

CONTINUING OUR JOURNEY

After God's Heart

This four-week prayer journal is the second in a series of prayer journals published by Prestonwood Baptist Church for its members. The first one, *Beyond All Limits*, published in the fall of 2006, is considered foundational to helping one establish a consistent and effective prayer life and a deeper personal relationship with the Lord.

You may pick up a copy of the *Beyond All Limits* Prayer Journal in the Prestonwood Bookstore; it is also available to those attending NextStep.

In *Beyond All Limits*, the Prayer Journal was intended to help us personally move spiritually beyond all limits in seeking fellowship and spiritual intimacy with the Lord, learning to discern His speaking to our hearts, and providing a simple journaling technique that requires but a few words to capture meaningful moments from our quiet times.

With this Prayer Journal we are after the very heart of God. We want for ourselves and for the youth of our church—the next generation who will advance His kingdom—to draw close to Him, seeking His kingdom and His righteousness as the priority of our lives. To that end, we're asking our Lord to unite us as a single organism, young and old together, not just for today and tomorrow, but laying a foundation for the generations to come. We ask God to keep us growing and maturing spiritually in our walk with Him.

AFTER GOD'S HEART

Living Daily in God's Presence

Prayer Journal: First Quarter 2007



BEYOND
ALL LIMITS

“You have said, ‘Seek my face.’
My heart says to you, ‘Your face,
LORD, do I seek.’”
(Psalm 27:8)

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PrayerPower Ministries

INTRODUCTION:

A PEOPLE AFTER GOD'S HEART

Once again, the Prestonwood family unites in a commitment to prayer. Our previous prayer journal served to encourage us to begin praying the Scriptures together—claiming God's promises concerning agreement in prayer (Matthew 18:19-20) and the power of praying according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). In both cases, the promise is that our prayers will be heard, and answered. How important that is!

Now we again set ourselves before God in unity, guided in a series of devotionals that take us daily into familiar territory—the beautiful and inspiring psalms of David, the shepherd king.

United in Our Prayers and Our Purposes

In many ways, we Christians are not alike. We have individual personalities, preferences, and priorities. But as worshipers of the true God and believers in His Word, we have at least one thing in common. We share a deep love, respect and passion for the Psalms. We learn from them, about ourselves and about God. We are reminded of both our frailties and our strengths. We are brought high and brought low. In the Psalms, the important questions are asked and answered.

And for most of us, whenever we venture into the Psalms, one name stands out and one life dominates the landscape. That is David, who wrote (and often sang) many of the Psalms, and the man whose heart is most clearly revealed. Though there are other writers of the Psalms, none is memorable to us. David is, for us, The Psalmist.

As we pray together based upon these Psalms of David, we of the Prestonwood family will seek to discover for ourselves what it can mean to be a man (or woman, or teenager, or child) “after God's own heart.” For that is what we all desire as members of this body—to be people who honor God with our lives, and through whom God can do mighty works in spite of our personal limitations, false starts and besetting sins. David was human, as we are. But just as God took this simple, flawed and often fearful man, gave him a difficult task and empowered him to accomplish it, so He can and will do with each of us. This is God's way for all who name the name of Christ.

God Works through Us All—Together

It is important to know that this does indeed include *all*. We are *one body*, made up of many parts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4). Just as David was able to look back over his life and proclaim:

“I have been young, and now am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or his children begging for bread.”

(Psalm 37:25)

...even so can we, young and old together, look to the God whom David worshiped and praised for His faithful provision and preserving grace, to guide our steps—all of us, young and old, moving together, following our Shepherd beside the streams and through the valleys of life as we encounter them, day by day.

Together, let's allow the Psalms of David to begin to speak to us in fresh ways as we deepen our personal devotion to God and our relationship with Him. Our aim is to be men and women, teenagers and children—Generation Now, Generation X, Baby Boomers, Depression kids, all of us—people after God's own heart, yielded to Him and ready to be used in the advancement of His kingdom on earth.

JOURNALING BRIEFLY—AND EFFECTIVELY

The purpose of journaling is to capture what you sense God is speaking to your heart, meaningful moments that can be noted in very few words.

This particular format doesn't require writing skill or eloquent language. It's designed to save you time and to make it easy to scan at a later time and find things you've written; this is especially important when you're trying to discern God's direction or will. It will help you clarify for yourself when God is speaking (not audibly, but through impressions of your heart as you are reading His Word).

Although this journal has five devotional/journaling pages for each week, you need not journal that often on a continuing basis. What is important is that on the days when God has a word for you, you have a way to quickly and effectively note it, even with only partial sentences. Try it over the coming weeks and prove to yourself what a personal blessing such journaling can be.

Sample Journaling Page

Date 9/10/07

Scripture or quote: *(In this booklet you'll find Scriptures already selected for you, but you would normally copy whatever verse had impressed you from your daily Bible reading (see page 35):*

"...the sheep listen to his [the shepherd's] voice. ...his sheep follow him because they know his voice." (John 10:3b, 4b, ESV)

What does my heart sense God has spoken (silently) to me?
He is my Shepherd, and I want to hear and recognize His voice.

My prayer response—

Please help me to know when my thoughts and impressions are from You.

My impression of what God wants me to do—

Trust Him to help me know when He is speaking to my heart, especially as I read the Bible.

KNOWING AND TRUSTING

...Those who know your name will trust you.

(Psalm 9:10a, NIV)

Those who *know God's name* will trust Him! Certainly this includes those who acknowledge His reputation and renown. But David here is saying that there is more to trusting God than simply being aware of His reputation. Trusting God involves much more, in fact: it is a matter of *knowing* Him *personally*.

The word David used is *yada*, which means to know through personal experience. It's when we know and personally experience God's manifesting His nature, character, and activity in our lives that our personal trust in Him grows. As we see and recognize His working in us, we realize that He is trustworthy for us personally, even with the smallest details of everyday living.

Where does such personal experience with God come from? We find it as David did, through spending time with God, in prayer and in the Word, every day.

In what ways do you sense you know the Lord through personal experience today?

Would you like to draw closer to Him? Ask Him what steps to take.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

WAITING

*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;
Wait for the LORD! (Psalm 27:14)*

Waiting on the Lord is one of the most difficult things we're asked to do. Perhaps this is true because it takes patience, when we're so prone to rush ahead.

But waiting on God has purpose beyond developing patience. Sometimes waiting is to mature us and build our character to match God's assignment. Think of the years between David's anointing and his actually becoming king. In those years he was busy tending sheep, fighting lions and bears—and even Goliath!—yet he still found time for worship and prayer, and to build a strong personal relationship with the Lord.

It's that relationship that helped build his character as he waited for God's timing. Psalm 23 shows how close he stayed to the Lord, learning that he could count on Him, even in dark times. As he waited, his faith grew. So will ours.

How do you handle the waiting times in your life?

Ask God for whatever help you think you need.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

QUIETING

Be still before the LORD... (Psalm 37:7)

Part of the secret of waiting on the Lord is learning to be still before Him. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet in the busyness of our lives, it's difficult, sometimes almost impossible, to be still, even in our quiet times with Him.

If we're not careful, we find ourselves approaching that time the way we approach a project, checking things off our list—so many chapters to read in the Bible, so many people and things to pray about. It's often difficult to settle ourselves to quietly worship or to think and pray about the Scripture we're reading, without being overcome by the sense that we need to get on with our day.

Being still can be the hardest part of prayer, learning to listen and not do all the talking. Perhaps it's difficult to listen because God's voice isn't audible; He speaks through thoughts and impressions as we're reading His Word or praying. We must learn to listen with our hearts.

In your quiet times, are you listening? If you need help, ask Him for it now.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

SEARCHING

...for you, O LORD, have never abandoned anyone who searches for you. (Psalm 9:10b, NLT)

David often felt alone and abandoned by everyone but the Lord. Most of us have such moments—if not physically alone, certainly alone in our responsibilities, wrestling through decisions, feeling that no one knows or cares.

These are the times to search for God, and it isn't difficult. We turn to our daily reading of the Bible, not just seeking His general truth, the *logos*, but seeking a special *rhema*, a word spoken to our hearts. That's what is happening when verses seem to come alive with new meaning or application for us at the moment, and we know that we know it's a word from God. We're searching for God when we put ourselves in a position to receive such a word, when we make time to be alone with Him, sitting in His presence, listening for His impressions.

In what ways have you been searching for God recently?

Thank Him for the comfort of His presence, or ask Him to make Himself real to you.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

CONSIDERING

*I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. (Psalm 16:8)*

We, like David, should be setting the Lord always before us, or as the writer of Hebrews put it, keeping our eyes on Jesus—considering Him, as the astronomers of the day *considered* the stars (Hebrews 3:1; 12:2-3). In David’s day as well as our own, this is the secret of living a life that cannot be shaken.

To set the Lord before us, to carefully consider Him, takes time and thoughtful study of God’s Word. It’s there that we observe how He thinks, learn what is important to Him, see how to live to please Him. As we immerse ourselves in the Word it becomes part of our natural thought process, and in every trial, His truths and promises are there to steady us. The more we consciously turn our minds toward Him, the more He becomes our constant companion. And we’ll not be shaken.

How do you set the Lord before you?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

SEEKING

You have said, "Seek my face."

My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." (Psalm 27:8)

How did David seek God's face? What does this familiar verse say, and how can we apply it to our lives today? Other translations help make it clear:

"You have said, 'Seek My face [inquire for and require My presence as your vital need].' My heart says to 'You, Your face (Your presence), Lord, will I seek....'" (AMP)

"My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with me.' And my heart responds, 'LORD, I am coming.'" (NLT)

"Come and talk with me" reflects intimacy with God—prayer as conversation. It's in talking *with* Him, not simply *to* Him, that we begin to understand His presence in our lives, and His presence becomes our "vital need." David sought God with his heart—mind, emotions, and will—the kind of seeking that God promises to honor by being found (Jeremiah 29:13).

In what ways are you seeking God's presence today?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

LONGING

*O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you.
My soul thirsts for you... I follow close behind you... (Psalm 63:1a, 8a)*

This is more than searching for the Lord, more than seeking His face. David's heart is yearning for God, he is thirsting for His presence—just as we long to be with people who are nearest and dearest to us.

Such a relationship requires something of us. God has promised that if we will draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8a)—but we have to take the first step, it's our initiative. We note from James that this can only happen when we come with clean hands and pure hearts (v. 8b). We must not come casually; we prepare by examining our hearts and confessing our sins, for we're coming to a holy God, no matter how well we know Him or how much we love Him.

How would you describe your heart's longing for the Lord?

How do you typically prepare your heart to spend time with Him?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

REJOICING

...save me because of your unfailing love. (Psalm 6:4b, NIV)

Verses like this should take our breath away, especially in the context of a passage like this psalm. David begins by remembering a time when he felt he deserved God's anger and discipline because of sin. He said his soul was in anguish (v. 3).

Yet he called out to God for His mercy, to save him because of *His unfailing love*. We would all do well to meditate on that amazing love, to realize that God loves us no matter what. He loved us enough to send His Son; Jesus loved us enough to lay down His life for us. Perhaps even more incredible is that God our Creator, knowing in advance all our sins, mistakes, and shortcomings, chose to give us life, to love us, to trust us with His work in the world.

Our desire must be to grasp the full measure of His love, how wide and long, how high and deep it is!

Think of the past few days. In what ways have you felt God's love?

If His love has been obvious, thank Him. If it hasn't been, ask Him why?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

FEARING

The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him... (Psalm 25:14)

It's sometimes startling to see David's connection between friendship and fear of the Lord. We must ask ourselves: Do we fear the Lord? Should we? Apparently so, if we want the kind of friendship with Him that David enjoyed. But fortunately, though we should have a realistic fear of so powerful a God, the word doesn't carry the connotation of being frightened, so much as having a sense of reverent awe and worship: He is Almighty God.

David had that sense, so it's easy to see why the Lord welcomed him into personal friendship, a relationship reserved for those who esteem Him most highly. We can be close to the Lord personally, but we must never forget that He is God, and we are not. To seek His friendship on any other terms is presumptuous and futile. We must come on His terms, and when we do, we'll find Him welcoming us as He welcomed David.

How do your prayers indicate reverence and awe toward the Lord?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

THANKING

I will give thanks to the LORD... (Psalm 7:17a)

David wasn't merely grateful; in his psalms he was *jubilant* in expressing his thanksgiving. He was always proclaiming it aloud, and telling people about the amazing things God had done in his life (Psalm 26:7). He refused to be silent; he was always giving the Lord thanks (Psalm 30:12).

Could anyone have doubted that David was a man who loved the Lord? Or that he was thankful to have the Lord in his life, and grateful for all He did for him? Can the same be said of us—whether things are going well or not? Do we that openly acknowledge all that God has done for us, and is doing now? If not, how will people know? How will those in our circle of family and friends be aware? Is that not to be a vital part of our witness?

Reflect on your spirit of thanksgiving for the past few days.

In what ways did you express your thanks to God? To others?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

SERVING

*Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
for to you I pray. (Psalm 5:2, NIV)*

Open to our gaze is the depth of David's heart as we hear him call out to God as his King. Because David himself was king, he was able to grasp better than most what it meant that God was his King—it meant he was a servant of God.

A true servant is one who obeys his king, seeks his will, counts on him for every provision to do whatever task is set before him. A genuine servant knows that he lives and breathes as a response to his king. He serves without choice as to when or where, or whether he serves. He simply does what he is asked to do.

David was revealing his servant heart, as surely we should as well. We serve the King of kings in ways both big and small. Is our spirit of service evident?

In what ways do you have a servant heart toward your King?

Now ask Him what He sees.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

ASKING

Make your face shine on your servant... (Psalm 31:16a)

This is a wonderful prayer that we should take as our own, asking God's favor and blessing. It's not a selfish prayer, because David was coming as a servant, not a king. David had a servant's heart of humility before the Lord. His prayers were for the essentials of life—protection, victory in battle, guidance to do the Lord's will, strength of character, God's favor.

We, too, should ask for these things personally, thoughtfully—seeking what will help us to better live for the Lord and serve Him most effectively. There is no limit to what we may ask when we come as servants to our King, on mission for Him. He expects us to ask for what we need (Matthew 6:12). If we are not always in the process of asking for His help and provision, what are we revealing about our attitude—dependence? Or is it self-sufficiency? And which of these attitudes will honor our King?

Do your daily prayers indicate the attitude you want to present to the Lord?

Ask Him what He sees.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

TRUSTING

...be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. (Psalm 31:2, NIV)

When David was in danger, he looked to God as his refuge and fortress. That's how he needed God to respond to him. Do we think about such things when we pray? Perhaps we should, because God's names represent different facets of His nature and describe the various ways He will respond to us. Aren't there days when you need Him to be your Wonderful Counselor? Other days when you need a mighty Rock to hold you steady? And yet other days when you just want Him to be your Abba, Father—*Dad*?

It's honoring to God when we use His names, just as it honors us when others call us by name. Asking Him by name to be or to act in a certain way reminds and encourages us to think about who He is and how He is willing to work in our lives.

Pause and reflect for a moment. Who do you need God to be in your life today?

Express your need, and call upon Him by name.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

HIDING

In the LORD I take refuge. (Psalm 11:1a, NIV)

This is a graphic word picture, but how do we make it real? The same way David did: we turn our minds to God. It's with our thoughts that we seek—and abide, and dwell, and draw near, and take refuge. We think about Him, reading and meditating on the Word, and its application, on our personal experience with His faithfulness. The better, the more personally we know God, the more easily our minds will turn to Him.

To see how naturally this worked for David, read through this psalm, or Psalms 3, 57, 59, 64, and you'll easily see how David's mind worked. When he was frightened or overwhelmed, he kept bringing his mind back to the Lord, sometimes several times in the longer psalms.

That's what seeking refuge in the Lord looks like in practical terms. We find refuge when we acknowledge our weakness, and intentionally turn our thoughts toward Him.

Do that now. Think of a problem or concern you're facing.

Then consciously turn your thoughts to God...and thank Him for His refuge.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

DWELLING

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (Psalm 91:1, KJV)

(Though this psalm is not generally attributed to David, there are scholars who believe that it is nonetheless one of his, so we include it.)

The sense of intimate protection, of dwelling in a secret place with God, makes this one of the most beloved and most often prayed psalms in the Bible. God is pictured as covering us with His wings and drawing us in close to His heart, much like a mother hen protecting her chicks. We are secure beneath His wings.

But note that this psalm is primarily about an intimate relationship with those who have chosen to dwell with God (v. 9). As we dwell in His presence, He sends His angels to protect us. As we hold fast to Him, He delivers us; when we know His name, He protects us; when we call out to Him, He rescues us.

In what ways are you dwelling in the secret place with God?

Ask Him how you might draw closer.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

IMPLORING

Arise, O LORD!...

*Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked.* (Psalm 3:7, NIV)

No one would call David's prayers lukewarm, but what about *our* prayers? We may not be as graphic as David—"Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime" (Psalm 58:8), or as emotional—"I am exhausted and completely crushed...." (Psalm 38:8, NLT), or as jubilant—"In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall" (Psalm 18:29, NLT), but are we as honest with God?

So often we become self-conscious about the words we use in prayer, feeling inadequate because we're not eloquent or gifted with words. Perhaps we should be a little more like David, maybe not as fervent and passionate, but equally open with God in expressing our emotions from the depths of our hearts, perhaps even crying out to God, as he did so often.

Do you sense that kind of freedom in your prayers?

Are you open and real with God?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

PERSISTING

Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. (Psalm 55:17)

What an example of prayer—morning, noon and night. The point for us isn't David's complaints and moaning, but that he prayed *all the time* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

David woke the dawn with a song of praise (Psalm 108:2), he sang of God's love in the morning (Psalm 59:16), sought the Lord morning and night (Psalm 77:2), sang a prayer at night (Psalm 42:8), meditated on the Lord in the watches of the night (Psalm 63:6).

David was willing to invest his time and energy in developing a prayer life that resulted in his close, personal relationship with His Lord. Though he was a king and a man on the move, he made time to be with the Lord. We may be quick to say we want a relationship with God like he had, but are we willing to pay the price?

Are you willing to invest yourself, to seek a deeper life of prayer and relationship with the Lord? Ask Him for His help.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

REASONING

*Since you are my rock and my fortress,
For the sake of your name lead and guide me. (Psalm 31:3, NIV)*

This is a strong prayer: *for the sake of Your name*, lead and guide me. Because of who You are, come and help!

David not only revealed who he needed God to be at that time in his life, but he gave weight to his prayer by giving God a reason to answer—*for the sake of His name*, His honor, His reputation. This approach to prayer not only honors God by referring to His names and attributes, but by keeping the focus of our prayers on Him rather than on our problems and concerns. Read through Psalm 31 and you'll find many examples: Rescue me, *for You are a faithful God* (v. 5); *in your unfailing love, save me* (v. 16).

Think about your prayers of recent days. Did they include thoughts of God or were they almost solely focused on problems and concerns?

Pause to ask God how you might have strengthened them.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

DEVOTING

...for I am devoted to you. (Psalm 86:2)

Here's another way to strengthen our prayers by taking note of David's example. We've seen how David called out to God using His names to enlist His help in a certain way, and to give God a reason to answer his prayer by honoring His name.

Here we see David giving God another reason to answer: because *of the life he was living and the relationship he had chosen to have with God.*

This is important for us to understand, because God has promised to answer our prayers when we're living to please Him (Psalm 37:4-5; Proverbs 3:5-6; 1 John 3:21-22).

David was giving God reasons to answer by reminding Him of his lifestyle of devotion. We can strengthen our prayers in the same way: "Father, I'm asking because—I *trust You, love You, obey You, want to serve You.*" This not only gives God a reason to answer, but it prompts us to consider how we're living.

So what reasons can you give God to answer your prayers today, based on the way you're living?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

UNITING

*Teach me your way...and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart... (Psalm 86:11b, NIV)*

Is our heart ever divided? Do we want to serve and obey God on one hand, but find ourselves drawn in another direction? It's the *old man/new man* struggle (Ephesians 4:22-24)—who's going to be in charge?

David felt it; he lived it. He knew he couldn't do it on his own, so he prayed, even in the midst of calling out urgently for protection, for God to build his character, to make him into the man he wanted and needed to be. David's prayers, like many of ours, were calls for God to meet his physical needs, but he didn't neglect asking for things to strengthen his character (Psalm 19:13-14; 141:3). David wanted the things for his life that he knew were important to the Lord. The lesson for us is clear, isn't it? Is it reflected in the way we pray?

In what ways are you asking God to strengthen your character?

How are you progressing in your quest to become like Christ?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

COMMITTING

...I do what is right... (Psalm 26:11, NIV)

Is this really David speaking? He didn't always do what was right! How then, could he be known as a man after God's own heart?

That image of David is preserved even in light of his failures, because of verses like this which show that David had set his heart, committed himself to obeying God. If he hadn't set his heart and determined to do what was right, his sins wouldn't have grieved him as they did (Psalm 38)—and who knows how many more he might have committed?

We're clearly told how important it is to commit our hearts (Colossians 3:1, NIV), but have we done that? It's one thing to understand the way we're to live, but it's totally different to commit to live that way. Praise God, He will forgive us when we fail, as He forgave David (Psalm 51).

In what ways have you set your heart on the things of God?

Ask Him if there is something that still needs to be addressed.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

BELIEVING

O you who hear prayer... (Psalm 65:2)

We're all quick to agree, *God hears prayer*. But what is really important to us is: does God hear *our* prayers? How do we know? We know when we see answers, as David did (Psalm 18:19; 34:4; 40:1-2).

So we must ask ourselves, are we seeing answers to our prayers? If not, it's important to consider why. First, and most obvious: Are we praying? Then, are we praying *specifically*, so that we're able to recognize answers when they come? (Mark 10:46-52) Are we praying often enough? We're told to ask for *daily* bread (Matthew 6:11); daily prayers provide opportunities to see frequent answers, even though some prayers may not be answered right away. There are also those that God answers, 'No,' because He knows what we've asked wouldn't be good for us. He often has a different and better thing in mind. Still, we should be seeing some answers to prayer on a regular basis. That is, *if we're praying*.

Reflect over your prayers of recent days. Have they been specific?

What answers have you seen?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

CONFESSING

*O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive,
so full of unfailing love for all who ask your aid. (Psalm 86:5, NLT)*

These have to be among the most comforting words of Scripture: God is ready to forgive and full of love for *all* who ask for His mercy and forgiveness.

Many, perhaps most of us, have occasions when we see our sins clearly, and we are so ashamed that we hesitate to come before the Lord to admit to them and to confess them. Sometimes we may even believe (though we know better) that this is something God won't want to forgive.

How reassuring is it that David wrote this verse? David, who sinned so greatly? God was ready to forgive him, and He is ready to forgive us (1 John 1:9), when we come as David came, with a heart that is truly broken and repentant (Psalm 51). God does not change (Malachi 3:6) or make exceptions—He is good, and ready to forgive *all*.

Have you taken every sin to God?

If so, thank Him for His forgiveness. If not, ask Him for His help.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

GRIEVING

*For I recognize my shameful deeds—they haunt me day and night.
Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight. (Psalm 51:3-4, NLT)*

Does this make you think we sometimes take our sins too lightly? That perhaps we don't consider them evil in God's sight, even making excuses for ourselves?

David's sins broke his heart: "My guilt overwhelms me—it is a burden too heavy to bear. ...I confess my sins; I am deeply sorry for what I have done (Psalm 38:4, 18, NLT). And, "When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long." (Psalm 32:3, NLT) In his brokenness, David confessed, and God forgave him (Psalm 32:5).

David's heart for God is revealed in his grief over his sins, over disappointing God and being separated from the intimacy with Him that he had grown to love. Do our sins break our hearts?

Think back over the sins you've confessed recently.

How did you feel? Did they break your heart?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

REPENTING

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10, NIV)*

Most of us are prone to confess the same sins over and over. Not the same *instance* of sin, but the same *tendencies* toward a *particular* sin.

That's usually because we haven't followed David's example, not all the way. David asked for a pure heart, as we can. The apostle John tells us that when we confess our sins, God will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

But David went further, asking not only for cleansing, but for repentance; he asked God to renew a steadfast spirit within him. He was asking for a change of heart, which is really what repentance is all about—changing our hearts, which changes our minds about our sin, so that we are willing to turn away from it in God's strength. David wanted a steadfast spirit, one that could hold onto his pure heart, a true turning away from sin. Is that our desire?

How steadfast is your heart?

Ask what God sees.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

CLEANSING

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts! (Psalm 139:23)*

We're all capable of deceiving ourselves, of rationalizing our sins away. So was David. But, here, we see his determination to get beyond that.

David was asking for a deep examination of his heart, a plea repeated in other psalms: "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. ... Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight...." (Psalm 19:12-13, 14, NIV) "Test me...and try me, examine my heart and my mind...." (Psalm 26:2, NIV)

David didn't hurry through confession of his sins; he went before the Lord and asked Him to search his heart and reveal what he wasn't consciously aware of. He sought deeper cleansing and the strength not to be controlled by sin. Shouldn't we do the same?

How much time do you typically allow God to search your heart?

Is it enough? Perhaps you should ask Him.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

WORSHIPING

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. (Psalm 29:2)*

Is this how we typically come into God's presence? David had a very high view of God. Though he evidently had a deeply personal relationship with Him, he didn't address his Lord with familiarity. Though he was joyful, he wasn't casual.

Nor should we be. Yes, Jesus is our brother (Romans 8:29) and our friend (John 15:15), but dare we forget He is also Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14)? The Apostle John, known as the one Jesus was closest to, the one whom He loved (John 21:7), fell at His feet as though dead when he saw Him in his vision (Revelation 1:17). He is worthy of worship.

David understood and practiced worship, much of it recorded in his psalms. Do you think God means them to be an example for us?

Reflect over your prayer life of the last few days.

In what way do your prayers reflect a worshipful heart?

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

OVERFLOWING

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:1)*

With psalms like this one, David shows himself to be a man simply overflowing with worship, who has an exuberant heart for the Lord that cannot be contained.

Is our sense of the greatness and majesty of God so overwhelming that it just spills out in worship as David's does? Are we worshiping God privately, in our quiet times at home? Is our personal worship as full of life, wonder, and passion as David's was?

We don't have to express our worship as energetically as David often did, but shouldn't there be a degree of reverence, perhaps even emotion, when we focus on the greatness of God? Do we ever enter God's presence without pausing to consider that we come not only to our Father, but to our Lord and King, to God Almighty, Himself? Every prayer doesn't have to begin with worship, but shouldn't every day?

How have you worshiped the Lord in the last few days?

Ask Him how you might strengthen your worship.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

PRAISING

*Sing to the LORD...
praise his holy name. (Psalm 30:4 NIV)*

Singing *to the LORD*—shouldn't that be our response to our loving Lord? Music is one of the most wonderful gifts the Lord has given us, and when we use it for His glory and pleasure, it must please Him.

Those who sing in the choir or play an instrument are surely blessed, and a blessing to others in the church as they lead us in praise and worship. We join them with singing, or by making our own joyful noise, or even silently offering the words of the song as our prayer. We should sing our worship not only in the church, but wherever we are. If we don't know the words to the songs, we can be like David and make up our own. He was a poet and musician, but we don't have to be either one to sing to the Lord. It's a matter of the heart.

How do you express your love for the Lord?

Tell Him right now what's in your heart.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

FOLLOWING

The Lord is my shepherd... (Psalm 23:1)

Because David was a shepherd before he became a king, he understood both the need of the helpless sheep and the role of the shepherd. To relate to God as David did, we must acknowledge the same helpless attitude he presented throughout his psalms. He had no illusions about being able to care for himself. He was constantly calling out to God for protection, provision, rest, comfort—the things he mentions in this psalm.

But this is a psalm of relationship, not only expressing David's total dependence, but God's amazing faithfulness. As we might expect of David, the psalm ends with exclaiming God's goodness and mercy, and the joy that fills his heart with the prospect of living in His presence forever. It's a psalm of affirmation recounting the wonderful things the Lord had done for him, the psalm of a lifetime spent walking with the Lord. We would do well to make it our own.

Reflect over your life and God's amazing faithfulness.

Affirm to Him how grateful you are.

Journaling to Remember

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart?—

My prayer response—

My impression of what God wants me to do—

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

A Prayer from Psalm 23

LORD, You are my shepherd,
and because You are, I know that You will take care of my needs.

Thank You for times of rest,
for giving me peace in the midst of every stress,
for refreshing, renewing, restoring me time and again.

Lead me in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake;
help me to live rightly,
according to Your will in all that I do.

When I go through the trials of life,
I'll not be afraid because I know You are with me,
protecting me with Your rod,
directing me with Your staff,
providing the comfort of Your presence.

How grateful I am that You give me all that I need,
preparing a table before me,
in the presence of my enemies,
evil spirits that I neither see nor fear.

I exult in the truth that You have anointed my head with oil,
that I am indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

Thank You for the abundant life You have promised;
my cup overflows, I have been given more than I need.

Surely Your goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall live with You forever.

JOURNALING FOR A LIFETIME

Once you have completed this *After God's Heart* Prayer Journal, our prayer is that you will want to continue journaling with this format, or another that may work better for you. The important thing is not which format you follow, but that you find a way to note what you feel God is impressing on your heart so that you can keep it and refer to it in the future.

This format works in any kind of notebook or journal. Keep in mind that you do not have to journal every day to keep an effective record of the impressions of your heart. You may find yourself journaling several days in a row, and then perhaps only once or twice a week for a period of time. The important thing is not to give it up.

Journaling will help you apply God's Word to your daily life and track your own spiritual journey. Thus, it will help you learn to discern His voice with your heart, and help you remember what you sense He said. It's for no one to read but you.

Sample Journaling Page

Date 00/00/00

Scripture or quote: (*Record the Scripture verse that impressed you from your daily Bible reading*):

*It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.
(Ps. 18:32)*

What do I sense God has spoken (silently) to my heart:

It doesn't matter how exhausted I feel today, He's going to give me strength.

My prayer response—

Thank You—I needed Your encouragement for the day I'm facing!

My impression of what God wants me to do—

Trust Him to always give me what I need.

ARE YOU A CHILD OF GOD?

This is a question that is easy to answer—if you aren't sure—by Scriptures that reveal this truth:

- Have you believed in Christ, trusting Him, relying on Him for everything? Have you received Christ into Your heart and life? (John 1:12)
- Have you become a new creation in Christ? Have you changed—desiring to turn away from sin, to spend time in God's Word, to live the life His children are called to live? (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Do you know Christ through personal experience? (Matthew 7:21-23)
- Have you believed in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and spoken with your mouth that Jesus is Lord? (Romans 10:9)
- Have you repented—turning away from sin, desiring to live an obedient life? (Luke 13:3, 5)

If these things don't seem real in your life, and you want them to be, speak to a pastor or godly friend—or pray a prayer like this:

“God, I believe Jesus is Your Son, and I now receive Him into my heart, my life. I believe that He died for my sins, that He was buried and raised again to new life. I confess that I have sinned against You, and I'm sorry. Forgive me, and help me to turn away from sin in Your strength. I acknowledge Jesus as my Savior and my Lord, and I pray in His name—amen.”

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