

# Journey through the Old Testament

1,900 B.C.

1,200B.C.

722 B.C.

596 B.C.

432 B.C.

## Message Notes

I. The Historical Background to Today's Scriptures:

II. The Overarching Message of Today's Scriptures:

III. What Do These Scriptures Tell Me About God?

IV. What Do These Scriptures Mean for Me?

Learning from the Rabbi

Sermon Scripture Passage:

## Holy Space

The issue of suffering and prosperity in life and their relationship to the righteousness of individuals is one that is both important and complex. What can I expect if I choose to diligently follow God's will in my life? Will my righteousness result in more or less suffering? Will it result in more or less prosperity? We all want to understand, as well as minimize, the amount of suffering in life, and to understand as well the sources and legitimate role of prosperity in life. This issue is addressed more deeply and directly in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Songs of Songs) than in any other section of scripture. These books provide a complex, rich set of teachings on this topic that is part of the absolutely unique ability of the Bible to explain the reality in which we live and to provide hope and guidance in the midst of that reality.

## **Meditation Moments**

**Monday, March 22** - This week's study guide will focus on the Wisdom Literature, which consists of five books of the Hebrew Scriptures (aka: Old Testament). They are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. These books are mainly attributed to David and Solomon. Read Job 1:13-22. Job is stricken with a season of calamities: his children dying, servants captured, and property destroyed; plus his health begins to disintegrate. In his grief, Job goes through a multitude of emotions (9:21, 16:1-3). His friends suspect that God is punishing him. His community isolates him. Have you ever felt that you share in Job's misery? If you turn to Lamentations 3:17-26 you will find the story of Job recapped with acceptance and peace voiced as his final reply to his situation. This story captures human desperation and its stages, then finally gives us the message of hope: God is with us through it all.

**Tuesday, March 23** - All of the human emotions can be found within the Psalms: joy, peace, love, thanksgiving, lament, hate, rage, deliverance, and restoration. Part of the power of the Psalms lies in their words and lyrical style. They drive the point home with words that seem to cling to our memories. The words are repeated over and over again. Each word and image can be loaded with meaning. Because of this, they can be powerful agents for our own expression for whatever sentiment we are trying to express. What emotions do you find most difficult to express to God? Try to write a personal psalm to God after you have read a few of the suggestions.

Thanksgiving: Psalms 34, 92

Joy: 63, 100, 146

Lament: 22, 80

Praise: Psalms 111, 112

Peace: 23

Forgiveness: 6, 32

Deliverance: 27, 62, 72

Anger: 137

**Wednesday, March 24** - The book of Proverbs offers a guide for right living. These pithy sayings will help us think about the outcome of our choices. If you follow "Lady Wisdom" you will "walk in the way of righteousness". You can read about her in chapters one, four, five and eight. These are the scriptures that Jesus knew. This is key, for you will find that much of the same language used in Proverbs is also used throughout the gospels, especially the book of John. Over and over again we see the words "way, vine, bread, lamp, and light." Out of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus in the New Testament personified the Way, Bread of Life, Lamp, Light, and True Vine. Many times the use of money is questioned. For Jesus also, this was a very important message. When we know these scriptures, we find ourselves more correctly understanding the mind of Christ.

**Thursday, March 25** - The book of Ecclesiastes cuts right to the chase. The Teacher in this book has seen it all. Everything in life has been experienced from storing up knowledge, excess work, injustice, vulnerability in relationships, chasing after fame, over indulgence, vanities and extravagances. (3:1-10). Then all of sudden, the Teacher asks serious questions: "Why? Who will inherit all this? Is all this futile?" (Read 2:20-23) Does any of this sound familiar?

In a world where we are surrounded by shopping malls, quick communication, and wild excessive entertainment, it is hard to find meaning. When have you experienced something that made you acutely aware of your mortality? The Teacher finally comes to the conclusion about the bottom line. See if it lines up with your own assessment of what is most important (12:13-14).

**Friday, March 26**—The Song of Songs is a quick read which seems to be a series of love poems. You can read it with that kind of very literal reading, yet both Jewish and Christian traditions have found another level in its meaning. It is that of the love between God and God's people.

For the Jewish tradition, the Songs is read at Passover while the earth is exploding with new life and when the people most remember the greatness of God who rescued them from slavery. The beauty of the creation is seen throughout chapters two and four. Read Songs 8:1-7 to see how the writer speaks about "coming up from the wilderness" and the "love as strong as death". The Israelites knew that God has seen them through all of their challenges. The God of faithfulness would not let them go. Such is the constancy that we find in God, named here as the great lover.

**THEME: "Journey Through the Old Testament"**

**"The Wisdom Literature"**

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

March 20-21, 2010 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

**Psalm 118: 14-24**

*14 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory.*

*15 Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.*

*The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!*

*16 The strong right arm of the Lord is raised in triumph.*

*The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!*

*17 I will not die; instead, I will live to tell what the Lord has done.*

*18 The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not let me die.*

*19 Open for me the gates where the righteous enter,*

*and I will go in and thank the Lord.*

*20 These gates lead to the presence of the Lord, and the godly enter there.*

*21 I thank you for answering my prayer and giving me victory!*

*22 The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.*

*23 This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.*

*24 This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.*

**VIDEO      Blowing of the Shofar**

**SLIDE      The Wisdom Literature**

Today we continue in a series of sermons that is taking us on a journey through the Old Testament. I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your message notes and your meditation moments. The message notes are a place where you can write down things you want to remember and possibly think about in the days ahead. The meditation moments are an invitation for you to read the Scriptures on your own this week and particularly to read from the books of poetry and wisdom in the Hebrew Bible. I encourage you to do these readings because I think you will be blessed by them as you do it.

**SLIDE      Old Testament Library**

Let's do a quick recap of where we are in this sermon series. We began by looking at the first 17 books of the Old Testament which are the books of law and history. We began with the book of Genesis and this first section of books continues until we have the destruction of Israel and Judah. They begin with the story of creation in Genesis and then we find the story of Abraham and Sarah. We

read about the Exodus and Moses leading the people out of Egypt. The Exodus from Egypt leads eventually to the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. Then we have the time of the judges and last week we heard about one of those judges named Gideon. After the time of the judges was the monarchy which included King Saul, King David and King Solomon.

After Solomon the nation of Israel was divided in two which included the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom was destroyed in 722 and the southern kingdom in 586 BC. Both times led to the people in those regions being exiled in about 50 years. After the southern kingdom was destroyed exiles returned to rebuild Jerusalem and we find those stories in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Those are the first 17 books of the Old Testament and they describe God's covenant with his people and God's relationship with them. We will look at the time of the Kings as well as the last 17 books of the Old Testament next week on Palm Sunday as we look at the prophets and kings and how Jesus fits into those prophecies. The 17 prophetic books describe the social ills and spiritual struggles of the people of Israel during the time of the Kings, in particular from about 750 BC all the way down until 432 BC.

So the Old Testament begins with 17 historical books and then it ends with 17 prophetic books. Nestled in between are five books of poetry or Hebrew wisdom. These books are very, very important. They are the heart and soul of the Hebrew Bible as they describe for us the feelings of the people of Israel. They describe the yearnings, the longings and the wisdom of the people at various phases and places in their lives.

As you study the five books of wisdom literature you will find they capture the various phases that all of us go through in our lives at one time or another. They also describe how we might respond to God in the midst of different times in our lives, as well as what we learn about God in the midst of the various phases of life.

With that in mind let's take a look at these five books. I want to walk you through what we find in these books and how we might understand them today, some 3000 years after they were written.

To get us started, let's hear again from Rabbi Arthur Nemitoff. He is going to describe for us the purpose of the wisdom literature in the Bible. Let's listen to what he has to say.

**VIDEO      Art Nemitoff – Wisdom Literature**

**SLIDE      Wisdom Literature – Job**

Let's start with the book of Job. We're not exactly sure when the book of Job was written, but in Job's time this book was meant to address a fundamental theological flaw of the Jewish people. The prevailing orthodox view during the time when Job was written was that if something tragic happened in your life it was because you had sinned in some way. The belief was that if you lived a righteous life you would have blessings and if you had sinned in your life then you would find the curses. This is what most Jews believed at the time and Job is meant to correct this.

We find in the book of Job is that God himself says that Job was the most righteous man on the face of the earth. Here is a righteous man and yet he suffers. It begins when he loses his flocks and then he loses his crops. He loses his servants and his servants are in the house which is destroyed and they are killed. He loses everything and his heart is overwhelmed with grief. Job is a righteous man who is overwhelmed with tragedy and sorrow.

In the midst of that his wife turns to him and says, "Job, you must've done something really wrong. Why don't you just curse God and die?"

She verbalized what Job may have felt in the midst of his tragedy. God is either unjust or I have done something wrong and I don't even know it. But Job refuses to curse God and he certainly doesn't die. I often wondered if he wanted to get a divorce because of the way his wife treated him, but Job sticks it out both with his wife and God.

The next thing that happens is that a group of his friends come alongside of Job and have a long conversation with him which lasts over 30 chapters in the book of Job. In this conversation they argue a bit back and forth. His friends keep telling him, "Job, you know that God is just, so if something terrible is happening and you are experiencing this suffering it must be because you did something wrong. Repent Job, and if you are unwilling to repent then just curse God and die."

Job insists that he has done nothing wrong and he is not going to curse God and die and he probably needs new friends, and he is not going to repent! Job is a picture of steadfast faith and trust even when we can't understand what is happening around us.

We want the book of Job to give us the answer to the problem of suffering but it doesn't. In the end we come to 4 wonderful chapters in which God has a conversation with Job. God basically says, "Job, please listen to me. Your mind is so small that you can begin to comprehend everything that happens in this world. You have got to just trust me."

God doesn't ever given the answer to the problem of suffering. But God does call Job to trust in the face of that suffering.

We get to the end of the book of Job and we find that he is blessed as he makes it through the times of tragedy and suffering. The life after is blessed even more than the life he had before his problems began.

Part of what I see in the book of Job is what I see in many of you in our congregation as I have served as your pastor. You have walked through such hard times and you wondered if you could survive. I had no answers for you except to say, "Trust in God and don't let go. Hold on and somehow God is going to see you through."

And he did. Years later you look back and you see how your life has been blessed and the joy that has returned to your life that you thought would never come back again. This is in part the message of the book of Job.

One of my favorite passages in the book of Job comes when Job's friends tell them to curse God and die. Listen to his response in chapter 19 verses 25 to 27.

**SLIDE      25 "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. 26 And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! 27 I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!**

Here is a man who has faced all kinds of tragedy and yet he still makes the statement of faith. That is a statement of faith in the midst of struggles and hardships.

Another passage that I really appreciate is one we find in Job 13:15 (NRSV) in which he offers these words.

**SLIDE      15 Though God slay me, yet will I trust in Him.**

Some of you have heard me share the story of Gary before. Gary was a father of a young girl in my youth group when I was a youth pastor some 15 years

ago. Gary was not a Christian for most of his life. His daughter began coming to our youth group and pretty soon his family was in church together. Gary had lung cancer that developed because of a job in his younger years where he inhaled asbestos eight hours a day. Through conversations with another pastor who had befriended Gary and me and his daughter he became a follower of Jesus and he began to read his Bible every day. Gary developed a deep and abiding faith that was amazing to see considering he discovered it in the midst of tragedy.

Even in his last days Gary would come in his wheelchair and sit in the front row of church. I have a picture of him at in my mind as his body was a shell of what it had been and yet he would sit with his arms on his lap, palms up and eyes closed in worship as we sang hymns on Sunday morning. He was so frail and yet he was determined to come to church because he was not going to give up on God. It was that faith which gave him hope. It was a trust in God's unfailing love that allowed him to face what he was facing with joy and anticipation.

It was a gift he passed on to his children. I saw Gary's daughter recently because she is finishing college and she is looking at going to seminary and becoming a pastor. Here is the daughter of a man who was an atheist until the last few years of his life, yet because of his faith and what she saw in him, she has felt a call from God to serve and to share what she witnessed during that time in his life. It truly was a holy moment.

This is what we find in the book of Job. It is a powerful invitation for us to trust in God. Job is really written for times of suffering when we are experiencing difficulty or tragic things in our lives.

We move from Job to the book of Psalms. We are going to come back to this book at the end of the sermon. After the book of Psalms is the book of Proverbs.

#### **SLIDE      Wisdom Literature – Proverbs**

Proverbs is written for people who are in a steady, stable place in life. Everything seems to be going pretty well because you have a good job, you are not afraid of the future and things are good in your family. In that kind of setting you can begin to talk about how things really work in life. You can feel like you have things figured out and so the book of Proverbs is written for that kind of time in life.

They are wonderful, pithy little things which describe how life works. They are the epitome of wisdom literature. Let me remind you that there is knowledge and then there is wisdom. These are two different things.

Knowledge is something you pick up by reading books. You can learn a lot of facts and if you're really intelligent you can master many of those facts and regurgitate them. But that is not the same as wisdom, is it?

You know you have met people who have never graduated from high school and yet they had the wisdom of the ages. In today's world you can go on the Internet and find all kinds of knowledge and facts but it won't necessarily help you apply them. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge and in the end what we really need is wisdom which helps us navigate through life.

The book of Proverbs is meant to be wisdom which comes from life experience and doesn't come just from reading a book. It comes from walking through life and seeing how life works over and over again. As you do this you can begin to formulate some general rules about how life generally works.

Proverbs does not describe how things will always happen. It is not meant to be a promise—that if you just do these certain things than these other good things will happen. Job really answers that question because it reminds us that life does not really work that way. Sometimes the righteous suffer.

But Proverbs tells us that if you do what's right than generally you will be blessed and generally if you do what is wrong then you will find there is a price to pay eventually for that. This is how Proverbs works and I have a number of them that are my favorites. Several of them come in Chapter 3. Each one of these stands on its own as a piece of profound truth or wisdom.

**SLIDE      3 Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. 4 Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation.**

**5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.**

**7 Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil. 8 Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones.**



**9 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. 10 Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.**

**11 My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when he corrects you. 12 For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.**

There is an amazing amount of wisdom in the book of Proverbs. There are so many things that we can read and take with us and live by. They describe for us what the life that God intends for us to live looks like. So this is the book of Proverbs which is written for time in life when things are pretty stable and it describes for us general principles of how life works in God's world.

**SLIDE          Wisdom Literature – Ecclesiastes**

The next book of wisdom literature is really a corrective to the book of Proverbs and that is the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is purported to have been written by the same man who wrote many of the Proverbs who is King Solomon. But in Ecclesiastes is not written by someone in the middle of life where things are going just fine and he is at the top of his game.

Ecclesiastes is thought to be written at the end of Solomon's life. He is looking back and he realizes that life was so simple and neat at one point. Everything fits into a nice little box. Life was black and white.

But now at the end of his life he realizes that life isn't always that way. Things are not always black and white and there is a certain wisdom that comes from maturity which says, "Sometimes it works this way and sometimes it doesn't. I can't quite figure it all out, but that is okay. I am still going to trust in God."

Ecclesiastes reminds me a bit of my great-grandmother Grace Berry. Grandma Berry was a lifelong Christian and when she was younger she was pretty strict about what faith looked like. In her house you were not allowed to play cards because cards were of the devil. My grandmother, her daughter, talked about sneaking into the basement at night and playing bridge by candlelight to avoid her parents. How is that for living on the edge?

But in her 80s and 90s my great-grandmother loosened up a bit and I can remember playing cards with her in her nursing home. She became much more broad minded about things in her older age. She did not see things as simply as she did when she was younger.

**SLIDE      Billy Graham**

I think also of Billy Graham whose biography I read recently. There was a time when Billy Graham was very clear about the black and white of the world, yet today there is a much more broad minded Billy Graham who sees life a bit more complex than that.

James Fowler in his book, **Stages of Faith**, talks about stage V and stage VI faith. When you get to this stage of faith in life you come to not only appreciate but enjoy paradox. You are able to say, "I believe these things to be true and yet I understand it doesn't always work that way." You can hold in tension both belief and disbelief, both faith and doubt, and you are able to say, "I trust in God even though I can't completely understand everything."

Somehow as we get older and we hopefully mature in our faith we come to a place where we realize not how much we know but how much we don't know and how much we don't really understand. This is really what we find in Ecclesiastes. Here are a few verses that I find helpful. In Chapter 3 we find these words that you no doubt have heard, whether you are Christian or not, either from the Bible or maybe from a song.

- SLIDE      1 For everything there is a season,  
                 a time for every activity under heaven.**
- 2 A time to be born and a time to die.  
                 A time to plant and a time to harvest.**
- 3 A time to kill and a time to heal.  
                 A time to tear down and a time to build up.**
- 4 A time to cry and a time to laugh.  
                 A time to grieve and a time to dance.**
- 5 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.  
                 A time to embrace and a time to turn away.**
- 6 A time to search and a time to quit searching.  
                 A time to keep and a time to throw away.**
- 7 A time to tear and a time to mend.  
                 A time to be quiet and a time to speak.**
- 8 A time to love and a time to hate.  
                 A time for war and a time for peace.**

He had looked at the end of his life and seen that all of these things were part of life and he couldn't control them. This is just part of what happens in life.

There are times and moments in life where we act one way and other times where we act and other.

Here is another passage which captures some of this simple wisdom. Remember that Solomon spent a good part of his life trying to gather wealth. He was one of the richest men who ever lived. Yet he came to the end of his life and he says this in Chapter 5:10-15.

**SLIDE**      **10 Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness! 11 The more you have, the more people come to help you spend it. So what good is wealth—except perhaps to watch it slip through your fingers!**

**12 People who work hard sleep well, whether they eat little or much. But the rich seldom get a good night's sleep.**

**13 There is another serious problem I have seen under the sun. Hoarding riches harms the saver. 14 Money is put into risky investments that turn sour, and everything is lost. In the end, there is nothing left to pass on to one's children. 15 We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us.**

In the end of the book of Ecclesiastes we find a message that is similar to what we find in the book of Job. In the last chapter which is Chapter 12, verse 13 he says this.

**SLIDE**      **13 That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.**

That's the essence of the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. It comes at a time late in life, a season in which you begin to see that maybe everything doesn't fit together as neatly as you once thought it did.

**SLIDE**      **Wisdom Literature – Song of Songs**

That brings us to the Song of Solomon or the Song of Songs. I think God must have had a smile on his face when he included the Song of Songs in the Scriptures. I think God laughs a bit at this text because he recognizes that we human beings tend to get a bit uptight about human sexuality and intimacy and love. Song of Songs is one of those books which is really rather embarrassing to a lot of people. The Jews were not sure whether or not to include it in the Bible. The

Christians gave it a whole new meaning and try to turn it into an analogy for the love that Christ has for the church.

But really it purportedly was written by Solomon when he was a young man, not when he was an old man or when he was even a middle-aged man. Supposedly he was a young man who was madly in love with a woman and he was about to get married to her. It was love poetry written back and forth between his fiancée and himself. As they were dialoguing back and forth they talked about how much they loved one another and how their hearts are given to each other. He describes the passion he has when he kisses her and embraces her. He describes a longing to touch her.

All of this is a way for God to say to us, "You people who sometimes look at the good gifts I give you and think they are sinful and bad need to take a chill pill!"

Bear in mind the church over many centuries decided its priests could not even marry because of the way they look at physical love and sexuality. Yet the Song of Songs says this is a good gift from God and is meant to be a blessing. God gives us sexuality and intimacy as a gift that we are to treasure. This is beautiful love poetry, some of which I wouldn't even read here in the context of worship, so now I know that some of you will rush home to read it!

#### **SLIDE          Wisdom Literature – Psalms**

This brings us back to the Psalms. The Psalms are really the heart and soul of the Hebrew Bible. There are 150 prayers, liturgies and songs of praise written in the various stages and seasons of life and of Israel's history. Some of the Psalms were written on the banks of the Euphrates River after the Israelites had been carried away into exile. They are grieving the fact that they can't even sing anymore. The Babylonian captors are telling them, "Take out your harps and play for us."

The Israelites respond, "How can we sing the songs of Zion when we are here in exile?"

You can feel the grief as you read those Psalms. There are also Psalms of great joy and there is everything in between.

The 150 Psalms are divided into five books just like the books of Moses or the books of the law at the beginning of the Bible. They are meant to be read and used as acts of worship and songs of praise. They were in essence the hymnal for the ancient Israelite people.

Walter Bruggeman, the great Old Testament scholar, wrote that there are three places that we find ourselves in life and the Psalms can really be divided into those three categories as well.

**SLIDE            Orientation**

The first is a place of orientation. Orientation is when things seem to be going pretty well. It is like when the book of Proverbs was written. Life seems to be going well and everything is stable. You can reflect upon how life works and life generally works that way. Psalm 1 is a Psalm written in times of orientation. Like the book of Proverbs is a wisdom Psalm. It begins with a general statement.

- SLIDE            1 *Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.***
- 2 *But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.***
- 3 *They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.***
- 4 *But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.***
- 5 *They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly.***
- 6 *For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.***

You can say things like that when things are going pretty well for you and you trust that if you do bad things you'll perish and if you do good things you will be blessed. But we know that things don't always work out that way.

Psalm 8 is another one of my favorite Psalms and is written during a time of orientation when things are going well. When things are going well you can offer great songs of praise like this one. I was reminded of last week during spring break. Our family went to Pagosa Springs for a few days and decided to ski at Wolf Creek ski area. We got up on Tuesday morning and it had snowed about a foot and the skies had cleared a bit and the mountains to the north of us were beautiful as the snowcapped peaks appeared beyond wisps of clouds with bright blue sky in the background. It looked something like this.

**SLIDE            Pagosa Springs Mountains**

It was a magnificent view and I sat at our front door and gazed at the site. "God this is amazing! This is awesome!" That is what is captured in Psalm 8.

**SLIDE**      ***1 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!  
Your glory is higher than the heavens.  
2 You have taught children and infants  
to tell of your strength,  
silencing your enemies  
and all who oppose you.  
3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—  
the moon and the stars you set in place—  
4 what are people that you should think about them,  
mere mortals that you should care for them?  
9 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!***

Psalm 121 just rolled off my lips!

**SLIDE**      ***1 I look up to the mountains—  
does my help come from there?  
2 My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth!***

That is how you feel when you see this view and the snow is sparkling on top of the mountain under the bright blue sky. You feel like praising God.

But then we got in our car and we began to drive up Wolf Creek Pass. The snow still covered the pass and you could see cars slipping in front of us all over the road. It made me even more nervous when I noticed that most of them had Texas license plates and they clearly had not driven in snow much lately. The snow began to fall and you could hardly see in front of you.

**SLIDE**      **Blizzard**

At those moments I am not feeling like crying out praise to God anymore. Now I am crying out, "Help me Lord! Deliver me! I am not sure I am going to make it out of here! I promise I'll be good from now on!"

That describes the second stage in the book of Psalms and really in all of our lives and that is disorientation.

**SLIDE**      **Psalms of disorientation**

Walter Bruggeman speaks about disorientation as periods of time when life seems to be falling apart. You're in the middle of a blizzard and you can't see your way out. It's hard to understand what is happening or to make sense of why it's happening. Life becomes confusing and we don't know how we are going to make our way through.

Sometimes disorientation comes from our own sin. When you were in times of orientation and things are going well is easy for you to slip from the path of God. It is easy for you to stop writing when things are going well. It is easy for you to start doing things that you shouldn't be doing when things are going well. This disorientation can come when we turn away from God. We find ourselves in trouble and we cry out to God for help.

Sometimes disorientation simply happens because life happens and life is hard, just like it happened to Job. Job went through that time of disorientation.

In the midst of disorientation we cry out to God but the words we cry out with are very different than in times of orientation. They are words like we find in Psalm 13. Listen carefully to these words.

**SLIDE**      ***1 O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever?  
How long will you look the other way?***  
***2 How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,  
with sorrow in my heart every day?  
How long will my enemy have the upper hand?***  
***3 Turn and answer me, O Lord my God!  
Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.***  
***4 Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!"  
Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.***

These are the words of disorientation and we find them throughout the Psalms. Psalm 22 was on Jesus' lips as he was dying on the cross.

**SLIDE**      ***1 My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?  
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?***  
***2 Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.  
Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief.***

This is disorientation. What I love about the Psalms of disorientation is that they give us permission to question God. God was not threatened by having Psalms of complaints or lament in the Bible. Instead, God gives us permission to share our true thoughts. God allows them to be there so we can vocalize our own

complaints against God. God is not hurt by that or wounded. God just says that in the midst of it we should remember the message of Job.

***"There are things you cannot understand. Just trust in me and don't let go."***

That is of course what we find in the Psalms of disorientation. We get to the end of Psalm 13 and we find that even though the Psalmist is crying out against God he says this in verses five and six.

**SLIDE**      ***5 But I trust in your unfailing love.***

***I will rejoice because you have rescued me.***

***6 I will sing to the Lord***

***because he is good to me.***

This is disorientation which leads to faith. Just the act of praying and complaining to God while life is falling down around you is an act of faith. This is what we find in the book of Psalms. It leads to a time of re-orientation.

**SLIDE**      **Psalms of Re-orientation**

As we find in the book of Job, Job does not live in disorientation forever. You finally pass through the time of trial and struggle and you find yourself on the other side. This is what I try to tell people as they walk into depression. Depression doesn't last forever. Sometimes we become so depressed and discouraged we think the only way out is suicide. And as you have heard before, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. The clouds will not last forever. The mountain of darkness in your life will not last forever.

This is what the Psalms remind us of. This is the message of the Bible. Job reminds us of this that if you just hold on tight then you will come out the other side of this tragedy and there will be joy in your life again. There will be hope, and there will be a day of resurrection.

This is reorientation. Reorientation is where you feel yourself forgiven and the load has been lifted. There is nothing like that moment where you have been walking through the darkness and suddenly you feel alive again. What you feel in those moments is utter and absolute gratitude. You just want to shout because you feel free of the darkness and you can see the light again.

Psalm 66 is an example of the re-orientation. Listen to this Psalm as it captures the feeling of reorientation.

**SLIDE**      ***1 Shout joyful praises to God, all the earth!***



- 2 Sing about the glory of his name!  
Tell the world how glorious he is.**
- 3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!  
Your enemies cringe before your mighty power.**
- 4 Everything on earth will worship you;  
they will sing your praises,  
shouting your name in glorious songs."**
- 5 Come and see what our God has done,  
what awesome miracles he performs for people!**
- 6 He made a dry path through the Red Sea,  
and his people went across on foot.  
There we rejoiced in him.**

Then he talks about how he had struggled and how things were difficult for him and God delivered him. In verses 16 to 20 he says this.

- SLIDE**      **16 Come and listen, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell you what he did for me.**
- 17 For I cried out to him for help,  
praising him as I spoke.**
- 18 If I had not confessed the sin in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.**
- 19 But God did listen!  
He paid attention to my prayer.**
- 20 Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer  
or withdraw his unfailing love from me.**

Those are the kind of songs we sing at times of reorientation when we feel once more the joy that we never thought we would experience again.

I want to conclude by looking at a particular Psalm that we read today. It is a Psalm that speaks to me and I know speaks to many of you sometimes. Psalm 118 is one that my great grandmother Grace Berry had imprinted on napkins when she came to stay at my house and be my nanny when I was six years old. She was 85 and was an amazing woman of faith. Before every meal we would have the special napkins that she had brought with her in her suitcase. She made me read Psalm 118: 24 as a grace before each meal.

- SLIDE**      ***This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.***

When I have experienced difficulties and trials throughout my life Psalm 118 would come back to me each and every time. It became a Psalm of reorientation for me in my life, reminding me that one day there will come a time again to rejoice and be glad even in the midst of the darkest of times.

I was reminded of this Psalm this last week as I read the story of a teenage girl from a Methodist youth group. Brittany Gallagher contracted Lyme disease when she was 13 years old but the doctors mistakenly diagnosed it as mononucleosis. The treatment for Mono actually boosted the Lyme disease. For four years her body was decimated by the disease. She had multiple surgeries and missed an entire year of school. She had tumors that constantly developed and her pupils were always dilated. Her lymph nodes were swollen and it seemed as if she was experiencing that life that Job experienced.

At the age of 17 the disease caught up with Brittany and she died in her sleep. At her funeral her friends remembered a young woman who was full of life even though it was hard. She would call up her friends from the youth group and say, "If you don't mind hanging out with someone who is throwing up, do you want to come over and hang out with me?"

She would be sick and then she would hang out with her friends and then she would go and be sick again and then hang out with her friends for more. She loved to drive around in her parents Jeep Wrangler with the top down blaring the soundtrack from High School Musical even though her friends were tired of it. If someone threw out a piece of trash from her car she would pull over and make them get out and pick it up because she didn't believe in littering.

She loved to play pranks on her friends but she did not believe in wasting toilet paper or in littering so instead of TPing someone's house she would use big stacks of old, stale tortillas found in the clearance section in the bakery aisle of the grocery store. She would throw the tortillas all over the grass in front of a friend's home and then the birds and squirrels would eat the tortillas later in the day.

Brittany and her friends would drive around their town looking for trains who were crossing the road. At the railroad crossing they could then stop their car and turn up the music full blast. They would get out of the car and begin dancing in the streets with all of the people in the cars behind them watching them. It was humorous until the train had already passed and they would still be dancing out in front of their car while people honked their horns.

This is how Brittany lived—wild and big and fun. The night before she passed away she sat down in her bedroom and made up a list of all of the things she was grateful for in her life. She talked to her mom that night before she went to bed and told her these things and gave her the list.

Do you want to know where Brittany found the strength to live this way? There was one verse that seemed to shape Brittany's life. She wrote it in lipstick on the mirror in her bedroom. It is a verse that captures what gave Brittany her strength. It was Psalm 118:14.

**SLIDE**        ***14 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory.***

I want you to listen to Psalm 118 because these verses shaped this young woman's life, and they can shape yours and mine as well.

**SLIDE**        ***1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!***

***His faithful love endures forever.***

***2 Let all Israel repeat:***

***"His faithful love endures forever."***

***3 Let Aaron's descendants, the priests, repeat:***

***"His faithful love endures forever."***

***4 Let all who fear the Lord repeat:***

***"His faithful love endures forever."***

***5 In my distress I prayed to the Lord,  
and the Lord answered me and set me free.***

***6 The Lord is for me, so I will have no fear.***

***What can mere people do to me?***

***7 Yes, the Lord is for me; he will help me.***

***I will look in triumph at those who hate me.***

***8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to trust in people.***

***9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to trust in princes.***

***13 My enemies did their best to kill me,  
but the Lord rescued me.***

***14 The Lord is my strength and my song;  
he has given me victory.***

***17 I will not die; instead, I will live  
to tell what the Lord has done.  
18 The Lord has punished me severely,  
but he did not let me die.  
24 This is the day the Lord has made.  
We will rejoice and be glad in it.  
29 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!  
His faithful love endures forever.***

Brittany found her strength in the Wisdom Literature and the poetry of the Scriptures and the God they proclaimed, and you can too.

We all walk through various seasons of life. We are going to have times when we are young and filled passion for the person that we love, and we can hardly contain it all. At those moments we feel nothing but joy.

We will have times in our lives where everything seems pretty settled and things are going well. We can make broad statements about how a life of faith really works. It does generally work that way, but not always.

All of us will go through periods of suffering. During that suffering, where will we turn? What do we hope in, except with Job to hope in the Lord?

Finally, there will come a point at the end of our lives where we will wonder, “What is it that we trust in now? What is that we can sink our feet down upon? What can we stand on when the blizzards of life hit? At those moments we recognize with the writer of the Psalms and with Gary and Brittany that:

**SLIDE**      ***The Lord is our strength and our song.***

I pray he be that for you today and always. Let's pray.

**SLIDE**      **Prayer**

*O God, we give you thanks and praise that in every season of life—in our seasons of doubt, in the seasons of struggles that we face, in the times that we cry out in pain—you are still God.*

*We thank you that though we can't understand everything that happens in this world, we can trust in your unfailing love that endures forever. Help us to hold on tight and not let go.*

*With the writer of the Song of Songs we recognize the blessings and the gifts of love and passion and sensuality. We thank you for them and recognize you are*

*the source of those gifts. With the writer of Proverbs we recognize there are ways we should live and we pray that you would help us to trust in you with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding—to acknowledge you in all our ways that you might direct our path.*

*With the writer of the book of Psalms we pray that you would help us so that in midst of the pain we might cry out to you and find that your love will hold us and sustain us. In the midst of the times of stability and orientation we might sing songs of great praise. And in the times of disorientation we might come to you in repentance and love, crying out to you for help that you might be our strength and our song.*

*We offer ourselves to you Lord, in Jesus name, amen.*