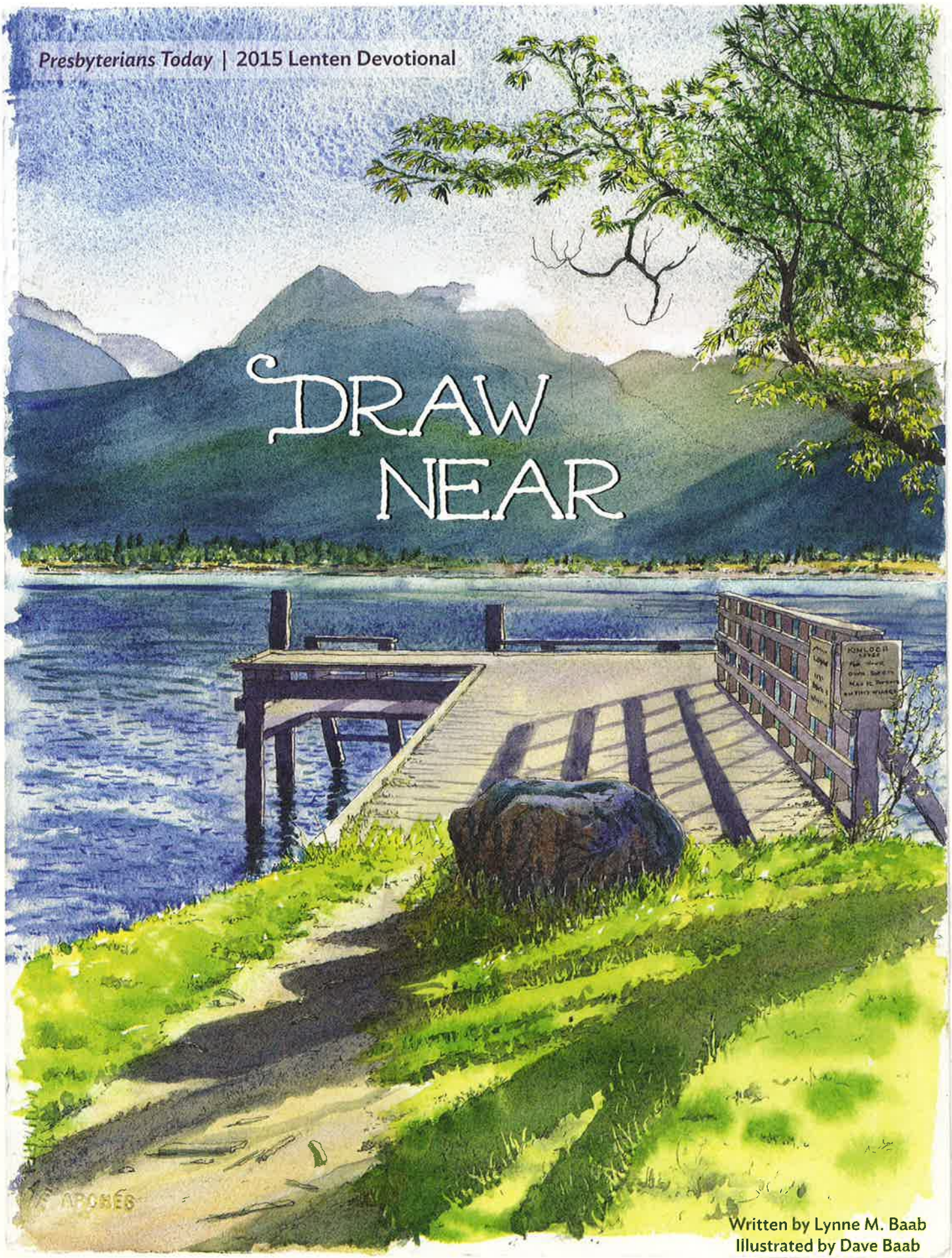
*Presbyterians Today* | 2015 Lenten Devotional



# DRAW NEAR

Written by Lynne M. Baab
Illustrated by Dave Baab

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By Lynne M. Baab

## A NOTE TO READERS

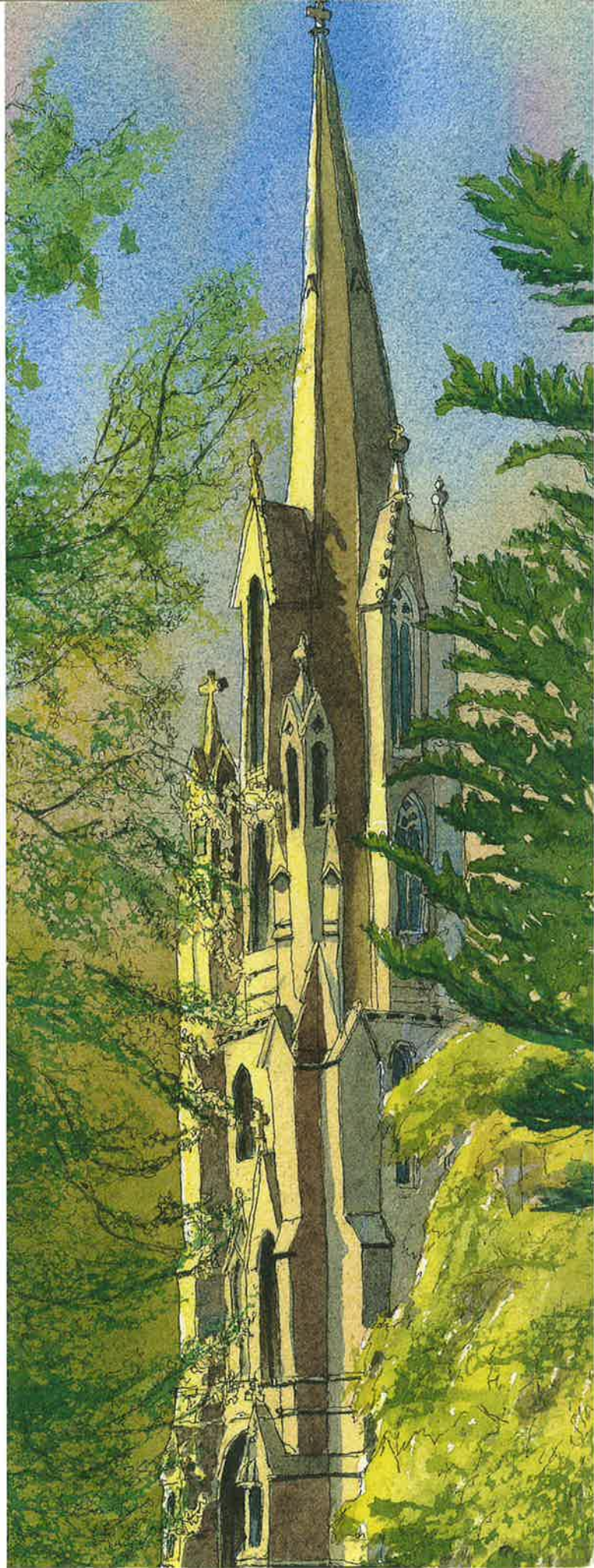
*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
*—Hebrews 4:15-16*

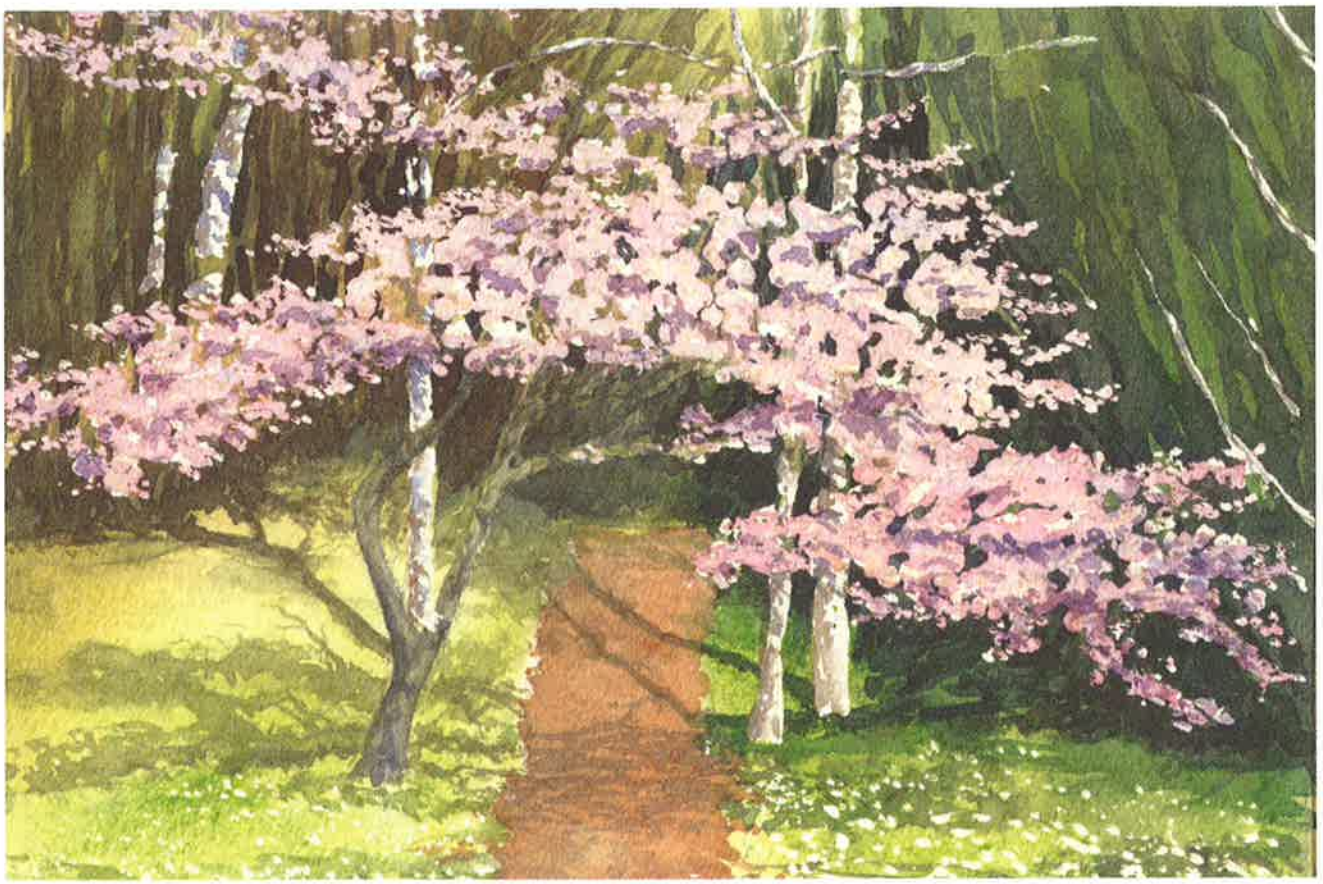
Throughout history, Christians have made special efforts to draw near to God during Lent. Some have fasted. Some have prayed. Some have set aside time to read the Bible. Others have gardened, taken daily walks, written letters to God, kept a journal, or sought out opportunities for service.

This Lent, I invite you to make this devotional your way of drawing near to God. To do that, we will journey through the book of Psalms, which has long been viewed as the prayer book of the Bible. The prayers in the psalms are rich and passionate, representing many different kinds of prayer and a variety of ways to approach God. The diverse moods of the psalms include sorrow, anger, confusion, thankfulness, and joy. The psalms have been an important part of my own faith journey, and now I hope they will help you also to bring your whole self a little closer to God.

I've chosen one psalm for each day, grouped thematically by week, and I encourage you to read the whole psalm. As you read, try to pray the words. One helpful way to pray the psalms is to read the psalm first to get a sense of the content and then read it a second time slowly, praying the words. Reading and praying psalms out loud can be helpful because it slows us down. Then use the questions that follow each day's meditation to reflect on the psalm's meaning for your life.

Among the psalms you'll be praying are the handful of psalms either quoted by Jesus or referenced by the Gospel writers. These psalms will help us journey with Jesus to the cross and resurrection. Jesus our high priest was tempted during his last weeks on earth to turn away from the path laid before him. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Because of who Jesus was and is, and because of what Jesus did on the cross, we can draw near to God with confidence. Mercy and grace are waiting for us there.





# WEEK ONE

drawing near

## ASH WEDNESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 32**
*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven.*

Throughout Christian history, Lent has been a penitential season, a time for reflecting on our own sin and brokenness and acknowledging our great need for God's forgiveness and grace. As we journey with Jesus to the cross, we acknowledge that his death and resurrection are absolutely essential for us to move beyond sin and brokenness. This psalm focuses on the freedom that comes after being honest with God about our sin.

**Questions for reflection**

1. "While I kept silence, my body wasted away." What experiences does this passage remind you of?
2. In what ways would you like to feel the freedom and joy described by the psalmist?

*Forgiving God, help me to be honest when I draw near to you.*

## THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalms 42 and 43**
*Hope in God; for I shall again praise God, my help.*

A shared refrain (occurring twice in Ps. 42 and once in Ps. 43) binds these two psalms together. The mood of these psalms is mournful, full of longing for a renewed sense of God's presence in the midst of pain, sad memories, and adversity.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what ways do you long for God's presence, and what events or aspects of your life trigger that longing?
2. "Hope in God," the psalmist says. During Lent this year, what are you hoping for?

*God of hope, help us to follow the model of the psalmist and bring our pain, sad memories, and adversity to you in prayer. And as we bring our whole selves to you, give us hope.*

## FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 98**
*O sing to the LORD a new song, for the LORD has done marvelous things.*

The Bible talks over and over about God doing a new thing in our midst. We need to keep our eyes open so we can see those new things and sing "a new song." But sometimes we don't want a "new thing"—we don't want a changing church or a new career or a new person to love. We want it the way it was. It can be very hard to see God's steadfast love and faithfulness in changing situations.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What are the biggest obstacles to your ability to see—and accept—God doing new things?
2. What new things have you seen so far this year? What has enabled you to see them, and in what ways are you resisting and embracing them?

*Lord God, I want to sing a new song to you, in response to the new things you do in my life. Open my eyes to see your new things.*

## SATURDAY

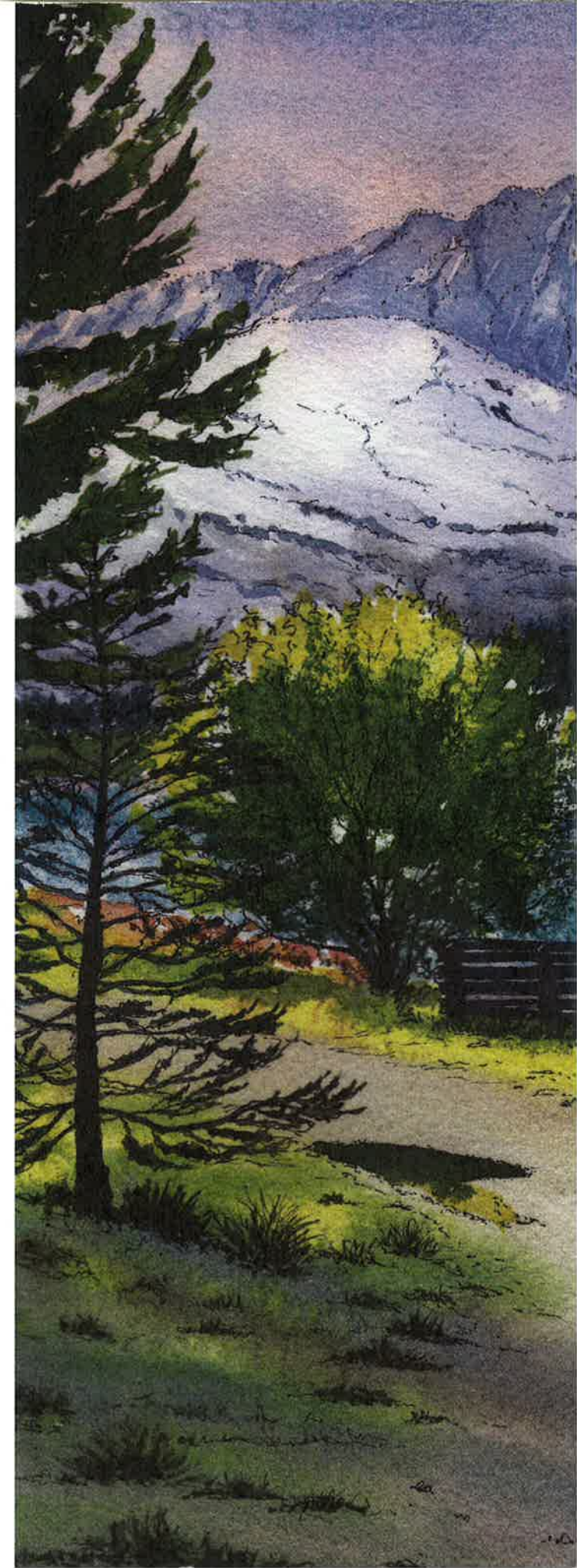
**Scripture: Psalm 23**
*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

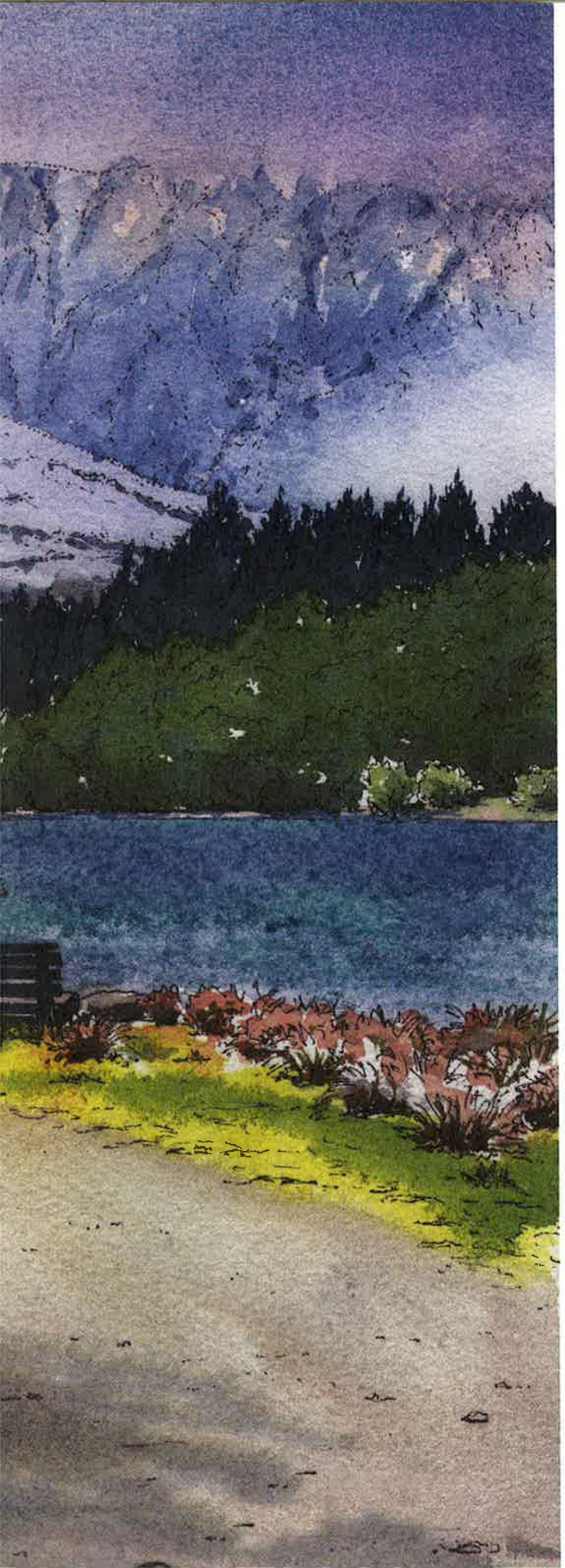
I was a child when I first heard and fell in love with this beautiful psalm. Though God works through the new, God also works through the familiar. Try something different with this psalm that is so familiar and well loved. Try praying it slowly several times. You may want to change *he* in verses one to three to *you* as you pray. Consider pausing for a moment of silence after each line.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Where are your green pastures? Where are your still waters? Where is your darkest valley?
2. This year in Lent, in what ways might thinking about God as shepherd help you draw near to God?

*God our shepherd, guide us, restore us, and give us your peace. Help us to rejoice in your abundant goodness.*





## FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

**Scripture: Psalm 145**

*The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and the LORD's compassion is over all the LORD has made.*

On Sundays, even during Lent, Christians remember the joy of Jesus' resurrection. The book of Psalms ends with six psalms of joyous and exuberant praise for God's acts and God's goodness. On Sundays during Lent, this devotional will focus on these psalms of praise. Both sorrow and joy coexist in real life, and the psalms do such a good job of showing us how those two emotional states are part of a vibrant prayer life.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What makes it difficult in your life right now to praise or thank God?
2. Look back over the first five days of Lent and name some of the emotions you experienced. What can you praise God for?

*Lord Jesus, we praise you for your resurrection, which brought us so many gifts. We pray that you will help us draw near to you with both our sorrows and our joys.*

# WEEK TWO

acknowledging our need for God

## MONDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 63**

*My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips.*

I have a beautiful calligraphy painting of the first five verses of this psalm, and I love it because it so vividly captures my experience in the years when I battled depression. I desperately needed relief from the darkness, and indeed I experienced glimpses of joy from time to time during those painful years. Those moments of satisfaction came as great gifts from God, like water in the desert.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What do you long for most from God today?
2. In what ways has God satisfied your deepest longings?

*God of steadfast love, you have been my help in need, and you have given me moments of deep satisfaction. Help me turn to you with my longings and to see the ways you bless me.*

## TUESDAY

### Scripture: Psalm 46

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.*

The psalms are honest about human life. So often our lives feel like an earthquake or a violent sea—when we experience job difficulties, relationship disappointments, financial losses, or especially the death of loved ones. In those big challenges, we desperately need a refuge and source of strength. And yet we need security and strength in the "small" anxieties and pressures as well.

### Questions for reflection

1. What are the earthquakes—and tremors—of anxiety in your life today, and in what ways do you feel God's presence in the midst of them?
2. Spend some time taking up God's invitation in this psalm: "Be still and know that I am God."

*God our refuge and strength, give us a sense of your presence and peace in the midst of turmoil and anxiety.*

## WEDNESDAY

### Scripture: Psalm 124

*Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

Some people have external enemies, people who are against them. Some people have internal enemies, emotions and thoughts that attack from within. In either case, it is God who keeps us safe in the presence of our enemies. Without God, "the flood would have swept us away." But, instead, we have "escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers."

### Questions for reflection

1. When you think of the enemies in your life, what or who are they?
2. In what ways has God rescued you from those enemies?

*God, help us to see your hand of protection at work in our lives, and help us to be thankful.*

## THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 121**

*My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

Have you ever wondered if God is sleeping—if God has failed in some way to watch over you and the world? This psalm is so poignant and vivid because it addresses that common fear and affirms that our protector God does not slumber. God's help comes to us 24/7. Note the psalm's sweeping overview of threats and dangers, and note the strong affirmation that God provides help in all such situations.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Look back at your life. What are some of the anxiety-provoking situations that God has helped you through?
2. What are some of your biggest anxieties today? Pray the words to this psalm with those fears in mind.

*God our help, may we know deep inside that you are with us always, even when our worlds seem to be falling apart.*

## FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 126**

*May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.*

We need God in the awful times, the minutes and hours full of tears. We need God to turn our sorrow into joy. This psalm affirms that the movement from pain to joy always comes from God.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Think of a moment in your life when sorrow turned to joy. In what ways did you see God giving you joy, and in what ways did you think you caused the shift on your own?
2. If you asked God today to "restore your fortunes," what specifically would you ask for? Do you think this refers to money?

*O God who restores, I confess that I am often blind to the ways you bring joy after sorrow. Help me to see your loving hand bringing refreshment to me.*

## SATURDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 62**

*For God alone my soul waits in silence; from God comes my salvation.*

The word *alone* occurs three times in this psalm. The psalmist waits for *God alone* and acknowledges that *God alone* is our rock, salvation, and fortress. In our 21st-century consumer-driven world, many things other than God entice us to put our hope in them, such as money, career, body image, family, and intellect.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In your life, what competes for God's place? What tempts you to delete that word *alone* from your view of God?
2. If you were to finish this statement, what would you say? God alone is my . . .

*God my salvation, rock, fortress, and deliverance, help me to grow in experiencing both your power and your love so I can trust you alone.*

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

**Scripture: Psalm 146**

*I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

The song of praise on the lips of the psalmist comes from remembering and pondering a variety of ways God has met people in their real-life situations. Look back on the past week with this devotional's focus on acknowledging your need for God, and keep those thoughts and feelings in mind as you read and pray this psalm.

**Questions for reflection**

1. As you think of the past week, which characteristics and acts of God are you most grateful for?
2. In what ways do those attributes and acts of God inform your worship and song?

*God our Creator, you help us, set us free, lift us up, watch over us, and love us. Help us to sing your praises with an open and joyful heart. We love you.*

# WEEK THREE

thankfulness

## MONDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 136**

*O give thanks to the God of heaven, for God's steadfast love endures forever.*

Some contemporary writers recommend making a list of things you are thankful for. These could be recent sources of gratitude or moments from your past. Psalm 136 reads like such a list based on Israel's history. The repetitive refrain encourages us to view each event as a sign of God's steadfast love that endures forever.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What are the biggest blocks to thankfulness in your life, and how have you overcome them?
2. Make a list in writing or out loud of 10 things you're thankful for, and use the refrain from this psalm for each one.

*God of heaven, thank you for all the ways you care for us. Give us eyes to see your care as a sign of your steadfast love.*

## TUESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 92**

*It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High.*

We honor God when we give thanks and sing praises, and we also benefit a great deal ourselves. Giving thanks is good for our souls, and giving thanks opens our eyes to see more of God's blessings. "You, O LORD, have made me glad," says the psalmist, and often we need to choose to be thankful in order to experience that gladness of heart.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What are you most thankful for today?
2. As you name the things for which you are grateful, how do you feel? Do you feel less stressed, less anxious? How could you make more time for the things that gladden your heart?

*O Most High, help me to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night. Help me to open my eyes to see your goodness so I can have a glad heart.*

## WEDNESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 134**

*Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD.*

The idea of asking God to bless us is a familiar one, but what's this about us blessing God? When we bless God, we are praising God. We bless God by asking that we might be among the blessed named in Jesus' beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12): the merciful, the peacemakers, the pure in heart. We bless God by being a blessing to others. When we ask God to bless us, we are asking God not for material fortune or prosperity but for hope, healing, faith, and courage.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What do you want to bless God for today?
2. In what way can you be a blessing today to others?

*God, your blessings are beyond our comprehension. We so often can't see them. Help us to perceive your goodness and to respond in thankfulness and praise.*

## THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 116**

*I love the LORD, because the LORD has heard my voice and my supplications.*

When something terrible happens—perhaps the death of a loved one—and God delivers us from its captivity after much fear and pain, there comes a quiet relief (even though the terrible thing may still be with us). "What shall I return to the LORD for all the LORD's bounty to me?" the psalmist asks. Love, thankfulness, faithful obedience, and resting in God are the psalmist's response.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In your life, what impedes you from seeing the ways God has delivered you in crises? Does "delivery" always mean that the crisis is over, or can it mean the persistence of faith in the midst of crisis?
2. Can you remember a time in your life when you felt the kind of relief this psalm expresses? Spend some time thanking God for it.

*O God, you hear my voice when I cry out. Help me to see your hand in my life and be thankful.*

## FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 1**

*They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.*

My husband and I try to spend some time every week praying thankfulness prayers together. The many years of expressing gratitude to God has enabled me to see so much more to be thankful for. The metaphor of the trees planted by streams of water reminds me to look for the seasonal fruit and green leaves of my life.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What kinds of good fruit, green leaves, and other signs of God's life in you are you thankful for today?
2. Right now, imagine your roots sinking deep into the living waters of God's grace. What does that look like in practice in your life?

*God of green trees and delicious fruit, help me to notice and thank you for the fruitfulness of my life that you have made possible.*

## SATURDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 47**

*The LORD, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth.*

The word *awesome* gets used so much these days that it has lost its original meaning: "inspiring awe." As you pray this psalm, think about a variety of ways you feel awe (reverence, fearful wonder) when you think about God and what God does. Think about the places in your life that help you feel awe toward God.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In the time of the psalmist, kings often inspired awe. What analogies could we use today when describing the awesomeness of God?
2. How could you make awe a regular part of each day?

*God, inspire and move us to clap our hands and sing praises to you. Let us witness your grandeur, your mystery—that we might be filled with fire for this life.*

## THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

**Scripture: Psalm 147**
*How good it is to sing praises to our God; for our God is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.*

Psalm 147 reads like a thankfulness journal. The psalmist alternates between recounting the manifold ways God cares for humans and praising God for all the ways God sustains creation. Consider starting a thankfulness journal, recording what you're thankful for.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What are you thankful for today about the way God sustains creation and human life? What about the way God sustains your life and those you love?
2. After a week of thankfulness prayers, spend some time reflecting on the role you would like thankfulness to play in your life.

*Creator and Redeemer God, give us eyes to see your hand at work in the world and to praise and thank you for all you do.*

# WEEK FOUR

the whole earth belongs to God

## MONDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 19**
*The heavens are telling the glory of God. . . . The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.*

Scripture presents to us God's word, what the psalmist here calls "the law of the LORD." Through Scripture we learn of God's love for humanity throughout time and God's sending of Jesus Christ. God also speaks to us through nature, telling us of God's beauty, creativity, and care for all of creation. Because the whole earth belongs to God, we can expect to hear God's voice from time to time in God's creation, even while we remain reliant on Scripture for a more detailed and conclusive revelation of God.

**Questions for reflection**

1. How have you heard God in nature and in the Bible?
2. What specifically has God conveyed to you recently through nature or the Bible?

*May we have the ears to hear your truth, O God, wherever and however you choose to reveal it.*

## TUESDAY

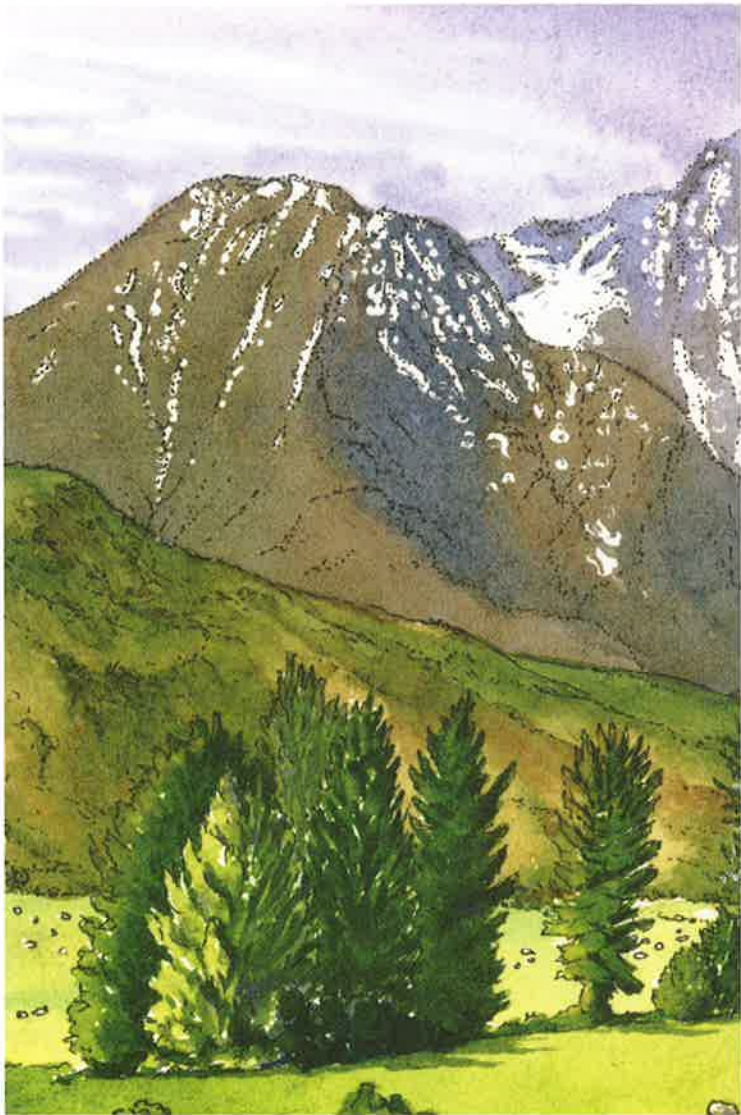
**Scripture: Psalm 104**
*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.*

God created the earth and sustains its every part: the seas, springs, and rivers; the birds, sea creatures, and other animals; the grass, plants, and trees. All of creation looks to God to "give them their food in due season," and humans are not exempted from this utter and complete dependence on God. We rely on God with every breath we take.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Our culture tends to extol the virtues of independence. Why do you think God instead wants us conscious of our dependence (and interdependence)?
2. In what ways are you tempted to think that you are not dependent on God?

*God my Maker and Provider, help me to be willing to acknowledge how much I depend on you, and help me to see your hand at work in the creation around me.*



## WEDNESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 8**

*What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

Have you ever looked at a starry sky and felt small and insignificant? God and the universe God created are so much bigger than we are. Yet Psalm 8 affirms that God has given us a special role on this earth—we get to be caretakers of God's garden. As we admire the beauty of God's creation, and as we care for it, we remember that all of it belongs to God.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what settings do you feel your smallness? Your significance?
2. In what ways are you called to be a caretaker of God's creation?

*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Help us to care for your creation with joy.*

## THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 67**

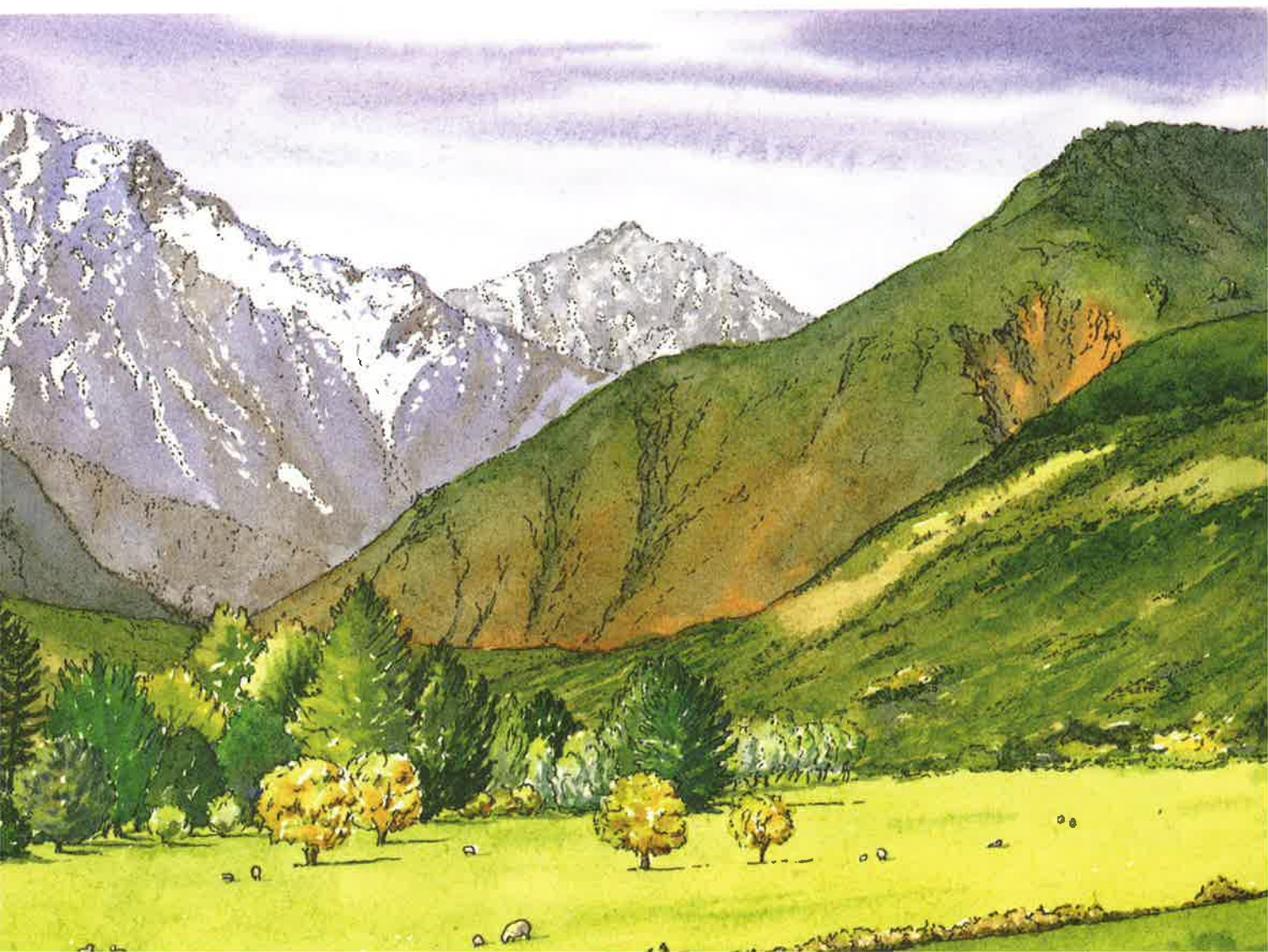
*The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.*

The abundance of the earth is a sign of God's blessing to all peoples and a call to the whole earth to honor the giver of that abundance. Every flower, cloud, mountain, lake, river, beach, fruit tree, and field of crops speaks of God's creativity, provision, and blessing and calls us to praise God. All the peoples of the earth depend on God's goodness.

**Questions for reflection**

1. When you look at the earth, where do you see God's abundance?
2. What are the places in your life where you see God's abundance and blessing?

*God the Creator, give us eyes to see the beauty and abundance of your creation. Make your face to shine upon us so that your way may be known upon the earth.*



## FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 95**

*For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of the LORD's pasture, and the sheep of our God's hand.*

In the same way that the physical world—the mountains, sea, and dry land—belongs to God and is protected by God, this psalm affirms that we humans also belong to God. This belonging takes the form of the tender care of a shepherd for the sheep. Sheep follow the shepherd's voice, and the shepherd protects the sheep and leads them to food and water.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what ways do you resist viewing yourself as a sheep?
2. In what ways do you enjoy thinking of yourself as a sheep in God's hand?

*God our shepherd, we need your protection and guidance. Give us willing hearts to hear your voice and follow you.*

## SATURDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 96**

*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.*

Psalm 96 calls all the peoples of the earth, and the earth itself, to worship the God who made them. More than any other, this psalm has a global and international perspective, affirming that God is Lord over all peoples and will ultimately judge all peoples with righteousness and truth.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What judgments do you think are needed right now for the world? How would the world be different if it proclaimed, "Jesus is Lord"?
2. Where do you see righteousness and truth being practiced in your life? Where could there be more righteousness?

*God our Maker, help us to join all of creation in coming into your presence with thanksgiving and making a joyful noise to you with songs of praise.*

### FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**Scripture: Psalm 148**

*Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise the LORD in the heights! Praise the LORD, all you angels; praise the LORD, all you heavenly host!*

The psalmist exhorts all of creation to praise God: angels, the sun, the moon, stars, sea creatures, fire, hail, snow, frost, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, wild animals, cattle, creeping things, and birds. No one is left out.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Who or what is excluded from your worship life? What is preventing them from joining you in worship? Now imagine you are joining with all creation in worship. How do you feel?
2. How would you live your life differently if you truly acted from the belief that all things belong to God?

*Lord, your name alone is exalted, and your glory is above earth and heaven. Help me to praise you every day.*

## WEEK FIVE

being honest before God

### MONDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 102**

*Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress.*

I was raised in a family where all forms of complaining were strongly discouraged. Talking about negative emotions was viewed as "whining" or "having a bad attitude." I was a moody teenager who had no idea what to do with the painful thoughts and feelings swirling around my mind. When I discovered in my 20s that the psalmists modeled honesty before God, sharing their complaints openly, I felt like a great load had been lifted.

**Questions for reflection**

1. How can you keep your honesty from becoming a pattern of negativity?
2. What distress or groaning would you like to express to God today?

*God our help, we want to be positive about your role in our life but also honest about our needs. Give us wisdom to do both.*

### TUESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 130**

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!*

Imagine yourself as a night watchman. Imagine the intensity of your longing for morning, particularly in those cold and dark hours right before dawn. That's the powerful picture used in this psalm to express the intensity of the psalmist's longing for God's help and forgiveness. In our advertising culture, it is so easy to believe that something other than God will satisfy our longings.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What is painfully absent from your life? What is one hole you're waiting for God to fill?
2. In what ways are you tempted to think that something other than God will satisfy your longings?

*God of hope and steadfast love, help me to be honest about what I long for, and help me to turn to you with those longings.*

### WEDNESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 51**

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

This psalm is attributed to David after his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1–12:25). It is a psalm of confession and repentance. On the Lenten journey with Jesus to the cross, God invites us to be honest about our sin and brokenness and our need for forgiveness and healing.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what ways do you need God to give you a "clean heart" today? In what ways do you resist acknowledging that?
2. Who do you—a person forgiven by God—need to forgive?

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.*

## THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 139**
*O LORD, you have searched me and known me.*

For many of us, one of our deepest fears is to be known fully. We fear what might be seen, and we fear that the other may turn away in disgust. Yet being known completely—and loved for or in spite of it all—is also one of our deepest desires. In my case, my closest friends and family are the ones who know me inside and out and love me even more for what they have seen. That love inspires me to trust them, to talk honestly and openly with them. This psalm affirms that God sees and knows us intimately. Sometimes this idea can be scary, but mostly it reminds us that God knows and loves us even more fully than our closest friends and family can.

**Questions for reflection**

1. If indeed God sees you through and through, in what ways does this help you to be honest with God?
2. Which parts of your life do you fear sharing with God and others? What would it mean if you knew that you would be loved no matter what?

*Loving God, help me feel known and loved by you.*

## FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 123**
*Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us.*

Praying this psalm requires viewing oneself as a servant. In a culture that values competence, looking good, and self-promotion, this is a big ask. Honesty before God requires that we face our own pride in things like appearance, money, family, possessions, and achievements. We cannot ask for mercy unless we admit we need it.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to be proud?
2. The success-driven values of our culture can put a lot of pressure on us. In what ways do you find comfort and relief in viewing yourself as a servant?

*You are enthroned in the heavens, O Lord. I want to rest in being your servant, but sometimes I chafe at viewing myself that way. Help me to be honest about my need for your mercy and guidance.*

## SATURDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 73**
*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Psalm 73 recounts a powerful inner journey. The psalmist is furious because the wicked prosper. The psalm begins with all the arguments why this situation is simply not right. Then the psalmist enters the "sanctuary of God" and understands that God is still in control. This perception of God's power enables the psalmist to affirm God's love and care as well.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What kinds of situations make you the angriest? Bring that anger honestly to God in prayer.
2. Can you remember instances when God gave you answers to your concerns and you were able to affirm God's goodness in the face of blatant evil in the world?

*God, when I am angry, help me to bring my anger to you and to let you guide me in how to work for justice.*

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**Scripture: Psalm 150**
*Praise God with trumpet sound; praise God with lute and harp!*

I have a weak singing voice and find it hard to sing along in church. But I can play the piano, and when I play, I experience exactly what this psalm describes: I feel myself joining with "everything that breathes" in praising God. The piano also helps me bring a variety of emotions to God as I play.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Which songs or other forms of music help you feel close to God? Why is that particular kind of music meaningful to you?
2. In what ways does music help you be honest before God?

*O God, you created sound and harmony. Help me sing your praises today, and help me rejoice in the loveliness of the music that enables me to draw near to you.*

# WEEK SIX

dwelling in God

## MONDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 90**
*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.*

Home can mean many different things, including the house or apartment we live in, the place where we grew up, the town or city where we live, and our country of citizenship. Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses, who lived at various times in a slave shack, a palace, and a tent in the desert. This psalm affirms that, wherever we live, God is our true home. The psalm also encourages us to live with awareness of the short span of time we will be on earth.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What does home mean for you? Is it a place, a set of people, a feeling, a smell, a set of values?
2. In what ways do you experience God as your true home?

*God our Maker, help me to grow in experiencing you as my true home.*

## TUESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 133**
*How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!*

We dwell in God as individuals but also as a community. The first metaphor in this psalm—precious oil running down the face and beard—may not resonate with us today, but the richness of that image speaks to the intimacy and luxury of human harmony. Dew on a mountain is another image of the beauty and blessing of human love.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Where in your life do you experience unity between people? Where is it missing?
2. Think of someone in your life who has been like refreshing dew or precious oil in your life. Make an effort today to thank that person.

*God, give us your love so we can love those around us and dwell in you together.*

## WEDNESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 24**
*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in the LORD's holy place?*

Many aspects of our lives can make us feel unworthy of dwelling in God's presence. Perhaps yesterday, for the ten thousandth time, I ate too much or longed to purchase something I didn't actually need. Or maybe I worked so long I didn't have energy for my family. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are freed of all these hindrances—all the weight of these sins—and invited into God's presence.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What makes you feel unworthy of dwelling in God's presence?
2. In what ways do you need God's grace today so you can feel confident that God loves you and welcomes you?

*God of the whole earth, you welcome us into your presence as your beloved children, made holy through Jesus Christ. Help us to accept your forgiveness and love.*

## THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 131**
*I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother.*

Children who are nursing often crawl onto their mother's lap in order to get something—food. A weaned child, on the other hand, crawls onto its mother's lap simply to enjoy being there. The mother gives comfort, companionship, care, and nurture, and the child soaks it up. The psalmist seems to be saying that we can dwell in God's presence in that way only when we calm and quiet our souls.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What impedes the calming and quieting of your soul?
2. Spend some time right now in silence, seeking calm. Maybe meditate or pray. Imagine you are resting in God like a child on its mother's lap.

*Loving Lord, help me to draw near to you like a weaned child. Help me to soak up your comfort, companionship, care, and nurture.*

## FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 100**
*Know that the LORD is God. It is the LORD that made us, and we are the LORD's.*

Because God made us and redeemed us in Jesus Christ, we belong to God. We never have to worry that we belong to a tyrant, a capricious boss, or anything else that seems to have a claim on our lives, such as a job or mortgage payment. Of course that also means our life doesn't belong to us either. And that can be difficult to accept. In order to dwell in God, we must agree that our life is God's and not our own.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What keeps you from believing that belonging to God is a gift and a joy?
2. What do you do to demonstrate that you belong to God?

*Good, loving, and faithful God, we want to rejoice that we belong to you, and we want to worship you with gladness for your gift of life.*

## SATURDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 84**
*A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.*

Even small birds feel at home in God. We too are invited to settle into God's presence. As you read and pray this gentle and tender psalm, take the opportunity to reflect back on this past week and ponder the ways you have prayed about and experienced dwelling in God.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What are the habits and practices that help you experience the sweetness of dwelling with God?
2. What are the times and places in your life where you have enjoyed the loveliness of dwelling in God's presence? As Jesus did, bring the joy of dwelling in God with you into the pain of Holy Week.

*God, help me to long for you. Help me to experience the sweetness and joy of dwelling in your presence even when evil and pain seem so strong.*

## PALM SUNDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 118**
*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.*

Today we remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12–15), when the crowds welcomed him with palm branches and sang words from Psalm 118. Probably at least some of the same people who welcomed him on Palm Sunday shouted "crucify him" only a few days later. That fickle response—one day praising loudly and a few days later calling for Jesus' death—reflects the fickleness in each of us.

**Questions for reflection**

1. How have you been fickle in your relationship with God? Which parts of Jesus' ministry and teachings might lead you to reject him also?
2. What helps you return to dwell in God when you have been fickle?

*You understand me through and through, O God. Be merciful to me when I love you one minute and turn against you the next. Forgive me and draw me back into your presence.*

# HOLY WEEK

walking with Jesus to the cross

## MONDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 27**
*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

This psalm may have encouraged Jesus during the last week of his life, as he disputed with the religious leaders and anticipated betrayal at the hands of one of his chosen disciples. In the midst of battle, we all need a sense of God's strength. As you read and pray this psalm, imagine yourself with Jesus this week, finding strength and comfort by seeking God's face and trusting the One who saves.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what ways do you need God to be your light, salvation, and stronghold today?
2. "Your face, LORD, do I seek." What does this look like for you?

*God our light, our salvation, and our stronghold, help us draw near to you and trust you in difficult situations.*

## TUESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 91**

*Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.*

During the temptation of Jesus, Satan quotes verses 11 and 12 of this psalm to argue that Jesus can disobey his Father in heaven and that his Father will still protect him (Matt. 4:6). Jesus, however, obeyed God during the temptation and continues to obey God as he walks toward the cross. This psalm may have given Jesus strength as he faced his death.

**Questions for reflection**

1. When you think of God as shelter and shadow, what images and feelings come to mind?
2. In what areas of your life do you need God to be your shelter and shadow today?

*God our shelter, shadow, refuge, and fortress, help us to love you and trust you when we experience fear.*

## WEDNESDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 69**

*Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.*

Psalm 69 is one of the most often cited psalms in the Gospels, and two of those quotations occur in Holy Week: John 15:25 and John 19:28. The mood of the entire psalm, with the pleas for deliverance and deep sorrow, evokes the events of Holy Week that take Jesus to the cross. As you pray this psalm, imagine you are praying it with Jesus.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What do you need deliverance from right now? What about your community and the world beyond?
2. As you walk with Jesus to the cross and feel some of his sorrow, what do you want to thank him for?

*Lord Jesus Christ, I take you for granted. I forget the pain you suffered for me, for all people, and for the entire creation. Help me to see your love more clearly.*

## MAUNDY THURSDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 41**

*Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.*

Today we remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples, when he gave them instructions and prayed for them (John 13–17). Judas, who ate bread with Jesus and the other disciples, then left to betray Jesus (John 18:1–11). It's so easy to view Judas's actions as something quite extraordinary, but all of us have the tendency to betray those we love.

**Questions for reflection**

1. In what ways have you behaved so unkindly to people you love that they may have felt betrayed?
2. When you have acted unkindly toward others, what helps you turn back to God to receive forgiveness?

*O Lord, the capacity for betrayal is so powerful in me. Be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.*

## GOOD FRIDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 22**

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.*

Psalm 22, a plea for deliverance from suffering and humiliation, is another of the psalms quoted most frequently in the Gospels. Two of those quotations, in John 19:24 and 19:28, occur just before Jesus' death—in the account of the soldiers casting lots for Jesus' clothes and of Jesus' being thirsty right before he dies. "It is finished," Jesus then says (John 19:30), his obedience to the point of death bringing us salvation and peace with God.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What do you most need to learn from Jesus' death?
2. Spend some time in silence, pondering the gift of Jesus' death for you.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer and Savior, thank you for your sacrifice for us. Thank you for your great love that took you to the cross.*

## HOLY SATURDAY

**Scripture: Psalm 34**

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all. The LORD keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken.*

Yesterday we remembered Jesus' death in fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures; not one of Jesus' bones was broken in the crucifixion (John 19:36). Tomorrow we will celebrate that God rescued Jesus from death. Today is a day of waiting between sorrow and joy, between defeat and triumph. The juxtaposition of these opposed realities is common on the journey of faith. We know God's goodness, but we live in the reality of a broken world.

**Questions for reflection**

1. From what afflictions has God rescued you?
2. From what afflictions are you waiting for God to rescue you?

*Loving God, I want to taste and see that you are good. Help me to see the ways you rescue me when I call to you for help.*

## EASTER

**Scripture: Psalm 103**

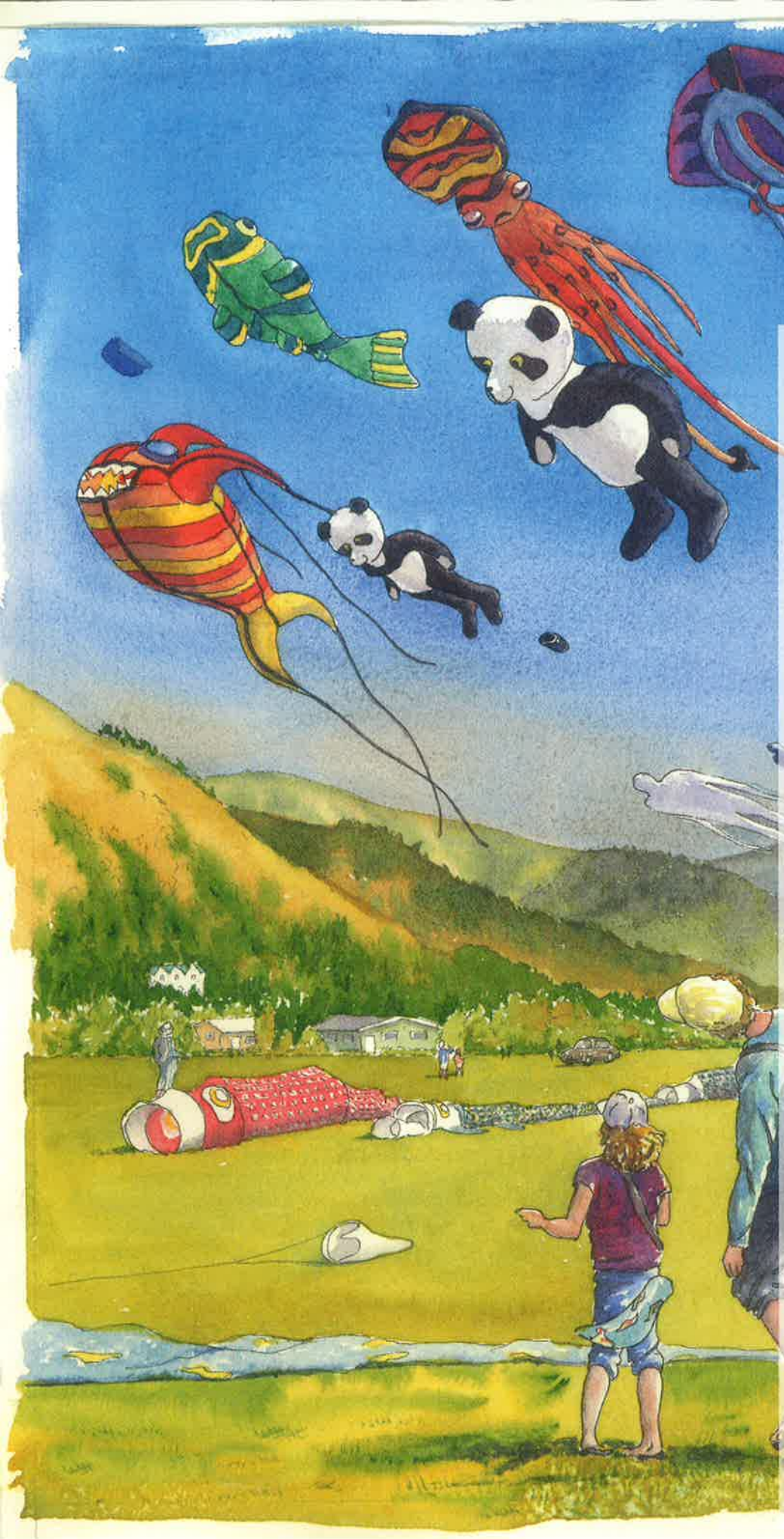
*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all the LORD's benefits.*

Psalm 103 focuses on God as the great redeemer, the one who forgives all our sin, redeems our lives from the pit, and crowns us with steadfast love and mercy. As you read and pray the psalm, look for all the ways God redeems and cares for us.

**Questions for reflection**

1. Spend some time reflecting on your Lenten journey this year. In what new ways have you drawn near to God?
2. What prayer practices would you like to carry forward into the weeks after Easter?

*Christ is risen! We praise you, Lord God, for your grace, power, and might! Help us to join with creation in praising you today. Help us to see the best ways to draw near to you. Help us to give our lives to you in service and mission, for your love shapes us, sustains us, and calls us to respond.*



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