innocent, they are guilty of hurtful, abusive, deceptive, and violent behavior against the Psalmist and, likely, others as well.

All of this has application beyond the Psalmist and his immediate enemies. There are principles here that apply to all who would approach God in hopes of His help. This approach may take place inside or outside the temple, but the Psalmist's focus here is on those approaches that take place inside the temple. In this meditation, we will reflect on his temple focus. What the Psalmist expresses here about the temple and its relation to ethical behavior is found elsewhere in the Psalms. In Psalm 24, for example, the Psalmist asks,

“Who can go up into YHWH's temple,
and who can stand in His incomparable place?”¹

In another, he asked God directly,

“YHWH, who can feel secure in your temple?
Who can stay comfortably in your sacred mount?”²

¹ Psalm 24.³, author's translation

² Psalm 15.¹, author's translation

The answer to each question is similar.

“Whoever is blameless and has a clear conscious,
does not give himself to deceitfulness,
and does not swear in confirmation of a deception.
He will receive a blessing from YHWH
and triumph from God who saves him.
This is the community that inquires of Him.
They who seek your presence, O God of Ya ‘aqōb.”³

“One whose life is one of integrity;
who does what is right,
and is committed to speaking what is true.
No slander escapes his tongue.
He brings no injury upon a fellow citizen.
He does not countenance the dishonoring of those around him.
He avoids the contemptuous,
but he honors those who reverence YHWH.
He might make a commitment that is not in his best interest,
but will not renege on his promise.
He does not lend money at interest.
He does not accept a bribe that might turn a case against the innocent

He that acts in these ways
can never be shaken.”⁴

The Psalmist’s assertion that one’s ethical conduct outside the temple is central to one’s experience inside the temple is consistent with those of the Hebrew prophets. The Hebrew prophets often expressed reservations about the temple. Their reservations often stemmed from the disconnect between what the temple represented and taught inside its walls and how temple devotees lived outside its walls. The temple taught the celebrant that the life lived outside the temple was to be one of justice, compassion, and engaged discipleship.

“How should I approach YHWH?
How should I bow to my exalted God?
Should I approach him with a fully burnt offering?
How about with new-born calves?
⁷Will YHWH be satisfied with thousands of rams?
How about with countless channels of olive oil?
Should I offer my firstborn for my willful defiance?
How about my offspring for less serious private infractions?
⁸He has already told you, man, what is good.
What does YHWH want from you
but to do justice,
and love compassion,
and be willing to live like your God?”⁵

The temple taught that this justice, compassion, and discipleship is to be exercised toward all, but

³ Psalm 24. ⁴⁻⁶, author’s translation

⁴ Psalm 15. ²⁻⁵, author’s translation

⁵ See Micah 6. ⁶⁻⁸, author’s translation See our meditations on this passage.

especially to the vulnerable whose lot in life it is to most often experience the exact opposite.⁶ Those who attend the temple and clearly hear its message, leave the temple committed to seeking reconciliation and peace with everyone they meet outside the temple.⁷ A life lived outside the temple that is inconsistent with the life mandated inside the temple is a sham. It makes a sham of the temple.

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying,

‘The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.’

For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say,

‘We are delivered to do all these abominations?’

Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.”⁸

There is, then, as the Psalmist asserts in this Psalm, an unbreakable link between a worshipper’s ability to enter the temple and confidently anticipate a positive interaction with God, and the life that the worshipper lives outside the temple. God’s unwavering devotion to individuals does not break this link. Rather it is intended to strengthen it.

As we approach God in or out of the temple, He is interested in and examines the life we live in the mundane world. He does not bother so much with the sorts of trivial and legalistic behaviors that we so often consider—where our posterior is sat on Sunday morning, what percentage of the mammon for which He has no need we give Him, of what our diet does and does not consist, etc., etc., etc.

Rather, he examines our relationship with others, especially the vulnerable. He looks to see whether we show a devotion to others that is imitative of the devotion He shows to us—or, at least, an approximation of His devotion. He looks to see whether we act in ways that intentionally harm, abuse, deceive, and violate others, or whether we live ethically and expansively with others; whether we practice justice and compassion toward others. And, as always, we must remember that it is not only our own individual behavior that is examined. Also examined is how we interact with societal laws and policies that impact others in society—especially, again, the vulnerable, the downtrodden, the disadvantaged.

How we treat others outside the temple impacts the quality of our experiences inside the temple. This is so particularly because the temple itself directs us to devotion toward others. How we treat others in our daily lives and in our societal responsibilities directly impacts the quality of our prayer life and to what degree our prayers gain access to heaven and bring relief in times of need. How we treat others can turn temple worship into a sham and prayer into hypocrisy or it can turn mundane prayer and mundane temple worship into something extraordinary.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

⁶ See Isaiah 1.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

⁷ See Isaiah 2.¹⁻⁵

⁸ Jeremiah 7.⁴⁻¹¹

meditation 7— psalm 5.⁴⁻⁷

⁴knowing that You are not a God who takes pleasure in willful wrongdoing;
that cruelty cannot find safety in You;

⁵that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.

⁶that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual.

⁷But, as for me, because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.

I can bow down in Your sacred temple precincts;
bow in reverence to You (author's translation).

In this Psalm, the Psalmist enters the temple and confidently pleads with God for deliverance from his detractors. His confidence flows from both God's devotion to him and his own imitative devotion to others. He knows that those who are intentionally hurtful, abusive, deceptive, and violent toward others can have no assurance of God's positive response in times of need. God's devotion and one's devotion to others should, truly, be all the "yes" necessary to a successful temple recommend interview and a meaningful temple worship experience.

As I meditation upon this passage, it comes to mind that the Psalmist likely believed that God was most apt to hear the pleas offered to Him if they originated in and from the temple. The temple was sacred space, after all. To be in the temple was to be as physically near God's presence as one could get—God sat on his throne, the ark of the covenant, in the throne room (the holiest place) at the back of the temple.

Perhaps early Jewish Christians shared the Psalmist's belief. However, it would not be long after Jesus' death and resurrection that Christians began having difficulties with temple officials, causing them to rethink, perhaps being forced to rethink such beliefs. Acts informs us that Peter was forcibly removed from the temple several times. The reason for his removal, according to the temple authorities, was his insistence on teaching in the temple what they considered false doctrine. In addition, they found him inside the temple performing unauthorized ordinances in the form of healings.⁹ In such circumstances, how long, do you suppose, could Peter reasonably expect to maintain his temple recommend?¹⁰

Later, Paul and, perhaps, new Christian gentiles (and thus, uncircumcised) converts were driven from the temple—"Are you circumcised" was, after all, one of the temple recommend questions. Even the possibility that uncircumcised individuals might have entered the temple was deemed so serious that the temple was closed and cleansed—a veritable temple rededication!¹¹ Whether Paul really introduced a gentile into the temple is immaterial. Clearly, a Christian who was a gentile was not going to pass a temple recommend interview and so would live without temple and the benefits that were supposed to derive therefrom.

It is little wonder that a Christian such as Stephen was soon preaching openly anti-temple sermons.¹² This

⁹ See Acts 4

¹⁰ In mentioning "temple recommends" and "temple recommend interviews, please do not take me literally. Such things did not exist then. I am being poetically anachronistic for the sake of understanding and relevance.

¹¹ See Acts 21

¹² See Acts 7

cost Stephen more than his recommend. It cost him his life.

What, then, was one to do if they lost their temple recommend and were refused admittance into the temple? Could their prayers, increasingly offered without the benefit of the temple, reach heaven as certainly as those offered in and from the temple? How would individuals without the benefits of the temple maintain direct communion with the much-needed God of Israel? Such questions and issues must have caused some degree of spiritual heartburn for early Christians who were, largely Jewish.

Soon Christian reflections on the relevance or irrelevance of the temple became a cottage industry. The writer of the New Testament's Book of Hebrews, for example, made the argument that the temple in Jerusalem was but a dim earthly shadow of the real temple, which was in heaven. It was into this heavenly temple that Jesus, the true High Priest, entered. His entrance into this true heavenly temple granted access to that same heavenly temple to all who took him as their great High Priest.¹³

John's gospel reasoned that God had tabernacled in Jesus.¹⁴ It reported Jesus' teaching to his disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."¹⁵ Just as Jacob had come upon a holy place to which angels descended from heaven and then ascended back to heaven, those who came to Jesus would have access through him to heaven. Jesus was the true ladder by which not only angels, but they, themselves could pass into heaven and heaven descend upon them.

Couldn't get into and pray inside the temple sitting atop Zion's mount? Not to worry. Jesus was the real temple of God. Go to him and worship in him.

Whatever Paul thought of these reflections, he had another take on the problem of Christian "templelessness" and direct access to God.

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"¹⁶

"Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."¹⁷

Returning to Peter, who was, as we have seen, one of the first forced to wrestle with the problem, we find that he came to much the same conclusion as Paul.

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house..."¹⁸

The temple of God is not to be found perched atop any hill. No! The temple is wherever you are!

I don't know if the Psalmist was right in his time to feel as he did about the temple: that it offered the best access to God. But it is not true today. Jesus changed everything. Now, we will not try and stand in the way of those who feel the need to go to a latter-day temple in prayer, believing that it will grant them more and better access to God. They are welcome to pray there to their heart's content.

But, the truth as it is found in Christ is that one need not travel over land or sea to go to a temple made by mortal hands to commune with God. One need not change into different clothes or utter rote phrases. God

¹³ See, Hebrews 8-9

¹⁴ John 1.¹⁴

¹⁵ John 1.⁵¹

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 3.¹⁶

¹⁷ Ephesians 2.²²

¹⁸ 1 Peter 2.⁵

is not confined to one place. Rather, as in the days of Israel's ancient tabernacle, God is perfectly happy to move about, comfortable wherever he finds a tabernacle that has the name of Jesus written in its heart. The most welcoming tabernacles are those in which Christ dwells. There are millions of these dotted over the entire globe. For my money, no brick and mortar building can compete with Jesus when it comes to gaining access to God. And there is no temple closer to God or dearer to his heart than the individual.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

⁸YHWH, bring me acquittal
in response to my accusers.

Grant me access to You.

⁹Because nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven;
because ruinous intent resides deep inside them;
because their throat is an open grave;
because their tongue is a slippery slope

¹⁰O 'ēlōhîm, pronounce them guilty.

Let them fall prey to their own malicious intentions.

Banish them because of the enormity of their legal overstep,
since their defiance is really directed against You (author's translation).

As is the case with the two Psalms immediately before Psalm 5 and the two immediately after it, the Psalmist is under attack. The attack comes in the form of accusation. The Psalmist has resorted to the temple where he spends the night in intense and expectant prayer (vs. 4). He expresses his faith that in His “unwavering devotion” toward him, God will respond to his pleas (vs. 7). He also believes that because of God’s character in judgment, God will judge him to be innocent, and his enemies guilty of behavior toward others that is harmful, abusive, deceitful, and violent (vss. 4-6). Now, in verses 8-10, the Psalmist asks God to come forward in his defense. He confesses his innocence, and he asks that his violent accusers be thwarted in their false attacks against him. More than thwarted, he wants them to pay for their wickedness.

It should perhaps be said, first, that the Psalmist is not claiming to be sinless. He knows that he sins. The Psalmists candidly and repeatedly make this confession. There seems little doubt that the Psalmists would have all agreed with Paul when he uncompromisingly declared, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3.²³). But, here, the Psalmist is innocent of the specific charges brought against him: “Nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven.”

We do not know the exact nature of the charges. Given the Psalmist’s assertion/ confession in verses 4-6, we can reasonably surmise that it involves some form of harm, abuse, deception, and violence against another. If we read Psalms 2-7 as reflecting the same or a similar situation, then we might consider the charge brought in Psalm 7.

“YHWH, if I have done this,
if I bear responsibility for this wrong—
that is, if I have repaid with evil one who befriended me,
or if I have deemed one an enemy without cause—
let the enemy pursue me,
catch me, and stomp my life into the underworld;
establish my abode in death.”¹

Here, whatever the exact nature of the alleged offense, the Psalmist is accused of wrongfully turning on someone who had previously been beneficially friendly to him.

In light of the charges brought against him, the Psalmist requests that God, Himself, involve Himself in the trial.

¹ Psalm 7.³⁻⁵

“YHWH, bring me acquittal
in response to my accusers.
Grant me access to You.”

Perhaps the Psalmist wishes to have God as his “defense attorney.” This is the case just two Psalms later.

“My defense rests with ^עלֹהִים,
Deliverer of the sincerely upright.
It is ^עלֹהִים who arbitrates for the innocent,
whom he never condemns.”²

Here, we might think of Jesus who, as he prepared to leave his disciples, promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to do what he, Jesus, had always done for them during his ministry: serve as *paraklētos* (Jn. 14.¹⁶). One of the several meanings of this Greek word is “advocate, defense attorney.”

On the other hand, and perhaps more likely, in asking for acquittal the Psalmist desires to have God preside as judge over his trial—perhaps God serves both roles: defense attorney and judge. In this Psalm, the Psalmist places his trust in God’s attribute of judgment. The Psalms speak often of God’s role as judge. He is judge over the whole earth. But more intimately, the Psalmists speak of God’s role as judge and ask that he act in that role in their own lives. There is no clearer or more visual depiction of God as judge to individuals than that found, again, in Psalm 7.

“Arise, YHWH, vigorously.
Rise up to match my enemy’s excessive outburst.
Rouse yourself and demand that I be given a fair hearing.
With the assembly gathered round you,
sit, as the one presiding over it.
It is YHWH who judges people.
Judge me, YHWH, as befits my total innocence.
Please undermine the malice of the unjust,
while supporting the innocent,
by examining heart and mind, God of justice.”³

Whether as defense attorney, judge, or both, the Psalmist has come to the temple seeking God. He asks that God grant him access to Him. We might read this in response and contradiction to the claim his enemies made in Psalm 3: “He’ll get no help from ^עלֹהִים”! (vs. 2). But the Psalmist believes he will get help from God. Indeed, he firmly anticipates God’s help as he himself confessed: “At first light, I’ll present myself to You and anticipate Your response.”

The Psalmist’s overriding hope is that God will find him innocent of the accusations leveled against him. But he wants more than this. He wants his enemies’ maleficence exposed. But even this is not enough for him. He wants to see his enemies pay for their maleficence (vs. 9-10). We might feel that the Psalmist is carrying things a bit too far. Perhaps he should just forgive and forget. We will explore the Psalmist’s imprecation of his enemies in the next meditation on this passage.

Even so, come Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

² Psalm 7.¹⁰⁻¹¹

³ Psalm 7.⁶⁻⁹

m editation 9— psalm 5.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸YHWH, bring me acquittal
in response to my accusers.

Grant me access to You.

⁹Because nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven;
because ruinous intent resides deep inside them;
because their throat is an open grave;
because their tongue is a slippery slope

¹⁰O 'ēlōhîm, pronounce them guilty.

Let them fall prey to their own malicious intentions.

Banish them because of the enormity of their legal overstep,
since their defiance is really directed against You (author's translation).

The Psalmist stands accused of acting in such a way as to harm, abuse, deceive, and violate another (vss. 4-6), perhaps one from whom he had formerly benefited.⁴ In response, the Psalmist, firm in his faith in God's devotion to him and His character in judgment, has come to the temple, where he spends the night pleading that God stand up in his defense, hear his case, and pronounce him innocent.

The Psalmist adamantly maintains his innocence in regard to the charges his accusers have brought against him. His accusers have, he maintains, failed to make their case.

“Nothing coming out of their mouth has been proven.”

The fact is, it is his accusers who are guilty of planning harm, abuse, deception, and violence against him—and likely others. The Psalmist presents the words his accusers speak, the accusations they let fly against him as a mortal danger. It is in his enemies very nature to seek the ruin and even death of others, most notably the Psalmist. Perhaps this is poetic exaggeration. In an honor-based society, losing one's reputation and honor really is akin to a sort of death. It really can lead to death, not only of the one whose family has been besmirched by the loss of honor, but of others as well as retribution has its way back and forth between the antagonistic parties. Then again, it is possible that the Psalmist's enemies do indeed seek the death penalty against the Psalmist.

This brings us to the Psalmist's imprecation, his calling for evil to be brought down upon his mortal enemies.

“O 'ēlōhîm, pronounce them guilty.

Let them fall prey to their own malicious intentions.

Banish them because of the enormity of their legal overstep,
since their defiance is really directed against You.”

Imprecation is an extraordinarily common feature of the Psalms. It is a feature with which we are not always or completely comfortable. We think of Jesus who, when asked by Peter how magnanimous one should be in forgiveness toward others, counseled to forgive “seventy times seven” times or, essentially, “always.”⁵ We think of the challenge posed in the Sermon on the Mount that disciples “Love your

⁴ see Psalm 7.³⁻⁴

⁵ See Matthew 18.²¹⁻²²

enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully us you, and persecute you.”⁶ We think of Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son (which some refer to as the Prodigal God) and that father’s unwavering devotion to his wayward son.⁷ Most powerful of all, perhaps, we might think of Jesus’ own “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” as he hung and suffered on the cross.⁸

Surely the Psalmists’ propensity of resorting to imprecation is a thing of a bygone era. A relic of a violent past. Surely Jesus’ call for devotion and forgiveness supersedes the possibility of imprecation. Yet, one wonders if this is a matter of our domestication of Jesus. For this same Jesus, just days before his violent death, offered a scathing rebuke and pronounced uncompromising “woes”—eight of them, to be precise—on “scribes and Pharisees,” his most vociferous antagonists and accusers.⁹ This same Jesus offered as one of his final sermons a full-throated and apocalyptic warning of coming catastrophes and destructions that would flow from society’s rejection of him.¹⁰ And this same Jesus, the one who talked and lived so much of forgiveness, this same Jesus found words of imprecation coming to his lips as he made his way to the cruel cross.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.’

Then shall they begin to say to the mountains,

‘Fall on us;’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’

For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”¹¹

The fact is, we are under the near impossible necessity of keeping these things—imprecation and blessing—in balance, not sacrificing one for the other. As we have discussed in these meditations, there are times when God, in His “unwavering devotion,”

“does not relate to us as our sins deserve
or deal with us as our iniquities might suggest.”¹²

There are other times when he lets fly

“A hero’s arrows, sharp pointed,
burning hot.”¹³

There are times when there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth as our evil deeds catch up to us.

I do not maintain that God has a cosmic dashboard on which he punches buttons for the infliction of punishment or the bestowal of blessings. I do not pretend to know the balance between imprecation and blessing or the calculations heaven makes to achieve its perfect balance. With my limited sight, there are many times when I think I would do things very differently than He. But I have to believe that there is a balance for which we must strive. It seems that both imprecation and blessing exist in the cosmos. The Book of Mormon prophet, Alma, takes this stab at explaining the machination of imprecation and

⁶ Matthew 5.⁴⁴

⁷ Luke 15.¹¹⁻³²

⁸ Luke 23.³⁴

⁹ See Matthew 23

¹⁰ See Matthew 25

¹¹ Luke 23.²⁸⁻³¹

¹² Psalm 103.¹⁰

¹³ Psalm 120.⁴

blessing with what we sometimes call “the law of restoration.”

“And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, every thing to its natural frame—mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption—raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on one hand, the other on the other—the one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil...”¹⁴

It seems that “what goes around comes around” has scriptural support. But, still, it is all well above my paygrade. Perhaps it is a matter of intent? Most of us do not intend to harm, oppress, deceive, and violate others. Perhaps for this reason we are not treated as it appears we should be treated? Perhaps those who do intend and scheme to harm, oppress, deceive, and violate others as the Psalmist’s accusers seem to do... perhaps there comes a time when imprecation is the only alternative—and maybe even then, not as soon as some of us would think and hope. Then again, perhaps imprecation is about the deliverance of the innocent more than about “punishing” the guilty.

I don’t know. But it does seem that the Psalmists’ enemies lived to harm, lived to oppress, lived to deceive; lived to violate others. Harm, oppression, deception, and violence found a comfortable home deep, deep inside them. Such behavior became as natural to them as breathing. It is difficult to see anything other than imprecation being appropriate to their condition. They directed their wickedness at the Psalmist and the Psalmist called upon God to not only deliver him from their wicked schemes but to deliver them over to their own wicked schemes.

I do know this, though. Balance is to be sought after when striving to understand the character of an infinite God. Attempting to domesticate God the Father and God the Son, turning them into something that resembles us or, worse, snuggly teddy bears is to be avoided.

I also know that I will avoid intentionally harming, oppressing, deceiving, or violating others. More than that, I will attempt in my puny way to imitate the unwavering devotion that God has shown me as I relate to others. I will strive to do so because it is the right thing to do. But I also know that in doing so I might find comfortable access to God—comfortable for me and comfortable for Him. I do very, very much want to be comfortable with Him and have Him be comfortable with me.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

¹⁴ Al. 41.⁴⁻⁵

¹¹But, all those who seek shelter in You will loudly rejoice;
always shout joyously, those over whom You throw Your protection.
As for those who love You for who You are, they will exalt in You.

¹²For You bless the devout, O YHWH.
As a full body shield, You surround them with Your acceptance (author's translation).

As is the case in Psalms 3-4 and again in 6-7, enemies attack the Psalmist's character, accusing him of wrongdoing (vs 8-9) in such a way as to threaten his relationship with God (See 3.²) This Psalm begins with the Psalmist direct appeal to God that He come to his aid (vs. 1-2). This appeal is made in the temple (vs. 7). This is followed with the Psalmist's confession of trust in God (vs. 3-7). He fully expects God to respond to him (vs. 3). The Psalmist's trust is based first on God's character in judgment. God judges with discernment, accuracy, and justice. He responds and grants entrance to the temple to those who resist the temptation to intentionally harm, oppress, deceive, and violate others. At the same time, He refuses access to those who intentionally engage in those same wicked behaviors (vs. 4-6). More, the Psalmist's trust in God is strengthened by his knowledge of God's "unwavering devotion" to him (vs. 7).

This confession of trust in God is followed by another direct appeal to God (vs. 8-10). In this appeal, the Psalmist asks that God actively participate in his acquittal (vs 8) and that He see that his accusers pay for the harm, oppression, deception, and violence they have engaged in against him (vs. 9-10), and perhaps others.

Now, in verses 11-12, the Psalmist returns to direct confession of trust in God. But here, the Psalmist presents an expanded vision of God's devotion. God's devotion is not limited to the Psalmist but is extended to all who trust Him; who seek to shelter in Him; who respond to His devotion toward them with their own devotion toward Him. All who trust in God, love Him for the expansiveness of His character, and are devoted to Him will find the protection they seek and will rejoice in God without inhibition. God will surround and protect them with His acceptance.

"As a full body shield, You surround them with Your acceptance."

This final line leads me to think of God's grace of which Paul so often speaks. There is no end to what one could say of God's grace. Like Him, it is infinite. But among the many things that could be said is this. Grace is, first and foremost something that exists in God, Himself. It is part of his divine character. The word reflects an immense generosity of acceptance and appreciation for others. It is an acceptance that is life-changing for the one experiencing it.

Think of the Italian, "grazie," or the Spanish, "gracie," both related to the English word "grace" Both mean, "thank you." "I appreciate that." Such expressions as thanks reflect the aspect of "acceptance" that underlays the word. "I accept, I approve of what you have done, the gift you have given."

Acceptance, approval, appreciation... these are all part of God's grace. Grace reflects His willing and happy acceptance of those who put their trust in Him. It is impossible to calculate the empowerment that comes with God's acceptance of us—his grace. Grace is not empowerment itself, as we sometimes claim, but grace does bring empowerment in its wake. Who, among those who truly know His character and trust Him, will fear to approach Him? What can we not do with Him on our side? What boldness will we avoid, knowing that with His acceptance we need not fear failure? What advances can we not make through the courage that His acceptance brings? Those who know not His grace, His boundless acceptance, are often spiritually stifled in their progress through their fear of failure and of displeasing

Him.

So, yes, God's acceptance is indeed like a full body shield that shields us from, among other things, this fear of failure and its accompanying erosion in spiritual advancement.

God's grace or, as here, His acceptance, is related to His "unwavering devotion" that brought such confidence to the Psalmist, as expressed earlier in this Psalm. God's devotion to us creates in us a reciprocal devotion to God. This devotion to God, this "devoutness," brings blessings into not only our lives, but the lives of everyone with whom we interact as we seek, albeit imperfectly, to imitate in the lives of others the divine devotion God has shown to us. God's "acceptance," then, sets off a chain reaction until it surrounds, protects, and empowers not just one, but many.

Sadly, there are some—we might think of those the Doctrine and Covenants calls "Perdition," who refuse all of God's advances—who willfully reject God's acceptance. This brings them to engage in all manner of harm, oppression, deceit, and violence toward others, as the Psalmist observed about his enemies earlier in this Psalm. After much patience and longsuffering, they run the risk of being removed, perhaps removing themselves, from divine accompaniment as the imprecations of this Psalm also suggest.

But, if enough individual "manies" take shelter in the shield of God's acceptance and pass it on to others, then entire societies can be shielded; can be changed, strengthened, and given unhindered access to the God of "unwavering devotion;" they can become little Zions until, finally, they are drafted into the Kingdom of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

Meditation— Psalm 5.¹⁻³ (Lent)

“YHWH, You’ll hear my voice in the morning.
At first light, I’ll present myself to You and await Your response.”

Though we might read these lines as an expression of faith that God hears prayers, it seems best to read them as a statement of the Psalmist’s firm commitment to a diligent, searching, and hopeful prayer life. Before anything else, he commits, each morning will find him praying expectantly to God.

In this prayer, the Psalmist asks God to “give ear,” “give heed,” and “give close attention” to his prayer and his plea. Just as in Adam’s thrice repeated prayer soon after he had been expelled from the garden of Eden, the Psalmist’s thrice repeated plea for God’s attention perhaps gives some indication to the seriousness of the challenge facing the Psalmist.

All prayer is not created equal. There are times when prayer can become somewhat repetitive without serious spiritual harm to the worshipper. There are other times when, due to life’s temporal and spiritual challenges, serious, searching prayer is called for. Some challenges require a heavier, more serious prayer effort than others. “This kind,” Jesus said, speaking of his healing of a father’s “lunatic” son, “goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”⁵⁰

Joseph Smith once observed that “The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out.”⁵¹ I do not know how often they should occur, but I suspect that all of us could benefit from more frequent serious and searching prayer over “the deep things of God” which it is our privilege to receive.⁵²

I suspect God would be pleased if we engaged in at least the occasional “careful and ponderous and solemn” prayer that has God and the “things of God” as its principal concern. I suspect that He would be pleased if we used prayer to get to know Him better through the questions we ask Him and the pondering in which we engage. Among the reasons behind the Psalmist’s commitment to prayer, I suspect, is a personal and intimate inquiry after God. Elsewhere, the Psalmist confessed,

“When thou said, ‘Seek ye my face,’
my heart said unto thee, ‘Thy face, LORD, will I seek.’”⁵³

Perhaps during the Lent Season, we could devote a little more prayer time to exploring the “solemnities of eternity,” and in setting our sites on growing our understanding and appreciation for God. Maybe, we can converse with Him as one man or woman converses with another. Perhaps we can more diligently seek the face of the LORD for the innate beauty that is in it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 13, 2024)

⁵⁰ Matthew 17.²¹

⁵¹ *TPJS*, p. 137

⁵² See 1 Corinthians 2.¹⁰

⁵³ Psalm 27.⁸