**September 1**

**READ:** 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 and Job 31-33

**MARK:** Men, mark this: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze as a virgin [young woman]?” (Job 31:1).

**LEARN:** 1 Chr. 29 presents us with a wonderful example of a freewill offering. Now, first things first: God does not need anyone’s money. “All that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours… Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all” (1 Chr. 29:11, 12). *It’s all God’s*. All of it. “Your” money is not your own; God has provided you with it so that you are equipped to love and serve God and your neighbor with it. “Your” time is not your own; you cannot make one hair on your head grey, nor can you extend your life by a single day from what God determines. God has provided you with every minute of your life so that you are equipped to love and serve God and your neighbor with them. Your purpose in life is to love and serve the Lord your God and the people whom God has put in your life. This is why you’re here.

A “tithe” literally means a “tenth.” Within the Church, we all give a tithe of all God provides us with to rightly support his Church and mission. This is what our “offering plate” is really primarily for—our regular contribution. Again, he does not *need* this from us; he can raise up children for Abraham from the very stones, and neither the gates of hell nor a lack of money will destroy his Church. However, God has designed us and his Church such that it is good, right, and proper for us to give a tithe of our income to the Church. Not only do you support the Lord’s mission, but it’s also good for you to intentionally give some things away so that you don’t make idols of them. Biblically, this is rooted in Genesis 14:19-20 and supported in places like Numbers 18:21, 26; Deuteronomy 12:5-6 and Matthew 23:23, along with the idea of returning to God the “firstfruits” of what he provides for us in e.g. 2 Chronicles 31:4-5. We can even consider “the widow’s mite” (e.g. Mark 12:41-44) in this light.

An “offering”—especially a “freewill offering”—is something different. Typically, an offering is a special gathering of riches for a particular use, e.g. when building the Tabernacle (Exodus 25) or the Temple (here in 2 Chr. 29), or today perhaps things like a diaper derby, building a clean water well in a 3rd world country, or supporting a missionary. Our benevolence offering on 5th Sundays is this sort of thing, though the offering plate can work just as well for this. At these times, God has a special project that he wants his people to accomplish, and he stirs up their hearts so that they freely and bountifully support this project. In 1 Chr. 29, the following language is used for this: “in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God” (v. 3) and “Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord” (v. 9).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** From the demon’s guide to tempting men that is C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*: “[Unexpected visitors or a friend’s talkative wife] anger him because he regards his time as his own and feels that it is being stolen. You must therefore zealously guard in his mind the curious assumption ‘My time is my own’. Let him have the feeling that he starts each day as the lawful possessor of twenty-four hours. Let him feel as a grievous tax that portion of this property which he has to make over to his employers, and as a generous donation that further portion which he allows to religious duties. But what he must never be permitted to doubt is that the total from which these deductions have been made was, in some mysterious sense, his own personal birthright.”

**PRAY:** *When receiving a meal with thanksgiving:* The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts which we receive from your bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**September 2**

**READ:** Psalm 86 and Job 34-36

**MARK:** “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11).

**LEARN:** Elihu is the only one of Job’s friends that actually gets it right (he is not condemned in Job 42:7-9). His commentary on Job’s despair is essentially this: Job, I’ve watch all this happen to you—terrible things which God allowed. However, you have handled it wrongly. You roll around in the filth of scoffing and you listen to your stupid, faithless friends. Who are you to condemn the Lord God Almighty with injustice? You are only human. God’s ways are higher than yours. He created you and your feeble little mind; you shouldn’t expect to understand him. God has not forgotten you. He has not ceased to care for you. But Job, you don’t get to ask why God lets evil things happen.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If God is all-powerful, good, and he cares for us, then why does he let tragedy strike us and take away our health, our possessions, and even our lives? We don’t get to ask those questions; the creature cannot demand to know the fullness of the Creator’s workings. “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Romans 9:20). We don’t always get answers to our questions, especially when they involve the causes of evil and suffering—things which are beyond our comprehension. However, we look to the cross, where we see clearly just how God feels about us. Through his Son’s death and resurrection, he has healed all our wounds. With Saint Paul, we must conclude, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33).

**PRAY:** “Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.” Amen. (Ps. 86:16-17)

**September 3**

**READ:** Psalm 87 and Job 37-39

**MARK:** The Lord answers the arrogant: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action [gird up your loins] like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me” (Job. 38:2-3).

**LEARN:** Of the many things we can learn from God’s wisdom in Job 38-39, one noteworthy aspect is God’s great care for his creation. He designed things to be just so. He made everything on the earth and in the stars to work together well and for specific purposes. He delights in what he has made, from the stars (which he painted and set in order), to the ravens (for whom he provides prey), to the horses (noble creatures whom he has designed, in part, for battle).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Reflect on a few verses of Job 38-39, marveling at God’s great design.

**PRAY:** “We turn a corner and stagger at the unexpected wind that sweeps our street. We look fearfully into the shadowy corners and dark doorways and complain of the inadequate lighting of our streets. We step fretfully across puddles. We fuss and fret our way through mud—as if we were alone, as if You were gone, an absentee God careless of His own. O Lord, give us light to see You steadily and see You whole in all Your world; give us wisdom to fear and to obey and trust the God unseen whom we can see, O God made visible by Your own illumining, to trust You round all corners, down all streets, in all shadows, across all puddles, through all mud, in Your world, ruled by Your almighty and all-giving hand, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*).

**September 4**

**READ:** Psalm 88 and Job 40-42

**MARK:** Job’s words of repentance: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:2-3).

**LEARN:** Two particularly strange creatures are mentioned in Job 40-41. The first is Behemoth (same word use commonly for “animal” or “beast”). This term likely references a hippopotamus, a dinosaur, or some other terrifying beast. The point in 40:15-24 is that God reiterates just how fantastic of creatures he has made; who is Job to question him? The second creature is Leviathan, which possibly refers to a crocodile, whale, dinosaur, or even a dragon (see 40:18-21). Again, God is demonstrating his power and creativity—how insignificant is Job by comparison! Even though Job has been suffering terribly, he doesn’t get to know why. God is in control of things much bigger and smaller than Job; Job just needs to trust him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Irony of ironies: Job’s friends argued that God does not readily show mercy and that he was angry with Job. In reality, God became angry at the friends, but he showed them mercy through Job. Job—the one robbed of family and property and left without any worldly goods is commissioned to pray for his friends and to offer sacrifices to the God whom he has found to be both terrifying and merciful.

**PRAY:** “O God of immeasurable goodness, You have given Your Son to be for us the power of God and the wisdom of God. For this we humbly thank You. Oh, give us fear to bow before Him in His foolish majesty and learn a wisdom that will stand the shocks of the world and come through the crash and howling end of the world. Amen.” (Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*).

**September 5**

**READ:** Psalm 89 and Proverbs 1-3

**MARK:** “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prv. 1:7).

**LEARN:** “The fear of God is reverence for God and spiritual worship of Him, for in this meaning Scripture everywhere uses the expression ‘the fear of God.’ For the truest worship of God does not consist in works, no matter how great and holy they may be, but in true and proper respect” (Luther). Fear thus also involves both humility and faith: recognizing one’s need to be taught (as in Proverbs) or saved (as with Christ), and trusting that God does, in fact, teach and save us through the Word who became flesh.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Knowledge is not something to be mastered, but perpetually pursued. “The fear of the Lord is *the beginning* of knowledge [or wisdom].” It is the foundation, and one will face the complexities of life better if built on this firm foundation. Likewise, other virtues serve to equip us for life: justice, discipline, honesty, chastity. These are not goals to be completed per se (likewise, knowledge), but characteristics to be honed. In Proverbs, knowledge/wisdom will equip you to take on the difficult situations of life; the point is the life lived well, not simply the knowledge that gets you there.

**PRAY:** O Lord, to be wise is to know and fear you. Teach us, we pray, the ways of the world and the ways of your kingdom, that we might follow in the path of your Son. Amen.

**September 6**

**READ:** Psalm 90 and Proverbs 4-7

**MARK:** “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:10, 12).

**LEARN:** Much of proverbs talks about money, and with good reason. It’s something we’re all acquainted with, and our hearts so easily chase after it. We treasure it, we hoard it, and we use it as power over others. The love of money is certainly the root of all kinds of evil, so there’s good reason that Jesus talked about money quite a bit, too.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Men and men-to-be, read well Prv. 7. Temptations of the flesh are sure to come, but you must flee them. See where temptation leads: “All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.” Flee, men. Flee.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you have showered us with good gifts, but we only want what we cannot have. Teach us that the grass is never greener; that our passions, while puffed up, are empty; that temptation is but an illusion. Teach us true wisdom, O Lord, that we may be truly satisfied in you. Amen.

**September 7**

**READ:** Psalm 91 and Proverbs 8-10

**MARK:** “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you *in all your ways* [the part missing from Satan’s tempting Jesus in Matthew 4]” (Ps. 91:11).

**LEARN:** Compare and contrast the houses of Wisdom and of Folly in Prv. 9. Both call out, hoping to bring people in. Both houses are filled with the gifts of creation. However, Wisdom is established with order and beauty—things as they ought to be. She takes men in, though she requires that men leave behind their former ways. She gives them the gifts of life and leads them to further life. Folly has the gifts of creation, but they are without God’s proper order—stolen water and bread. She takes men as they are with no requirements placed upon them, and then they are trapped. She gives them the gifts of life, but they are poisoned, and she drags them down to death. See here the ways of the kingdom of God and the ways of the world!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Try to read Ps. 91 as Jesus would have on the day of his resurrection. This will be your experience, as well, when he raises you.

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, you have enlightened me with your gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. Keep me on the narrow path, lest I stray into Folly’s snares. Reprove and rebuke me, that by your discipline I may learn to love true life. Amen.

**September 8**

**READ:** Psalm 92 and Proverbs 11-13

**MARK:** “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion” (Prv. 11:22). “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Prv. 13:24).

**LEARN:** “Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm, but he who hates striking hands in pledge is secure” (Prv. 11:15). As Dave Ramsey notes regarding this passage, co-signing on someone else’s loan is typically unwise. If a bank would not otherwise loan them the money, it’s because they’re unlikely to pay it back. The likelihood of *them* paying it back does not change when you sign; the bank just ensures that *you* will pay it back instead if they don’t.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Many people understand the OT Sabbath to be all about what you cannot do. Ps. 92, which was written for the Sabbath, portrays quite the opposite. What should we do on the Sabbath? Praise God and celebrate his great works.

**PRAY:** Lord, plant us firmly in faith and righteousness that we may grow in you and bear much fruit for your kingdom. Amen.

**September 9**

**READ:** Psalm 93 and Proverbs 14-16

**MARK:** “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Prv. 16:32).

**LEARN:** Macho, macho man! How can I be a macho man? Contrary to popular opinion, a manly exterior often conceals inner weakness and insecurity. More than mighty is the man with self-control, wisdom, and a tongue that speaks softly (gently). See Prv. 15:1; 16:32.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Hurricane Harvey has just struck Texas. Heavy wind and floods have destroyed many homes and businesses. People have died. It will take years to recover. And yet, even this torrent of destruction pales in comparison to the might of the Lord: “Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty!” (Ps. 93:4). The Lord is stronger than storms, as Jesus himself proved. Though destruction surround us, we are still in the Lord’s hands—a very good place to be, indeed!

**PRAY:** Lord God, you control the wind and the rain, and you inspire compassion. Have mercy on those whose homes have been destroyed, and lead your people to pour out compassion beyond measure that everyone might see the good works you do through us and praise you. Amen.

**September 10**

**READ:** Psalm 94 and Proverbs 17-19

**MARK:** “O Lord, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! … They kill the widow and sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, ‘The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive’” (Ps. 94:1, 6-7).

**LEARN:** “Like the prophets, Proverbs has a persistent concern for righteousness and justice, not only in personal life, but also in the public arena of the law court (Prv. 18:5, 17). The modern relegation of religion to the private and personal would have been incomprehensible and abhorrent to ancient Israel’s prophets and sages. Public justice and righteousness are integral expressions of the ‘fear of the Lord’ (1:3b, 7; Jeremiah 22:13-17). For America, with its millions of Christians, this means that claims of biblical piety and godliness are empty unless they bear fruit in collective Christian action for equity between rich and poor, and among races and ethnic groups in our criminal justice system” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Family structure lies at the heart of society—certainly among the Hebrews and even still to a certain extent today. However, Prv. 17:2 reveals a relationship even more foundational than family: wisdom, godliness, and divine grace—in short, righteousness, i.e. being the right sort of human being—can override even the ties of family. Key examples of this are two women in the OT who were “outsiders” in a severe sense: they belonged to foreign nations and had worshipped foreign gods. However, by God’s grace, these two women were brought into, not only God’s covenant with his people, but actually into the Davidic line of heritage. Who were these women? Rahab and Ruth (Joshua 2; 6:17-25; Ruth 4:13-22). So, too, Jesus says that the brothers of faith are of more significance than the brothers of blood (Mark 3:31-34). And so he has brought us into the family of faith.

**PRAY:** Lord God, heavenly Father, how can you bear with the wicked with such patience? Then again, how can you bear with us? Teach us righteousness and humility, that we might see as you see and not think ourselves more highly than we ought. Hear us for the sake of your Son. Amen.

**September 11**

**READ:** Psalm 95 and Proverbs 20-22

**MARK:** “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prv. 22:6).

**LEARN:** In Prv. 21:30-31, the Lord warns people not to rely on power and technology. Throughout Scripture, and even seen in glimpses of daily life, the Lord demonstrates that *he* gives his people the victory. Often he demonstrates this by having a boy fight a giant bred for fighting (1 Sam. 17), having Gideon greatly reduce the number of troops he’ll take into battle (Judges 7), making the walls of Jericho fall without any military actions (Joshua 6), and the like.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** There’s a movie that I wouldn’t recommend watching entitled “Full Metal Jacket.” All I had heard about this movie before I watched it was from the first 10 minutes, which is filled with lighthearted humor. However, the movie takes a sudden and extremely dark turn, and it stays dark for the rest of the movie. This moment hit me like a ton of bricks, because I was expecting the whole thing to be a comedy. That’s what I was expecting out of Psalm 95: Oh, it’s the Venite from the service of Morning Prayer (LSB 236). I know this one. It’s a nice praise psalm. And then BAM! In comes verse 8’s stern warning, and it doesn’t get any more lighthearted, ending with the Lord swearing, “They shall not enter my rest.” The psalm presents itself in two stages: honor the Lord, for this is good; then, honor the Lord, or else.

**PRAY:** O Lord, our rock and our fortress, defend us with your mighty hand. Keep us this day from sin and from the snares of the devil, for without your salvation all is lost. Hear us for the sake of your Son, the victor. Amen.

**September 12**

**READ:** Psalm 96 and Proverbs 23-25

**MARK:** “Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns!’” (Ps. 96:10).

**LEARN:** Regarding Ps. 96:2-3, *The Lutheran Study Bible* notes, “tell … Declare. Psalmist first directs our singing to God, then has us speak to others. Evangelism is proclaiming to others this message of grace: God shows His glory through His wonderful deeds of salvation on behalf of all people.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Why does Solomon bother to teach us dining etiquette (Prv. 23:1-3)? Because this is a daily example of God’s ordering of things. Dining together connects us to the physical world that sustains us, connects people to one another, and gives expression to our various relationships. Eating in front of the TV takes away from every aspect of this.

**PRAY:** Lord, you feed us with food everlasting. Help us to know your gracious provision, that we look to you for all things. Amen.

**September 13**

**READ:** Psalm 97 and Proverbs 26-28

**MARK:** “O you who love the Lord, hate evil!” (Ps. 97:10).

**LEARN:** Regarding Ps. 97, *The Lutheran Study Bible* notes, “When people stand before God to be judged, only two responses are possible: terrified humiliation or joyful thanksgiving. Which will it be for us? The cross is where God’s justice is served and His anger appeased on our behalf. The empty tomb is the assurance that we are preserved for life everlasting. We rejoice because His judgment is that we are His saints, the upright in heart, through faith.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Proverbs 26:1 is an ancient version of the ‘Peter Principle,’ in which persons are promoted to their level of incompetence. When persons who are not gifted, trained, or ‘fit’ for a particular position of power, responsibility, and authority are nonetheless given that position, damage results (see 26:6, 8, 10). This is true of musicians [or pastors who would chant] without a sense of pitch, of basketball players without depth perception, and of preachers without faith or morals. The principle of giving honor only to those to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7) is especially crucial in the sphere of government (Prv. 29:1, 12; Ecclesiastes 4:14; 10:5-7). The allocation of honor (including wealth) is a key indicator of a society’s true values. When a society showers wealth and adulation on sports figures and entertainment celebrities without morals and underpays those who educate their children, something is desperately wrong with that society’s value system. Proverbs 26:1 implies that Christians must respect the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ and in society at large. But it also condemns us for giving glory to fools” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**PRAY:** By what right may we approach your throne, O God? How can we stand before you? Because your Son stood before Pilate. Because he was condemned before us, that we would not be condemned before you. Your mercy astounds us, O God, for you have declared us innocent in your Son. Amen.

**September 14**

**READ:** Psalm 98 and Proverbs 29-31

**MARK:** “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is in vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prv. 31:30).

**LEARN:** Prv. 8:22 alludes to the Son of God: distinct from the Lord and yet begotten from all eternity. So does Prv. 30:4. The answer to this verse’s rhetorical questions must be the Lord. Who, then, is his son that is mentioned? Food for thought on the Trinity in the OT.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** It may seem surprising to go from talking about a woman going well about her daily activities (Prv. 31:10-29) to saying that she “fears the Lord” (31:30). Why make this jump? Well, it’s actually not a jump at all. We ought not separate daily life and secular activities from our Christian identity and worship. It is we who are in Christ—all of us, taken as whole people—who serve in our vocations for the benefit of our neighbor.

**PRAY:** Faithful Lord, you provide for us with skills and supplies that we might serve our neighbor. Grant us wisdom and virtue as we use your gifts to love the people in our lives. Amen.

**September 15**

**READ:** Psalm 99 and Ecclesiastes 1-3

**MARK:** “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (Ec. 1:2-3). “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ec. 1:9). “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die…” (Ec. 3:1-2).

**LEARN:** Solomon, son of David, wrote Ecclesiastes right around the end of his reign, which had begun so well and ended so poorly. He began in wisdom, following the path of his father David. But his riches—namely, his marriage alliances—ended up being too tempting for him, and he fell away from the Lord to chasing foreign gods. As he reflects on the downward spiral that is his life, he writes, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Singer/songwriter Derek Webb, reflecting on the groaning of creation and the pending return of Christ (see Romans 8), considers Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, “Yes there's a time for peace, there is a time for war. There's a time to forgive and a time to settle the score. A time for babies to lose their lives, a time for hunger and genocide. And this, too, shall be made right.”

**PRAY:** Lord, because of our sin-driven tendency to destruction, everything our hands touch eventually falls apart. Send your Son to do away with this vanity and entropy, that everyone and everything he blesses may be renewed in perfect harmony. Amen.

**September 16**

**READ:** Psalm 100 and Ecclesiastes 4-6

**MARK:** “And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive” (Ec. 4:2). “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand” (Ec. 5:15). “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot” (Ec. 5:18).

**LEARN:** I, Pastor Bauer, read nearly the entirety of Ecclesiastes (except for its ending verses) as a lament of a closed universe—a world in which there is effectively no gracious God. Solomon may be wise, but he has forfeited godly wisdom for worldly wisdom. In this mindset, God may exist, but he does not really desire good for mankind; he indiscriminately gives riches or poverty, wisdom or folly. This imagined world is in desperate need of a Savior—one “greater than Solomon” (Matt. 12:42) who has now come in Jesus Christ, who demonstrates with his life and with his death just how vain this fallen world is… before the resurrection.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ec. 5:18 reflects the fatalist attitude, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (see 1 Corinthians 15:32). Surely Solomon’s eyes are closed to God’s grace as he writes this! He did write this at the end of his reign, after falling into the snares of false gods.

**PRAY:** Gracious God, if left to ourselves, we despair for lack of meaning and substance in our lives. If you had not revealed yourself to us and if you did not place your name upon us in baptism, we would be left to wander the earth, seeking but never finding. Thank you for the grace you have shown us in your Son, and give us faith to find our identity and meaning in him. Amen.

**September 17**

**READ:** Psalm 101 and Ecclesiastes 7-9

**MARK:** “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Ec. 7:20).

**LEARN:** Solomon laments the plight of the righteous: why do the wicked get just as good (or bad) of treatment as the righteous? The Psalmist also laments often: God, why do you allow the wicked to prosper while we your people suffer? The key difference here is that the Psalmist turns his lament into a prayer to God—the one who can properly address the situation. Solomon, however, laments to no one in particular; he does not see God as being someone who will or should intervene in the world to bring about divine justice and to bless the righteous. It seems to me that Solomon has forgotten the one true God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Throughout Ecclesiastes, for the most part, nothing that anyone does has any lasting effect on the next generation—whether for good or for evil. Everything is done in vanity and is, in the end, meaningless. Yet in Ec. 9:13-16, Solomon sees value—not in righteousness as in Ps. 101(!)—but in wisdom. People may not remember the wise, but the benefits of their deeds will carry on to coming generations. For Solomon, if anything breaks the spell of vanity, it is wisdom.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, by your Word and Spirit be present in our minds and in our lives that we might never forget that you are, in fact, our God and that you have saved us, are saving us, and will save us. Amen.

**September 18**

**READ:** Psalm 102 and Ecclesiastes 10-12

**MARK:** “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ec. 12:13-14).

**LEARN:** The study notes in *TLSB* do a great job explaining the imagery used in Ec. 12:2-7: “12:2–7 The Preacher gives us powerful and vivid images of old age and approaching death to rouse us from complacency or resignation due to troubles. We are to address the matter early in life, while we are able, so that failure does not sneak up on us. 12:2 *sun … darkened*. Describing death. 12:3 *grinders cease*. Poetic language. Teeth of an older person are compared with stones for grinding grain. those who look. Figuratively, the eyes, which in older age function less effectively. 12:4 *doors on the street*. Describing the mouth and ability to speak or the ears and ability to hear. at the sound of a bird. Though the hearing of enjoyable sounds is reduced in the elderly, their sleep is still easily disturbed, such as early in the morning when the songs of birds begin. 12:5 *almond tree*. One of the first to blossom and lose its petals in the spring. *grasshopper drags*. Formerly nimble gait is replaced with overall difficulty in movement. *desire fails*. Loss of appetite and impending death make it difficult to be enthusiastic about enjoying any earthly pleasure. 12:6–7 Repeats theme of vv 1–2. *cord … bowl … pitcher … wheel*. Placement of these four images suggests they represent life in some way. Their destruction implies the end of life. We are to remember our Creator before all this happens. *silver cord … golden bowl*. Precious objects indicate how valuable life is. *pitcher … wheel*. Practical objects are needed daily. A clay pitcher was attached by a rope, which wrapped around a wheel, making it easier to draw life-giving water. 12:7 *dust*. The body (Gn 3:19; Ps 104:29). *and the spirit returns*. Or “but the spirit returns.” The immaterial aspect of a person is separated from the body by death. Solomon’s expression anticipates everlasting life with God.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Vanity has been thoroughly examined, and what is left? What is “the end of the matter”? If you are not within a right relationship with your Creator, all is vanity. However, in our relationship with God, life does, in fact, have great meaning. Through our Redeemer, we have been saved from this vanity; death is not, in fact, the end of life. Through our Sanctifier, we are enlightened, not only with truth, but with the wisdom that Solomon so highly values. True value (the opposite of vanity) must come from outside this fallen and decaying world; it must come from God himself. And in Jesus Christ it has.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you have shown the purpose of man in your Son Jesus Christ, who is the image of God and the Son of David. Through his life you have restored humanity to its fullness and righteousness. Through his death you have joined our dead selves to him. Through his life you have inaugurated the new creation in which vanity will be but a faint memory. By your Holy Spirit, create within us true faith in your provision and in Christ’s resurrection that we not despair over what our eyes see, but with eyes of faith we look forward in hope to the way things truly are and truly will be. Amen.

**September 19**

**READ:** Psalm 103 and Song of Solomon 1-4

**MARK:** “Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases” (SoS 2:7).

**LEARN:** “The Song is not mere erotic literature, as many critics argue. It wrestles with the tension between the beauty and sensuality of the human body and the wisdom of reserving the body for marriage and genuine love. Wisdom counsels the listener “[do] not stir up or awaken love until it pleases” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The individual and the family have a responsibility to reserve sex for the wedding night (8:8–10). The Song connects the passion of love to the power of the Lord, comparing love to “the very flame of the LORD” (8:6). Also, wisdom admonishes that love is too valuable to be bought (8:7). For these reasons, the Song fits naturally with OT Wisdom Literature (see pp 775–78). Rightly understood, the Song is especially appropriate for teaching about the goodness of marriage and love in distinction from promiscuity (cf this theme in Pr 7)” (*TLSB*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Song of Solomon is often read by Christians as depicting the love of Christ and his Church.

**PRAY:** (O good Creator, You made us man and woman; You blessed us in our being for each other; You planted Your creative potency in us and bound us to each other with seeking coquetry and the gallantry of proud pursuit, with living tendrils of delight, with new life, radiant, of our bodies sprung. Forgive us, Lord. We have forgotten Eden and have run from You down darkling paths of selfishness. We have defiled Your gift and held cheap Your blessing. We have made a mania of Your gift of conjugal sanity. Bless us again, we pray, through Jesus Christ, who smiled on us at Cana once. Amen.” (Martin Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*)

**September 20**

**READ:** Psalm 104 and Song of Solomon 5-8

**MARK:** “You cause… that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart” (Ps. 104:14-15).

**LEARN:** Contrary to some outspoken moralistic teetotalers, Ps. 104:15 seems to suggest that, not only does the Lord provide wine for men (fermentation is not a corruption of grapes), but he actually does so, in part, because of alcohol’s effects: “to gladden the heart of man.” Now, as with all of God’s gifts, we are to use it in moderation so it does not become an idol or a stumbling block for us (cf. Solomon’s God-given gifts of wisdom and riches leading to his downfall and Ecclesiastes’ “vanity”).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**

**PRAY:** “O Lord, You speak well of us in Jesus! Teach us to speak well of all whom You have covered in His righteousness, especially those nearest to us. Help husbands and wives to love and honor each other, and as Christians, help us to speak well of our Bridegroom, Jesus, so that all the world would want to seek Him. Amen” (*TLSB* on SoS 5:10—6:1).

**September 21**

**READ:** Psalm 105 and Jeremiah 1-3

**MARK:** “See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). “He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations” (Ps. 105:8).

**LEARN:** Jeremiah prophesied before and after Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Jerusalem fell to Babylon’s armies. Jeremiah warned God’s people of the punishment that God was bringing because of their sin. He called them to repent, threatening God’s destruction. But even so, God also commanded him to proclaim God’s grace. Not only was Jeremiah “to pluck up and to break down,” but also “to build and to plant” (1:10).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Psalm 105, on the basis of God’s remembering and keeping his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, the psalmist calls God’s people to trust him now to continue to keep his promises to them. It’s as if he’s saying, “You have seen God’s faithfulness, and it will endure forever.”

**PRAY:** O God, you have made a great many promises to us: wonderful promises of eternal life in your renewed creation. Fulfill your promises, O Lord, for this world of death relentlessly encroaches upon us. Here us for the sake of your risen Son. Amen.

**September 22**

**READ:** Psalm 106 and Jeremiah 4-6

**MARK:** “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the Lord!

**LEARN:** In Ps. 106:6ff, the psalmist portrays Israel’s group guilt. As he goes on to describe the people’s sin, he’s talking about their fathers’ sin (not that of all/most of the people living at the time). How can he say that our fathers’ sin is our own? Why should we bear the guilt for what we ourselves have not actually done? In the West today, and especially in America, we have a tremendously difficult time understanding this because we see ourselves as individuals first—not first and foremost members of our family, Christians, American citizens, residents of Brookings, etc. Practically speaking, our context begins with our birth and ends with our death, and the fact that *my* parents raised *me* is not significant for who I am as a person today. But this way of thinking minimizes sin and its effects. Think of it this way: if a man struggles with alcoholism, his children are very likely to struggle with it to. Why? It’s not their sin—why should it affect them? But you see, sin is bigger than that. Alcoholism has both genetic and behavioral effects, not to mention the overwhelming degree to which it can mess people up. Our people’s sin affects us, and to some degree we share the guilt for things that we never actually did ourselves.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 106:4-5, however, speaks of shared grace. Here, salvation is not portrayed as my personal relationship with God/Jesus, but as my belonging to a group: the people of God. “Help me when you save them” is much like saying, “Let me be among your people. Let the promises you give them also come to because I belong with them.”

**PRAY:** Almighty God, as I reflect on my sin, my heart mimics your prophet’s: “My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent… Crash follows hard on crash” (Jer. 4:19-21). Rescue me from my evil self, dear Lord. Spare your servant, that I might not forfeit your promises but cling to them. Let me believe. Let me live. Amen.

**September 23**

**READ:** Psalm 107 and Jeremiah 7-9

**MARK:** “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Ps. 107:2).

**LEARN:** Psalm 107 reflects a pattern that repeats throughout the book of Judges: God blesses his people, then they fall into sin, so God makes things hard for them, so they repent and cry to the Lord, and so he saves them and blesses them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Crying “This is the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7:4) is insufficient to save God’s people, for they say it with a double tongue. “Though they say, ‘As the Lord lives,’ yet they swear falsely” (5:2). We are in the Church of the Lord—we are part of God’s redeemed people—but this does not give us license to pursue wickedness.

**PRAY:** Lord God, as we lead ourselves into dark and treacherous paths, please forgive us seventy times seven times, as you have said—and many more! Lead us back to the path of righteous which leads to eternal life. Amen.

**September 24**

**READ:** Psalm 108 and Jeremiah 10-12

**MARK:** “A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil; neither is it in them to do good” (Jer. 10:3-5).

**LEARN:** Several times, Jeremiah describes the folly of pursuing false gods made of wood and stone. When the real God makes himself known, he shows these idols to be worthless and powerless, much like he did with Dagon (1 Samuel 5). God makes these prophecies, though, not because of the other nations’ idolatry, but because of his own people’s.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord extends a plea for repentance, but those who refuse to hear the word of the Lord will soon perish (Jer. 11:21-23).

**PRAY:** Lord, so often we replace the idols of old of wood and stone with our own of paper, screens, and desire. Please continue to reveal to us that these idols are worthless creations of our own hands, not the true treasure of our heart. Renew us by your Spirit so that our trust is properly oriented: in you for all things. Amen.

**September 25**

**READ:** Psalm 109 and Jeremiah 13-15

**MARK:** “May another take his office” (Ps. 109:8; cited Acts 1:20).

**LEARN:** Jer. 14:13-14 describes false prophets—people who say, “Thus says the Lord: ‘I will bless you’” when, in fact, the Lord will actually bring about their destruction, as he is actually prophesying through the prophet Jeremiah. It can be tempting for Christians to water down the full truth of God’s Law—that Jesus is coming back soon to judge everyone to either eternal life or eternal punishment. However, we ought not to lie in order to butter people up or avoid uncomfortable situations. Look how the Lord takes revenge on the false prophets and those who believe them!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Imprecatory (cursing) psalms like Ps. 109 can be difficult for Christians to read, let alone pray. How can we pray curses upon our enemies, when Jesus says to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? It appears that David knew his enemies to be truly wicked and to have completely rejected the Lord. To pray for your salvation from evil is to pray for judgment against evil.

**PRAY:** Deliver us, O Lord, from those who hate you. Give us ears to hear, that we may discern those who speak for you from those who spread lies. Rescue us from this evil age that we might rejoice in the life and truth of your kingdom forevermore. Amen.

**September 26**

**READ:** Psalm 110 and Jeremiah 16-18

**MARK:** “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps. 110:1). “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4).

**LEARN:** Psalm 110 is quoted 17 times in the New Testament. Jesus quotes v. 1 to demonstrate that David’s Son is also David’s Lord—a mystery which perplexed the Jewish leaders so much they didn’t try to test Jesus anymore. The apostles quote v. 4 to show that, although Jesus was a Judahite, not a Levite, he could still be a priest. God instituted the priesthood of Melchizedek long before Levi was even born. Thus we come to see more clearly who Jesus is: David’s promised Son, who is also David’s Lord, who sits at the right hand of the Father, who intercedes for his people as a priest.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord repeatedly uses means which perplex and surprise his people in order to save them. It’s almost as if he wants us to rely him, not our own understanding and power, for all things (go figure).

**PRAY:** Almighty God, make known in every place the perfect offering of your Son, the eternal high priest of the new Jerusalem, and so consecrate all nations to be your holy people, that the kingdom of Christ, your anointed one, may come in its fullness; and to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honor and praise now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**September 27**

**READ:** Psalm 111 and Jeremiah 19-22

**MARK:** “Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day on which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!” (Jer. 20:14).

**LEARN:** In the early Church, Ps. 111 would be chanted at Sunday evening’s vespers service. Christians would reflect on the food which the Lord provided that very morning, at which time the Lord remembered his covenant (“Take, eat… Do this in my remembrance”) and redeemed his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** *TLSB* on Jer. 20: “Jeremiah complains bitterly about the opposition he has experienced in response to the dire warnings he preached to the people. His predictions of destruction stand unfulfilled, giving his enemies grounds to beat him, imprison him, and plot against his life. Jeremiah calls on the Lord for help and praises His name, but he cannot help expressing the anger and despair he genuinely feels. Like Jeremiah, we are often weak and fearful in times of crisis because we doubt the Lord and trust in ourselves. When we are weakest, God’s strength shines through more clearly (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:10). He is ever our refuge and strength, who hears our confession and forgives all our sins.”

**PRAY:** By Your Holy Spirit, Father, keep us strong in faith and grant us the courage to bear the name of Jesus in this evil world. Amen. -*TLSB*

**September 28**

**READ:** Psalm 112 and Jeremiah 23-25

**MARK:** “For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries” (Ps. 112:6-8).

**LEARN:** Ps. 112 praises the Lord’s gifts to those who follow him and keep his commandments. God blesses the faithful—whether in this life or the next. Ultimately, this psalm (like the rest) is about Christ, the one who deals generously, would not be moved, firmly trusted in the Lord, and looked in triumph on his adversaries after rising from the dead.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply” (Jer. 23:3). Even amidst God’s many, many prophesies of destruction which he spoke through Jeremiah, he consistently remains faithful to his covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: he will not abandon them, but will establish them in the land which he swore to them—even if it is just a remnant that comes back.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, you are the light shining in darkness for the upright. Teach us to love one another as you love us, that we might bring peace and joy to the world and find the happiness of your home, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**September 29**

**READ:** Psalm 113 and Jeremiah 26-28

**MARK:** “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised” (Ps. 113:2-3).

**LEARN:** *TLSB* on Jer. 26:1-15: “God sends Jeremiah to warn the people about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple due to their sin. If they confess their sin, God will forgive them and spare them. For Jeremiah’s faithful proclamation, he is arrested and tried for treason (a capital crime). Hard hearts resist every overture of mercy from God and ignore all His warnings of impending judgment. God’s heart longs to forgive sinners, even though they resist His Word and murder His prophets. Today, know that the Lord has set His heart on you. Call on Him in repentance and faith, through Christ.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ps. 113 celebrates God’s being on high. But what is joyful about his power? By his power he sends hurricanes and floods, topples governments, and punishes evildoers. But that’s not the emphasis here. By his power God uplifts those who are lowly. He “raises the poor from the dust… to make them sit with princes.” The Lord shows his power primarily in blessing his undeserving people.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, surrendering the brightness of your glory, you became mortal so that we might be raised from the dust to share your very being. May the children of God always bless your name from the rising of the sun to its setting, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. *–For All the Saints*

**September 30**

**READ:** 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 and Jeremiah 29-31

**MARK:** “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it’” (Jer. 30:1-3)

**LEARN:** Even in their exile, God does not abandon his people. He will restore them to the Promised Land and ultimately raise up from their descendants the Son of David—a Savior for all his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Meditate upon Jer. 30-31 in light of the previous 29 chapters of doom and gloom. Rejoice in the sweet, sweet Gospel.

**PRAY:** O God, You have given Your people a future and a hope—hope fixed and grounded in the resurrection of Your Son, who lives and reigns, who by His Spirit has given us a vision that can look beyond the gray breakers of our successive days and through the mists that obscure Your sun, out to the quiet shore of our unending home with You. Oh, keep us in that hope, that vision. Let us not lose it amid the clutter of the things that we possess, that threaten ever again to possess us. Teach us the loose hold on Your present gifts lest we lose the greater gifts You hold in store. Teach us to hold to that hope even amid our good and pure concern for this world’s agonies lest we forget that we can do no more than bind up this world’s wounds until Your Son returns and lifts up finally the fallen world; lest we forget that this hope is the most precious thing that we can give to men; lest we forget that giving mammon is no cure for hopelessness, that hopeless men well housed and hopeless still, that men fed on our food are futureless for all our feeding them. And since we are men who go from far left to extreme right, from one ditch to the other, and cannot hold a true course down the road that leads homeward, let us not use our hope to shield us from the poor who cry to us, the poor in whose outstretched hands and upturned faces we can see the hands and face of Jesus Christ, who at the last will come to judge us all. Through Him we pray. Amen. *–Martin Franzmann*