

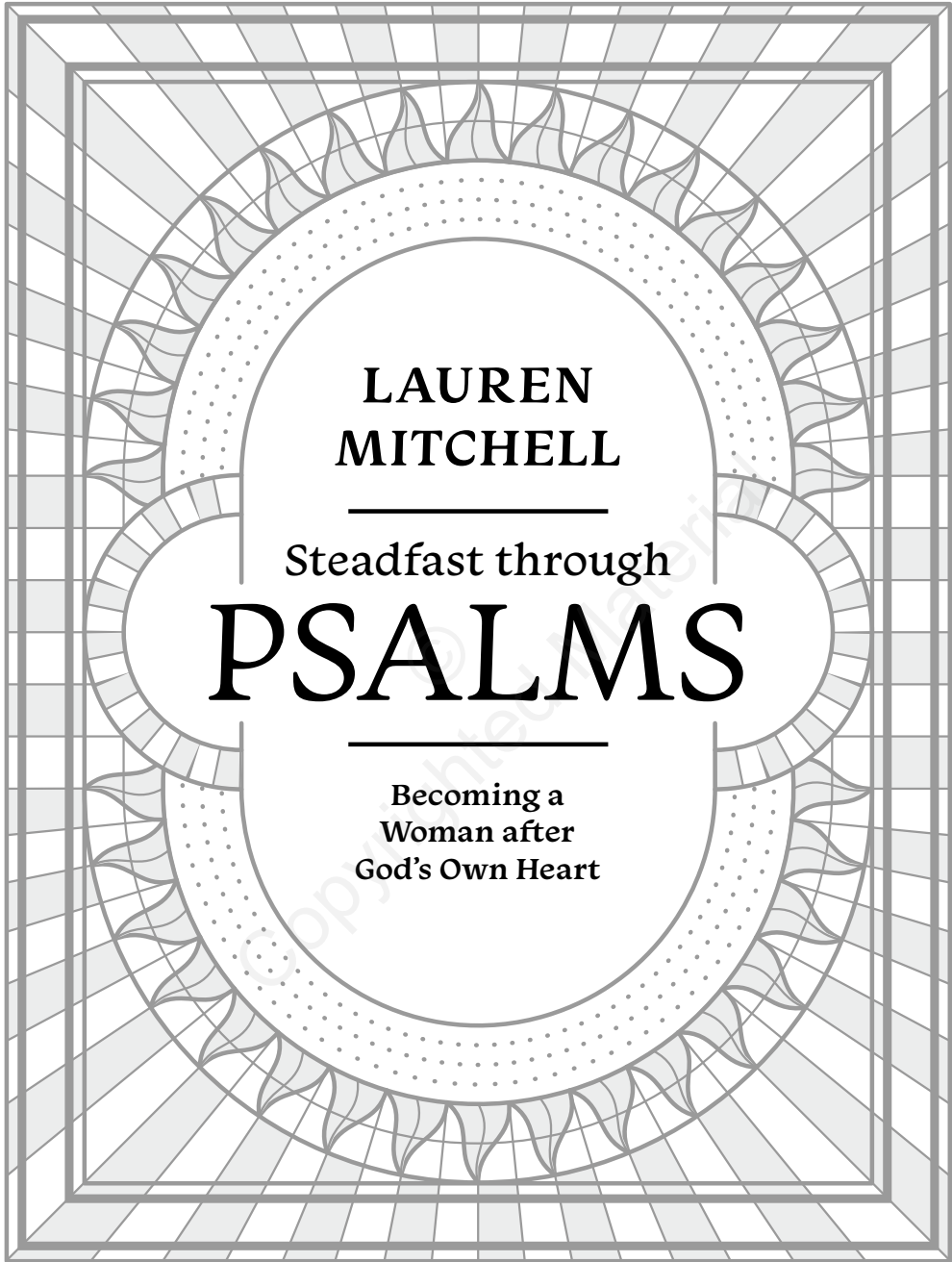
AN INTERACTIVE BOOK WITH SIX SESSIONS OF VIDEO INCLUDED

LAUREN
MITCHELL

Steadfast through

PSALMS

Becoming a
Woman after
God's Own Heart



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**Becoming a
Woman after
God's Own Heart**



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**Books for Courageous Women
from David C Cook**

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Contents

Introduction	15
How to Use This Book	19
Week 1: Focus	
Introduction to Week 1: Focus	23
Morning—Day 1	26
Evening—Day 1	28
Morning—Day 2	30
Evening—Day 2	32
Morning—Day 3	34
Evening—Day 3	37
Morning—Day 4	39
Evening—Day 4	42
Morning—Day 5	45
Evening—Day 5	47
Group Session 1	49
Week 2: Praise	
Introduction to Week 2: Praise	55
Morning—Day 1	58
Evening—Day 1	61
Morning—Day 2	63
Evening—Day 2	65
Morning—Day 3	68

Evening—Day 3	71
Morning—Day 4	73
Evening—Day 4	75
Morning—Day 5	77
Evening—Day 5	79
Group Session 2	81

Week 3: Identity

Introduction to Week 3: Identity	85
Morning—Day 1	87
Evening—Day 1	90
Morning—Day 2	92
Evening—Day 2	95
Morning—Day 3	97
Evening—Day 3	100
Morning—Day 4	102
Evening—Day 4	104
Morning—Day 5	106
Evening—Day 5	108
Group Session 3	110

Week 4: Sin

Introduction to Week 4: Sin	115
Morning—Day 1	118
Evening—Day 1	121
Morning—Day 2	123
Evening—Day 2	126
Morning—Day 3	129
Evening—Day 3	132
Morning—Day 4	134
Evening—Day 4	136

Morning—Day 5	138
Evening—Day 5	141
Group Session 4	144

Week 5: No Fear

Introduction to Week 5: No Fear	149
Morning—Day 1	152
Evening—Day 1	155
Morning—Day 2	157
Evening—Day 2	160
Morning—Day 3	162
Evening—Day 3	164
Morning—Day 4	166
Evening—Day 4	168
Morning—Day 5	170
Evening—Day 5	173
Group Session 5	175

Week 6: Destiny

Introduction to Week 6: Destiny	181
Morning—Day 1	184
Evening—Day 1	186
Morning—Day 2	189
Evening—Day 2	192
Morning—Day 3	194
Evening—Day 3	196
Morning—Day 4	198
Evening—Day 4	200
Morning—Day 5	202
Evening—Day 5	204
Group Session 6	206

Afterword and Challenge	209
Notes	211
About the Author	215
Acknowledgments	217
Bible Credits	219

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Week 1

Focus

*“The strongest of all warriors are
these two—time and patience.”*

Leo Tolstoy

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Access code: Steadfast



Introduction to Week 1

Focus

Time and focus. It takes time to focus. Without deliberate time in focus, life blurs. Instead of a life of purpose, you wind up with something that looks like modern art, the kind that takes no actual shape and is left up to interpretation. Life shouldn't be smears of color with no clear meaning or direction, but without time and focus, that is what life becomes. There is a way to make time purposeful instead of simply allowing it to pass. The key is in what you choose to spend your time focusing on. That is what decides what kind of life you will have. The moon shines no light of its own; it simply focuses on the sun. It reflects the light just by staying in position. We need to learn how to keep our hearts in position. Prayer is the key to those recalibrations.

The Bible leaves clear instructions as to what our focus should be. Colossians 3:2 instructs believers to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

How do we put that verse into action? What does it mean to set our minds on things above? How do we focus on something beyond this temporal earth?

It takes time. We have to deliberately direct our thoughts over and over to the truth. The world in which we live becomes more and more deceptive every day. Our battle is to see reality with heavenly eyes instead of the lies Satan and the world would have us believe. As noted in the opening to this section, Leo Tolstoy wrote in his epic novel *War and Peace*, “The strongest of all warriors are these two—time and patience.”¹ We battle our enemy with focus and time. The key to achieving a focus on truth is repetition; that is what takes patience.

You see, “Truth” is actually a person. The Truth *is* God. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The way to stay

focused on Him is to pray and meditate on His Word. Without this effort daily—yes, I said daily—we lose focus because of the onslaught of distractions and evil that also comes against us daily.

Renewing our mind is not a onetime deal. Taking our thoughts captive, as 2 Corinthians 10:5 advises, means that when our thoughts stray, we repeatedly bring them back. It's like a reset button. Bringing our thoughts back to God allows us to hit CLEAR and start over, seeing things from His perspective. The only way to achieve this is communion with God through time in prayer. Prayer is meant to be our line of ongoing communication with God. It pulls us back when our thoughts try to run away with us.

If we are honest, we all feel pressure to pray more, but that is looking at prayer the wrong way. It isn't something to add to our lists in our attempts to multitask through our days. Prayer actually simplifies and directs our lists.

You may feel as if you don't have the time, but you do. Spending time in prayer refines the time you spend on other things. You will find that you are less distracted and less easily led to worry.


After time with God, things become clearer, and less time is wasted not knowing what to do. The last verse of the book of Job states that Job died "full of days" (42:17). I think this verse illustrates a truth that the number of days is less important than the fullness of them. To have full days, we have to give the emptiness of our time to God first and let Him fill it. God fills with purpose; we usually fill randomly with our desires. We want to accumulate quantity, while God desires quality.

The time David spent with God focused his life on purpose. God directed and filled him. It's not different for us. We were made to run on God. He is our joy. We will find nothing and no one that fills us as He does. Time with God simply helps us run better. David was able to focus on what was important and to believe the truth because the more time he spent with God, the more real God became to him. David left a legacy that has prevailed through the ages because of his focus on a steadfast God.

And that is exactly what we are going to do. This week we start learning to pray by focusing on and praying God's Word. There is no other way to have a steadfast life in a world where change happens every moment. If our lives are to count for eternity, we have to start focusing on

eternity and realize that this life is temporal. We cannot ignore this life, but we need to spiritually multitask by focusing our effort on spiritual things first and watching the trickle-down effect this has on the temporal things. This shift in focus will take work, but everything does. It is work worth the effort. This time and focus will change not only your days on earth, but also your eternity. If that isn't multitasking, I don't know what is.

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Morning

DAY 1

This morning, let's start by reading Psalm 5.

Now, look closely at verse 3: "O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch." I love how The Message phrases it: "Every morning you'll hear me at it again. Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on your altar and watch for fire to descend."

Did you catch the importance of the time to do this? I would go so far as to say that God understands the sacrifice of doing this in the morning, as it's the time that counts double because the day is fresh. It's a new start. God is just waiting for you to say, "Here are the puzzle pieces. I don't know where they fit, but I am going to commit them to You in prayer and be watchful for what You do. That means I expect good to come from it; that when the pieces all fit together, it will be beautiful because I trust You, God, to make it good. You know where all the pieces of my life fit."

Being watchful for God requires an awareness of His presence all day. Do whatever it takes to remind yourself—leave stick-it notes; set reminders on your phone to pause and give God praise. When you think about God, thank Him that He is in charge. When little stresses pop up, immediately say: "Here You go, God, another puzzle piece." The more you practice this, the more it will become a godly habit.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the importance of listening for God both in the morning and evening. He wrote: "We are silent early in the morning because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to bed because the last word also belongs to God."¹

I can't process all the thoughts I take in during just one day. God can help me discern what to keep and what to let go.

I encourage you to practice giving God the first and last words over your day. Listen this morning for the truth He wants you to carry, and then tonight, check back to see what He says about your day.

God, I praise You that through the abundance of Your steadfast love I can enter Your house. Make Your way straight before me as I listen for You. Cover me with favor as with a shield. Let me believe that I have Your favor and let that direct my actions today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now it's your turn. Take Psalm 5 and pray for your day. Be specific. Lay out your day and your thoughts for God to take and create something out of.

**Don't forget we are doing this again tonight. Keep your journal or Bible handy or go ahead and put them on or beside your bed ... or better yet, on top of your pillow!*

Evening

DAY 1

Read Psalm 16 this evening.

Look at verse 8 specifically: “I have set the LORD always before me.” Think about what it means to set the Lord always before you, keeping Him directly in your line of vision at all times. This is an overwhelming goal, but even if you attain it for part of the day, it’s progress. If we can focus that closely on God—who makes known the path of life and brings fullness of joy with His presence—how might that change our days?

Focusing on God and reminding myself that He can guide my steps will help me make decisions and direct my time to the things that are truly important. As I see and feel His presence and direction, it brings me joy because it reminds me of His love and everything that *is* real, just unseen. That bolsters my faith.

It’s also hard to forget or lose your purpose in the mundane daily tasks when you have set God always in front of you.

What are some practical ways you can set the Lord before you tomorrow?

I like to set an alarm on my phone to remind myself to pray and reset in the middle of the day—sometimes at noon and three o’clock. It takes only a few moments to be encouraged and redirected.

You can leave Scripture notes for yourself with dry-erase marker on the bathroom mirror, or place 3-by-5 cards in your car, locker, or even on your refrigerator. Get creative.

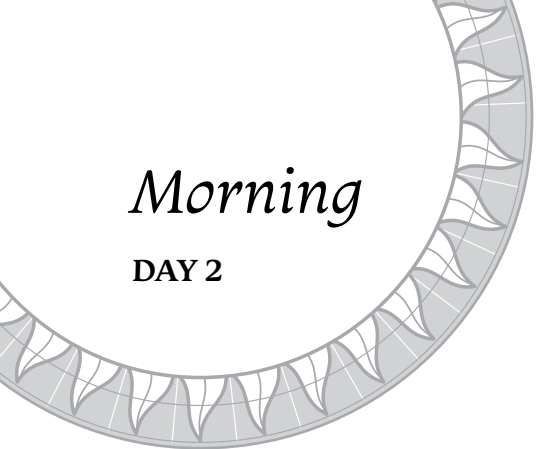
Make a plan for tomorrow, set reminders, leave notes ... maybe even send some to other people.

O God, let my eyes be set on You. Let me see only You before me and let it change how I go about my life, all my hours and all my days. You are my portion. You hold my lot. You hold the answers and the timeline. When my eyes stray to the earth, fix my gaze back on heaven

and remind me it's my home. You make known to me the path of life—there is nowhere else worth looking. In Jesus' name, amen.

Your turn ...

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Morning

DAY 2

David was given a gift of aloneness. I realize aloneness may not immediately seem like a gift, but God gave him aloneness so that He could set David apart. He was a shepherd; you don't get much more removed from people than that. (I don't know many sheep, but they have never struck me as great conversationalists.) Because of his aloneness, David would have had quality time to talk to God. God used this time to prepare his heart. Even after being anointed king, David spent countless hours hidden away in caves, on the run and facing fear ... alone.

Seventy-three psalms are attributed to the authorship of David.¹ If he had this many prayers not just written down but recorded to be read or sung publicly, imagine how many he could have simply penned as a shepherd alone under the stars. He would have had nothing but time to sit in awe of God's glory and respond to it.

Where do you find yourself today? How is God giving you aloneness so that you can choose Him? Or where do you need to slow down and create some space for God?

Time can give you the opportunity to make a list of doubts or a list of assurances. David used his to make lists of assurances. He strengthened his faith by setting his heart on what was true. According to the book of Hebrews, Moses did this too: "He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible" (11:27 NLT).

David made the invisible seem more visible. He set his heart on God.

Likewise, the more you focus on something and talk about it and think on it, the more real it becomes.

Now read Psalm 65 with these ideas in your heart.

Those lists of assurances in the Psalms still encourage us as well as countless other generations. David understood that God set up the morning and the evening as the bookends of his day. A reminder as the sun rises and as it sets that God holds time and all the in-betweens in His hands. We are going to join the morning and evening as they shout for joy the next six weeks.

When you pray, ask God for multiplied time and He'll provide it. He does the best multiplication. When you put God first, everything else falls into place. You will have all the time you need. Remember, you are actually gaining time because you are multitasking for your day and eternity. Double results!

I realize how hard it can be to try to maintain focus all day. It takes so much practice because our days get cloudy fast, which makes it hard to see.

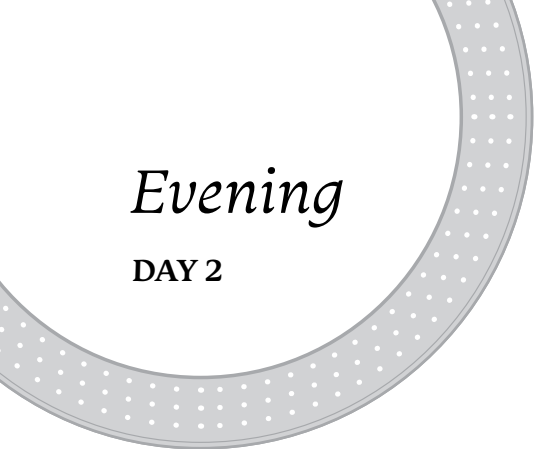
Corrie ten Boom said, "Faith is like radar that sees through the fog—the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see."²

I can sit with God in the morning when it's quiet and still before the chaos starts, but then the fog of busyness rolls in and makes it harder to see. I have to choose to fight the fog and keep reaching for the invisible. The more I fix my eyes, the more visible He becomes, not just to me, but also to those watching me.

Who's watching you? Who needs to see you fix your eyes on God during a struggle?

God, thank You that You are a God who hears our prayer. I want to be one You choose to bring near, to dwell in Your courts even while I am here on earth. Thank You for mornings where there is the promise of a fresh start, and evenings, the promise of rest. Thank You that You set up our lives in these divisions because You knew we needed them. Give me discernment for how to use my gift of hours. Let me give my time to You and watch You multiply it like the five loaves and two fishes. When the fog rolls in, help me see You through all the mundane and overwhelming circumstances of today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Your turn ...



Evening

DAY 2

Tonight, read Psalm 37.

I researched the word *fret* in verse 1. It is the Hebrew *charab*, which means “to ... be kindled.”¹ When we fret, we are kindling a fire. It may be a fire of anxiety or anger, but we are kindling and nursing that fire just the same. This morning I talked about David’s making a list of assurances rather than a list of doubts. He used prayer to put out fires in his mind before they got out of control and took over his actions. We can do the same by choosing wisely which thoughts we feed. Are we feeding anger or anxiety by what we focus on? How can you feed your thoughts more productively?

That word *fret* brought to mind a verse in Philippians. I love the picture The Message paints in this verse:

Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. (4:6–7)

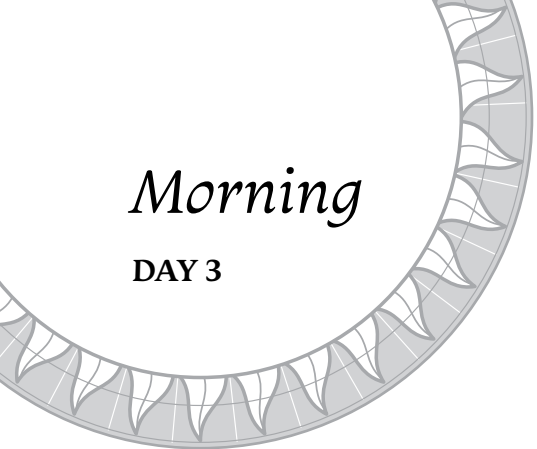
This is how we replace the anxious thoughts instead of just willing them to go away: we turn our focus back to God. Instead of worrying, pray. Instead of kindling my thoughts with all the things that might happen, I lead them to the one sure thing: God. Let Him help shape your worries into prayers and experience the peace of His presence the moment you call on Him. We have this choice. We can list praises instead of worries. Which one will you choose to focus on today?

We can always take our thoughts to God for help and let Him speak to them. As a disclaimer, there are days I need to do this over and over and over, and God has never turned me away.

Thank You, God, that I can trust You. I need not fret. Thank You that Your Word helps me put out that fire by affirming that when I trust You and commit my way to You, You will act. I can be still and wait for You; I don't have to strive and battle myself. God, keep showing me how my emotions can fuel so many of my actions. Let prayer be my immediate reaction. You will fight for me. You uphold the righteous. You know my days and my heritage will remain forever. Establish my steps, and thank You that if I fall, You hold my hand. Teach me to turn away from evil and do good. In Jesus' name, amen.

Your turn ... make it personal to you.

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Morning

DAY 3

I have always been a hopeless romantic. I love old movies. Usually my favorites star Cary Grant and Doris Day. They are light movies with happy endings because life is sad enough.

One old movie I have always loved is *Somewhere in Time*. It's a love story starring Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour. In the beginning, Reeve is a playwright, and at one of his opening nights, an old woman comes up to him and presses an antique watch in his hands and says, "Come back to me."¹ After that evening his curiosity grows and overtakes him. He can't stop thinking about the old woman and what she meant.

He finally tracks her down only to find that she died the same night that she visited him. Her caretaker explains that she was a famous actress in her day until she met a man and fell in love. The man had mysteriously disappeared, and after that, she never acted again. Reeve becomes completely obsessed with her, researching her life, finding pictures, and studying her history. He becomes so obsessed with her that he begins finding out all he can about time travel. He learns that to travel back, he must totally convince himself that the past is his reality. Everything around him and on him must teach his brain that it really is 1912. Eventually he makes it back in time and falls in love with her. I will stop there and not spoil the whole movie.

Reeve's process for time travel is exactly what we must do, except we must convince ourselves that our future is our reality. If we can immerse ourselves in God, His presence, His Word, then He is our reality and the promises He makes become fact. It's not something magical; it's just the way the brain works. The more you focus on something, the more real it becomes. What we believe determines our actions. It determines who we become.

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 9:24 that we are to run our race fixed on the prize, looking ahead. We are to lay down this life in exchange for something much better in the future. This sports analogy is showing us the same thing. Focusing on the truth of what's ahead of us

changes how we run. What we focus on matters. If we don't focus on what gets us to God, then we won't end up there. It doesn't happen by accident.

Where your heart is, that's where your treasure lies. So it follows that where your heart is will, in fact, be where you focus. Just like anything else worth having, focus takes self-control. Self-control always sounded like a self-help gimmick to me. Maybe that is because I am the person who cannot eat just one potato chip, but I suspect that you, too, have failed at just willing yourself to be better. It doesn't matter how much determination I have on my own; without the Holy Spirit in me, I cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. That's why it is called the fruit *of the Spirit*.

With the Holy Spirit, I am capable of as much as God wants to accomplish in my life, but as I stated before, it isn't magic; it's focus. How much God do you want? How much time and focus are you willing to give God?

A. W. Tozer said that "faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God."² I think the more fixed our gaze is, the stronger our faith becomes.

How much God do you want? Seriously, this is not a rhetorical question. Answer it in your heart or in your journal. I don't care where, but answer the question.

Do you want a zeal for God that consumes you? It's hard to choose God's plans when it feels like they overshadow you and what you want, but truly seeing God and knowing Him makes this less scary. Seeing His plans keep working out for your best makes letting go of your plans easier.

The more we practice this, the more we will see His goodness. Do you want to make the invisible so visible to you that others even start to see Him through you?

**What we believe determines our actions.
It determines who we become.**

What it will cost each of us differs. But the cost is proof of its worth. I write this with conviction mingled with fear in my own heart. If we want the invisible God to be seen in our lives, then we have to stop seeing only ourselves. To get us out of the way, we have to see more of Him. What steps can you take to focus on God and have Him become more real to you?

Read Psalm 108 and hear David's heart: "O God," the King James Version says, "my heart is fixed" (v. 1).

I want to echo David's words. I'm not moving anywhere, God; I will keep my gaze fixed on You until You are so real to me I see You everywhere.

Father, fix my heart. I don't want to fall short of the mark. I want my heart to be steadfast. I want others to see You because You can be seen in me. I want to be so sure of my God that others can visibly see You. You are reality. Open our eyes. Grant us help against our foe. With You, God, we shall do valiantly, but without You, we are lost. Remind us that our efforts without You are nothing but vanity. At the same time, strengthen us to go valiantly where You lead us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Your turn ...

Evening

DAY 3

Tonight, let's look at how The Message phrases a couple verses from this morning's reading of Psalm 108.

I'm ready, God, so ready,
ready from head to toe.
Ready to sing,
ready to raise a God-song. (v. 1–2)

Don't you love that? I'm ready from head to toe! This morning we read the King James Version where David said, "My heart is fixed." We can't be ready to be used by God until we are fixed on Him, but once our heart is practiced at seeing Him, He can use us to help others see.

David spent a lot of time waiting as a shepherd, in caves, on the run, and in hiding. I wonder if at the end of his life he could look back and see that it wasn't really waiting; it was changing. God had to change David's focus before he could be the man God needed. David couldn't be king until he really learned that there was only one King. He was just a shepherd who let God use those skills to shepherd His people instead of sheep.

David had to learn how much he needed God; he had to learn God would keep him safe both physically and spiritually; he had to learn how God answers prayer; he had to learn that it is God who gives strength and power; he had to learn obedience; and he had to learn where to take his fear. He learned countless other things as he practiced his walk with God.

Only God knew the preparation David needed because only God knew where he was headed. Only God knows the preparation we need because only He knows where we are headed.

Fortunately, God will ask very few of us to go to the extreme of living on the run in a cave. I'm exceptionally grateful I won't be given the assignment of king over His people. God will

ask each of us to do something. We each have an assignment here that God planned out for us before He knit us in our mother's womb, but we can't accomplish eternal goals if we aren't fixed on eternity. Similar to the movie I referenced this morning, eternity has to become our reality.

Make us ready, God, from head to toe. Let our hearts be purified in Your presence so that we can reflect Jesus well. Help us to recognize that the waiting has a purpose. Give us courage to face not just our preparation but also our heavenly purposes on earth. Fix our eyes on You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Your turn ...
