Week 1

FEB. 21–27, 2021

God is our creator and our shepherd

by Roger Gench

HYMN OF THE WEEK: "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need"

PRAYER FOCUS: Reception — How can I receive God's forgiveness for my own weaknesses and failures? In what ways is God speaking healing and grace into my heart?

ACTION: Pay attention to creation this week. Go for a walk and observe the Creator's handiwork. Look out a window and take notice. Look for photos of landscapes in regions far from where you live and give thanks for the beauty and variety of creation.

Sunday, FEBRUARY 21, 2021

PSALM 46:1–11

Psalm 46, one of the most beloved of the Psalter, inspired Martin Luther's celebrated hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." It articulates deep trust in God amid turmoil and chaos — realities with which we are all too familiar in our current historical moment. There are many ways to pray with this psalm.

Practice: You may wish to follow the practice of reflecting on images that compel you, or you may want to focus on certain lines of the psalm, such as the words from verse 10: "Be still, and know that I am God." Suggestion: Repeat these eight words eight times, each time omitting the last word until you are left only with the word "Be." This is a powerful, contemplative way to pray this psalm.

Journal: Note in a journal what surfaces in your awareness, what thoughts or emotions are evoked as you engage this Scripture in prayer — movements toward God or movements away from God. Whichever the case may be, rest assured of the loving presence of God.

BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.

Monday, FEBRUARY 22, 2021

PSALM 8

Psalm 8 invites us to consider our place in God good's creation — a lofty place, "a little lower than God." Though we are not God, the psalmist affirms human dominion over God's good creation. It is important to note that the word "dominion" does not connote domination, much less exploitation. It conveys, rather, that we are caretakers of God's creation, who care for it as God does. We play a representative role that carries responsibilities for stewardship on God's behalf; thus, exploitation is hardly in view. As Clint McCann writes in his essay on Psalms in "The New Interpreter's Bible," "God and humans are partners in the care of creation, because God has made a risky choice to share power!" A risky choice indeed!

Practice: Pray this psalm with special attention to our stewardship of God's creation.

Journal: As you meditate on this psalm, attend to movements toward God and away from God that surface in your awareness, and note in a journal what the psalm evokes.

Tuesday, FEBRUARY 23, 2021

PSALM 36:5–9

Psalm 36 is a profound affirmation of God's unconquered, life-giving power amid the brokenness of our lives and of all of creation — "you save humans and animals alike." This affirmation is foundational for our prayers throughout the season of Lent. It undergirds the movements of our spirits that we discern — movements both toward God and away from God. It is important to affirm God's life-giving power even as we recognize movements away from God, because it is especially during experiences of despair, fear or anxiety that we need this psalm's assurance of God's steadfast presence. The promise of resurrection out of death is foundational to our faith as we journey through Lent toward Easter.

Practice: You are invited to pray with Psalm 36:5-9.

Journal: Note what surfaces in your awareness in your journal.

Wednesday, FEBRUARY 24, 2021

PSALM 104:14–26

Psalm 104 is a majestic creation psalm, describing the interdependence of the creatures of the earth and God's manifold wisdom in creation. The psalm evokes a sense of wonder and awe as we consider the creation that surrounds us.

Practice: Read Psalm 104:14–26 slowly, two or three times, and consider its many references to the creation around us.

Journal: Note in your journal any movement toward God or away from God that is evoked as you pray this psalm.

Thursday, FEBRUARY 25, 2021

ROMANS 8:26–35

In this passage from Romans, Paul assures us that even when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. Have you ever prayed with audible emotions — groans, deep humming or sighs? We do not necessarily need words when we come before God in prayer.

Practice: Read Romans 8:26-35 slowly and open yourself to become aware of God's Spirit as it prays for you in the depths of sighs and groans — stay with this awareness for several minutes.

Journal: Note in your journal what surfaced in your awareness during this prayer time.

Friday, FEBRUARY 26, 2021

MATTHEW 6:7–13

Today's text is Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer — familiar to every Christian around the world. You probably know it by heart, but you are encouraged to read it slowly and prayerfully, pausing over each line, in order to see and hear it anew.

Practice: Pray this passage slowly several times in the manner we have been practicing. Note phrases and images that shimmer for you, asking how God might be speaking to you through them.

Journal: Note in your journal movements away from God or toward God that surfaced in your awareness as you prayed this Scripture.

Saturday, FEBRUARY 27, 2021

PSALM 42:1–8

This psalm is rich with imagery for prayer, especially in times of difficulty, distress or even in the midst of aridity — dry spells in our spiritual lives. The psalm may be especially poignant in the midst of the isolation, social distancing and loneliness we experience in a pandemic stricken world. God, too, may seem distant from us.

Practice: Pray the psalm slowly at least three times, then set your Bible aside and meditate on the images that come to mind, trusting that the images or words that you are most in need of will be present to you.

Journal: Record in your journal what happened in this prayer time. Note especially any images that stood out for you, and what you think they may convey with respect to movement toward God or away from God in your present experience.

MY SOUL LONGS FOR YOU, O GOD.