

Week of September 6

Title: Change for Good—Stability in Unstable Times

Text: Psalm 19:1-14

We often feel tension in our lives when we find ourselves facing times of instability and uncertainty. This is a Psalm of David—who knew his share of instability and uncertainty in his life. Pastor Jeff shared with us: “Whether running from Saul or Absalom—cheating with Bathsheba or trying to cover it up to Nathan—dealing with the sibling jealousies of his brothers or facing the challenges of his own children—being the youngest son of Jesse or navigating the pressure of being king—David—known as the man after God’s own heart knew what it was like to face instability and uncertainty in his life.”

When confronted with instability and uncertainty—creation reminded David that God IS.

Psalm 19:1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, 5 which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. 6 It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

Can you recall a time when you were overwhelmed by God’s creation? Can you recall a time when creation reminded you that God is in control, and because He is, He brings stability and certainty to our lives? How might the living of our lives change if we were intentional about being aware of God in creation? Why do you suppose we take God’s creation for granted? How might we become more aware of it in our daily lives?

When confronted with instability and uncertainty—David is reminded that God’s LAW IS PERFECT.

Psalm 19:7-13

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. 11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

As you read these verses what do they tell us about God’s Law? How might we live life differently, if we were to follow God’s Law? How might that bring stability and certainty to our lives?

When confronted with instability and uncertainty—David is reminded that OBEDIENCE gives LIFE

Psalm 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

David prayed that both his words and his thoughts might be pleasing to God. Do you think that we are intentional about this in our daily lives? How might our lives change if we were?

David recognized that God was both his Rock and Redeemer. How might we be able to face those times of uncertainty and instability, if we would remember and lay claim to God being our Rock and Redeemer?

Pray for God’s stability in your life through His presence and His Word.

Week of September 13

Title: Change for Good—Sustenance in Empty Times

Text: Psalm 42:1-11

Sometimes—life isn't fair. Bad news comes. Disappointment rocks us. Loss sweeps over us like a flood. Pain is real. God seems distant. If you have ever felt this way, the 42nd Psalm is for you. Sometimes, the Psalms give us words when we cannot find them for ourselves.

1—Our SOUL LONGS for God—but he SEEMS DISTANT (42:1-4)

The Psalmist here finds himself in a spiritual funk. He shares that his soul pants and longs for God—he longs for God, but God seems nowhere to be found. To make matters worse, those around him mock him by asking, "Where is your God?"

Psalm 42:1-4

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Have you ever experienced a time when you found yourself in a spiritual funk—a time when God seemed to be either far off in the distance or even nowhere to be found? What did that feel like? When you find yourself facing difficult times, and those around you question where your God is and why He seems to be absent, how do you respond?

Even though God might seem far away in the present, the Psalmist seeks to remember those times in his past when He encountered the living God. The Psalmist goes on to say:

4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. NIV

How do your memories of God's presence and activity in your life help you through some of the rough times in your life and faith journey?

2—Our SOUL is DOWNCAST and in NEED of HOPE (42:5-11)

Sometimes, our spiritual memory is enough to get us through, but others times—we need a fresh experience of God. In those moments, when our soul is downcast, we need fresh hope.

Psalm 42:5-11

5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and 6 my God.

Sometimes the most courageous thing we can do in the face of life's most empty and devastating times is to decide to put our hope and trust in God, to declare that the One who created every day is bigger than anything we might be facing. To declare that the One who made the mountains—is able to move any mountains in our lives. To declare that the One who is the author of life and death—is able to bring life in the face of death. To declare FAITH in what we cannot see, explain or understand—because the One we TRUST in does see and understand and does not have to explain it to US.

Do you believe that it is easy or difficult for us to decide to put our hope and trust in God? What makes it easy? What makes it difficult? How do we make this move?

My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

Mount Hermon and the springs of Dan are an unquenchable source of living water. These are the headwaters of the Jordan that water the entire Jordan valley and are a source of life in the desert. These words of the Psalmist remind us that God is an unlimited source of life for us, even in the desert times. Deep calls to deep. In essence, this is the Spirit of God reaching deep into the spirit of His children, bypassing all that which would attempt to impede the communion and fellowship God so passionately desires to have with us. Have you ever had a time when you were in the midst of a desert time, and you sensed God's unlimited source of life and love sweeping over you like a wave? How did that help you through that desert time?

8 By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life.

When life gets difficult it can take the song from our hearts and souls. It likewise can make it difficult for us to pray. Once again the Psalmist gives us the assurance that God is with us. Paul tells us in Romans that in those times, when we can't seem to find the words to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Have you ever experienced a time when it was difficult to pray? Have you ever experienced a time when you sensed the Holy Spirit intervening for you?

9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" 10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

If you recall Job and his friends they were not very supportive. We need to be careful that we do not listen to those who would speak words of doubt into our lives when we find ourselves in difficult times. We need those who will speak words of assurance and faith, turning us towards God. Have you ever had a person(s) who have done more to make you question God than look to Him in faith? Who are those people in your life that speak words of assurance, words of life, and words of faith that encourage you?

11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

It has been said that, "The most powerful weapon we have when our soul feels empty is PRAISE." How have you found this to be true? What are some things that you have found helpful in praising God?

Pray for God's sustaining grace to undergird your life.

Week of September 20

Title: Change for Good—Certainty in Uncertain Times

Text: Psalm 146:1-10

This is one of the Psalms of Ascent—one of the songs pilgrims would sing on their way “up” to Jerusalem for one of the festivals of the Jewish year. It served as a reminder of who was “God” and who was not. It has some perspective to give us, as we live in this uncertain time of change about where our help really comes from.

Some things for us to remember as we seek certainty in uncertain times:

1—PRAISE GOD (146:1-2)

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul.

2 I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

A good place to start during uncertain times is with the praise of God and God alone, no one else is eternal. No one else is perfect. No one else always keeps his word. Our problem is that we often seek to be praised rather than give praise.

Do you think that the statement “we seek to be praised rather than give praise” is true? Why or why not? Is it easy or difficult to maintain an attitude of praise in the midst of uncertain times? Why or why not?

2—KEEP “KINGS” in PERSPECTIVE (146:3-4)

3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save.

4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.

The important thing to remember about any leader, president, leader, king, queen or pastor—is that they are mortal. They have feet of clay and will not live forever. When our earthly lives are over, the only thing that will last is the legacy with which we have lived. Death has a way of leveling the playing field of our lives.

Do you think that we place our faith and trust in people at times instead of in God? What causes us to do so?

3—FOLLOW and TRUST GOD (146:5)

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God,

With one verse, the Psalmist refocuses the pilgrims on the object of their devotion and praise. In a world of temporary allegiances, we need a God who transcends time.

As the Psalmist references the God of Jacob he is calling the people to remember the deep history of their covenant. We find here an important reminder that God is eternal and those we often place our confidence in are temporary. When we realize how big God really is, it will be a constant source of HOPE.

Do you think that we tend to forget just how big God is? Why is it that we too often place our trust in things, people, or situations rather than God? How does it change our outlook on life, our feelings about things, when we place our trust in God?

4—GOD is TRUSTWORTHY (146:6-10)

6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — the Lord, who remains faithful forever.

7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, 8 the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous.

9 The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. 10 The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

As we read these verses, we find the many ways that God shows us His faithfulness.

What are some of the ways He does this? How have you found God faithful in your life? How would you share God's faithfulness to someone else?

Pray for God's certainty in these uncertain times.

Week of September 27

Title: Change for Good—Hope in Hopeless Times

Text: Psalm 23:1-6

The 23rd Psalm is a psalm of David—and one of the most familiar passages of Scripture. It reminds us that God is like a shepherd, to his people and as the poetry of the text unfolds, the example of a shepherd's care for sheep reminds us of how God cares for us, even when it appears hopeless. Let's explore the many ways God LOVES and CARES for us.

1—God is our SHEPHERD (23:1)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

The shepherd provides all the needs of their sheep, leads the sheep, defends and protects the sheep, guides them, feeds them, heals them and is willing to lay down his life for them. God is to his people like a shepherd is to his sheep.

What does this tell us about the nature of God? Is your God big enough to do all a shepherd does for their sheep in your life?

2—God GUIDES and PROTECTS us (23:2-3)

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

God is like a good shepherd who makes us lie down in fertile fields and leads us to safe water.

Sometimes, God allows circumstances in our lives to make us lie down. He does so in order to feed us and to nurture us. Sometimes he does so to adjust our path in order to keep us out of danger. It is important to note that God does not do these things to us but rather for us.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you sensed God causing you to lie down? How did you react to that? How did it feel?

3—God COMFORTS us (23:4)

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Sometimes life's road takes us to places where we face our own mortality, those times when we are overcome with fear and loneliness, but David reminds us that we do not need to be afraid for God has sent the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who will fiercely guide, protect, and comfort us along the way.

What does it mean to you to have Jesus as your Good Shepherd seeing you through the valleys of life? Can you recall a time when you experienced this?

4—God PROVIDES for and HEALS us (23:5)

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

In David's day the shepherd was charged with protecting the flock, even to the point of laying down their life for them. The shepherd was also the one who cared for the sheep when they became wounded. David tells us

that God is our Good Shepherd who does those very things for us. The image of an overflowing cup is a reminder that there is no limit to what God will provide, if we allow him to be our shepherd. How have you experienced God's protective care? How have you experienced God's healing touch in your life?

5—God PROMISES us a HOME (23:6)

6 Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It has been said that goodness and mercy are God's sheepdogs intended to help guide, protect and comfort us until we are home. God has prepared a place for us and it is his desire to take us there.

Do you think we live life with eternity in mind? How does that change the way we live our lives?

Pray that God may sustain you with His hope.