



2024 4Q Psalms Lesson 2

Teach Us to Pray

by Tim Jennings

SABBATH

The First paragraph states,

A simple way of introducing the Psalms into daily life is to devote time each day to the reading of psalm, beginning with Psalm 1, and following the order given in the psalter. Another way is to read the psalms that correspond to your present situation, whatever it happens to be... (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 13).

I have personally benefited from meditating on the Psalms each morning. Sometimes I go through them in order, sometimes I pick one randomly, sometimes I pick one based on subject matter. But the idea of having a morning devotional from the Psalms is a good one.

At a conference I attended April 2023 one of the speakers, Gary Oliver, ThM, PhD, led the group in a form of Christian meditation called *Lectio Divina*. He gave each attendee a handout that included a brief history of *Lectio Divina*, some instructions, and a copy of Psalm 1:1–3 from four different versions: King James, New Living Translation, The Message, and The Remedy of the Lord in Song: The Psalms.

I did not know that Dr. Oliver was going to speak or that he was going to lead the entire group in a thoughtful, hour-long reflection of one of the psalms, especially not one that included The Remedy paraphrase. But it just so happened that Come and Reason Ministries was offering free copies of The Remedy of the Lord in Song: The Psalms for the participants, and many attendees, who came from all over the country, took one. Many personally thanked me for the paraphrase, telling me how much they were blessed from meditating upon The Remedy version.

In the aftermath of that meeting, I decided to research *Lectio Divina* and in May I wrote a blog on it. *Lectio Divina* means “divine reading.” It is an ancient Christian practice that goes all the way back to Origen of Alexandria in the third century. The intention of the practice is to help the Christian internalize the Scripture beyond mere fact or head knowledge to a deep experience, heart appreciation, and practical living out of the things of God. As we discussed last week, to allow the Psalms to be part of our spiritual healing.

Lectio Divina has four distinct actions or steps:

- Bible reading
- Meditation upon the passage read, which means reflecting on its meaning
- Prayer (conversation with God) about the passage

- Contemplation or experiencing its application to the inner workings of one's heart, attitudes, motives, and affections—i.e., abiding in and experiencing the Holy Spirit applying the truth to the heart.

A couple of important points about *Lectio Divina*: First, this form of meditation always starts with the inspired Word of God. If one replaces Scripture with other writings, then the meditation will serve to strengthen those writings' ideas into one's being rather than God's Word.

A second point is that this form of meditation requires deep thinking, reflection, active thought, and communion/prayer with God. It is *not* an emptying of the mind, nor is it a repetitive mantra. The goal is to expand our finite awareness, both cognitively and experientially (intellectually and spiritually), of our knowledge of God, so that we may *know* God for ourselves just as Jesus prayed that we would (John 17:3).

As we engage with God, actively connecting with Him and applying His methods to our lives, we experience healing, cleansing, recreation, renewal, transformation, which is also known as sanctification:

- May God himself, the God of peace, **sanctify you** through and through. May your whole **spirit, soul and body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NIV84).

God wants to sanctify, heal, make us holy in spirit, soul, and body.

Lectio Divina meditation engages all aspects of our being. We engage our body when we disengage from the daily activities of life, put down the digital devices, and sit quietly with God, often in nature—breathing in the fragrance of the flowers, hearing the songs of the birds, appreciating the beautiful rainbow, feeling the warmth of the sunshine, being caressed by the gentle breeze. Our experience in the natural world that God has created stimulates our senses and turns our minds toward our Creator in awe and appreciation.

In such a state of reverence, we turn our attention to the written word, focusing upon a specific passage of Scripture, and in that place of natural quiet, we meditate deeply upon the message of God. We reach out to God with our heart, reflecting upon the meaning, asking Him for greater insight, understanding, and wisdom. We praise God for His providence, presence, faithfulness, and goodness and for connecting the truths in Scripture in our minds and for its application to our life at that moment in time.

And then we pour out our affection, love, appreciation, and adoration to God, inviting His Spirit to cleanse and purify our attitudes, feelings, and longings to be ever more united with His so that we experience the joy, love, and presence of God in our inmost being.

I hadn't heard the term *Lectio Divina* before Dr. Gary Oliver introduced me to it. But as I studied out what this method of meditation was functionally doing, I realized that its steps are the very practices I

had been doing throughout my Christian journey because I had read other Christian writers who described these very things without using that Latin term.

Most interesting, I found that one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church advocated these very same practices, also without ever using the term *Lectio Divina*. Consider the following historical quotes, keeping in mind the four components of *Lectio Divina*: Bible reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

- Merely to hear or to **read the word** is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures **must meditate upon the truth that has been presented to him**. By earnest attention and **prayerful** thought he **must learn the meaning of the words of truth**, and **drink deep of the spirit** [contemplation] of the holy oracles (Christ's Object Lessons, 59).
- It would be well for us to spend **a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ**. We should take it point by point, and **let the imagination grasp each scene**, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, **our confidence** in Him will be more constant, **our love** will be quickened, and we shall be more **deeply imbued with His spirit**. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross (*The Desire of Ages*, 83).

Regardless of what you call it, I encourage you to take time daily to be apart from this busy world in order to spend time with God, to read His Word, meditate deeply upon its meaning, talk to God about it, and invite the Holy Spirit into your heart to bring the truths home to your inmost experience.

SUNDAY

Read first paragraph,

- All Christians know, and have experienced, times of despair and suffering, times when they have wondered what the Lord is doing, or why the Lord is allowing these things to happen to them. The psalmists themselves went through similar things. And, through divine inspiration, they recorded what they had experienced. (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 14).

If a person feels discouraged, feels down, feels so despondent that they actually wish they could die, does that mean they are out of favor with God?

Could a person be in despair, even to the point they want to die and still be in a saving relationship with God?

Consider Elijah, would we consider him one of the faithful, a person who succeeded? He was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot and never died. He was sent to encourage Jesus along with Moses at the transfiguration. Yet, after Jezebel threatened to kill him, we read the following about Elijah:

- He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” (1 Kings 19:4 NIV84).

Was Elijah no longer in good standing with God? Or did Elijah struggle with human emotions that discouraged him? Were Elijah’s feelings of depression and despair an accurate indicator of how God felt toward him?

Commenting on Elijah’s experience, the author of the book *Prophets and Kings*, writes the following:

- **Into the experience of all** there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, **till death seems preferable to life**. It is **then that many lose their hold on God** and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. **Could we at such times discern** with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences **we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves**, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being. (*Prophets and Kings* 162).

The Bible stories are there not just as historical records, but as lessons for us, to show us God’s dealing with people. When Elijah became discouraged by his human emotions, God did not abandon him, God did not look down on him, condemn him, reject him, but God moved in love, in sympathy, in compassion, with grace and truth to save Elijah from his own discouragement. And God works for every single person in the same way, the difference is that not every person responds to God’s love, grace, and truth the way Elijah did. Not everyone when discouraged turns to God and prays as Elijah did—some instead turn to destructive things. But God is still there working to reach them, to save them from their own feelings of discouragement.

In my own life I have had moments of despair, weakness, discouragement, depressed mood and feelings of hopelessness where the feelings tempted me to think that it would be better if God were just to take me, to just die. But at those times, I remembered Elijah, and I remembered this quotation from *Prophets and Kings* and realized those emotions that were tempting me were not from God, but from my own fears and insecurities and I turned my mind, my heart to Jesus and cried out to Him to send His angels and deliver me from my own self—and in each and every time He did and my spirit was imbued with hope, and after each experience my faith in God increased.

This is part of the journey for every person, and the Psalms are filled with helpful songs. Consider Psalms 143:

- Lord, respond favorably to my prayer, intervene mercifully to my plea!
Because you are faithful and always do what is right, come to my relief.
Do not judge me responsible for my sin-condition, for no one living can set themselves right with you.
The enemy hounds me, crushing my joy for life into the dirt, driving me into darkness with no zest for living — like those already long dead.

I am tired of living, I am discouraged and ready to give up, but then I remember what happened in the past — I focus upon your design and all you have done and think about your plan and all you have made.

I surrender myself to you; my inmost being thirsts for your life-giving presence like dry land thirsts for rain.

Respond to me quickly, O Lord; I am dying inside. Do not keep your life-giving presence from me or I will surely die and join those in the grave.

Let each day start with your love filling my heart, for I have put my trust in you. Teach me the way to live, for I surrender myself to you.

Rescue me from my enemies, O Lord, for I place myself under your protection.

Teach me to fulfill your purposes, for you are my God; may your Spirit of truth and love lead me to the world recreated to your design.

Heal me, O Lord, to magnify your character of love; cleanse my soul from sinfulness, because you always do right.

Show mercy to my enemies and let them go; let perish all those who reject healing and persist in attacking me, for I am your faithful follower. (Psalm 143:1-12 REM).

We find the psalmist and others in Scripture going through the same struggles with painful human emotions, whether from grief, fear, threats, guilt, shame or something else. But in all situations and circumstance, Jesus has a solution, a remedy to heal our hearts and minds and place us back on a solid foundation if we will turn to Him and trust Him.

TUESDAY

The lesson points us to Psalm 22:

Verse 1:

- My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? (Psalm 22:1 NIV84).

The lesson notes that these words are famous because Jesus quoted them while on the cross.

What do these words of Jesus reveal? Did God reject Jesus? Did God become angry, upset, mad at Jesus? Did God use power to harm Jesus at the cross?

What happened at the cross? Why did Jesus die? What kind of death did Jesus die? What was the necessity of Jesus' death in the plan of salvation? What did the Father do to Jesus at the cross?

What law lens do you understand all of this through?

Do we agree that the plan of salvation centers upon Jesus, His sinless life, His voluntary sacrificial and substitutionary death, His victory over death and resurrection?

So, Jesus is the solution! The plan of salvation is God’s plan to resolve the sin problem; it is the treatment to the sin problem—then what we understand about the healing plan, the solution, the remedy, the treatment, the fix to the sin problem is *determined* by what we think the sin problem is?

What is the problem that sin caused that the plan of salvation fixes? And our answer to this question is *determined* by how we understand God’s law.

If we believe that God’s law functions like human law, imposed rules that require the rule-giver to inflict punishment, then we falsely conclude that the sin problem is a legal problem and the just solution is the infliction of punishment, the minimum punishment being death. Then we falsely conclude that Jesus’ mission was to come, live a sinless life so that He personally did not break any rules and thus did not personally deserve any inflicted punishment so that God could place all our rule-breaking deeds (sins) on Him and do make-believe, pretend trick and treat the innocent Jesus *as if* Jesus was the one who did all the bad stuff and broke all the rules and then make a claim not actually true in reality, that it is right and just to punish an innocent person for the crimes of the guilty—and then teach that God used His divine power to inflict death upon Jesus so that He won’t have to kill us—and then we claim, again contrary to all reality, that it is just, reasonable and true to declare a guilty person to be innocent if an innocent person is punished in place of the guilty.

This is all pagan, false, a lie, and stems directly from the lie that God’s law functions like human law. It contradicts Scripture, it contradicts reason, it contradicts how God’s design law of love and liberty works.

Can you get people to love you and trust you by threatening to kill them if they don’t?

And this pagan lie is what is being taught actively in our church today. The following quote is from the Review December 8, 2023:

- “To spare us, God poured out His wrath against the violation of His law (sin), not on the violators of His law (sinners) but on the sinless Jesus, the only way that God could “be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). **In short, rather than killing us for violating His law, the Father killed Jesus instead. ... Or, to put it crudely, the Father killed Jesus so that He wouldn’t have to kill us**” (emphasis mine). (Goldstein, C. “Law, Freedom, Love.” Adventist Review online edition, Dec 8, 2023, https://adventistreview.org/cliffs-edge/law-freedom-love/?fbclid=IwAR3wAGrpMo-HQQi2KFAIHxfD47q5Aam6lZ6yJTNk-5FH7QZr66b8h_3CqX0)

Can you find anywhere in Scripture where the Bible shows God using power to harm Jesus? No! What you find is God stops using power and let’s go of Jesus allowing Jesus to experience what Jesus chose, which was to be our Savior, to take up the responsibility to confront Satan and “destroy him who holds the power of death that is the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

Who does Scripture say holds the power of death? Satan does! Jesus holds the keys to life, the power over death, Jesus destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light (2 Timothy 1:10). In the

quote I just cited from the Review, place who is placed in the role of inflicting death? God, thus they are teaching that God wields Satan's power—in other words the man of sin has set himself up on God's temple, the spirit temple, proclaiming himself to be God. People are worshiping a god who has the attributes of Satan. This is why we have been given an end-time message that calls people to make a right judgment about God, for the hour of God's judgment has come.

But people persistently make the wrong judgment about God if they believe the lie that God's law functions like human law, and they conclude that God is the source of death, that God uses power to inflict death, that God is the one from whom we need to be protected.

But when we return to design law all the confusion resolves and we can answer all the questions.

What happened at the cross?

- Jesus completed the mission that He, the Father, and the Holy Spirit were jointly carrying out—for Jesus to destroy death (2 Timothy 1:10), Satan and his power (Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 1:20), the work of Satan (1 John 3:8), and fulfill God's purpose for humanity (Genesis 1:26,27), and redeemed Adam's fall becoming the new head of humanity the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:47) and thereby restoring the species human back into perfection and at-one-ment with God.
- God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:19 NKJV)

Why did Jesus die?

To destroy death and fear and selfishness from within humanity and replace it with the divine nature, God's design law of love. He did this when, as a human, He was tempted by human emotions to save self (Gethsemane) but with each temptation, as a human, with human powers and human abilities, He chose to love perfectly and trust completely in His Father.

- Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13 NIV84).

Thus He not only *demonstrated* the truth about God, but also *developed* a new sinless perfected and sealed human character, human being by restoring God's perfect living law into humanity. As Scripture says,

- once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:9 NIV84).

What was the necessity of Jesus' death in the plan of salvation?

It was the only means whereby God could destroy sin—not just Satan, but sin itself, the roots of sin, the lies that broke trust in sinless beings, and destroy the carnal nature, the fear-driven, me-first, anti-

love, rebellious survival driven motives of sin out of the human species, thereby destroying the death causing principle out of humanity.

What kind of death did Jesus die? Did Jesus die the first death—the sleep death? No, did Jesus die the second death?

Before we can answer that we need to define what we mean by the term, “second death.” So, what is the second death? Do we have any inspired references to inform us of what that death is?

- He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. (Revelation 2:11 NIV84).
 - This text doesn't tell us what the second death is, but does inform us that those who overcome won't be hurt by it.
 - What about Jesus, did He overcome? Then was Jesus hurt by the second death or not hurt by the second death?
- Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6 NIV84).
 - This text also doesn't tell us what the second death is, only that the second death has no power over those who arise in the first resurrection, and that they will be priests of God.
 - Again, what about Jesus, does the second death, whatever it is have power over Him? And is Jesus a priest—in fact the High Priest of God?
 - So, we haven't yet defined what the second death is, but thus far we must question the idea of whether such a death could hurt Jesus or have power over Him.
- The lake of fire is the second death. (Revelation 20:14).
- Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)
 - Did Jesus die in the lake of fire? Do we have any evidence that fire rained down from God upon Jesus at the Cross or in Gethsemane?
 - Do we have any evidence that God used any kind of power on Jesus? Or do we have the opposite, Jesus crying out “my God, my God why have you forsaken me” (Matt 27:45, 46)?
 - So we haven't fully defined what the fire is, but we have no evidence that Jesus experienced it at the cross.

These are the only Bible texts that directly mention the term second death.

Some Bible commentators add further clarification between the first and second death noting that the first death is the death from which a resurrection occurs but the second death is the death from which there is no resurrection. There is sound Biblical evidence for this conclusion (1Cor 15:12-21, 42-49, 1Thes 4:16, Rev 2:11, 20:5,6,14, 21:8). If we accept this additional demarcation then we must ask,

- Did Christ die a death from which there was no resurrection or did Christ rise again? “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1Corinthians 15:13).

While the Bible doesn't use "second death" language in any other place, Jesus actually described the two deaths (first and second) in Matthew 10:28 when He said:

- "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28 NIV84).

Christ makes a distinction between two types of death. The first in which only the body is destroyed and the second in which the body and soul is destroyed. Amazingly, the word translated "soul" is the Greek word "psyche" which means "mind, identity, individuality."

So, we can inquire about Jesus, when He died on the cross, did He have His mind, identity, individuality destroyed or did He rise again as the "same Jesus" (Acts 1:11) who died?

If we use the Bible as our guide, we have three demarcating features of the second death:

- lake of fire
- death without resurrection
- death which destroys both body and soul (psyche, individuality, mind)

When Jesus died were any of these identifiers met? No! The Bible seems to be making a strong case that Jesus did not "die" the second death. If He didn't die the second death, then what was the significance of His death?

Jesus' death was the means of actually destroying death!

Christ confronted the second death and conquered it, not "paid" it.

- Jesus "destroyed death and brought life and immortality to life." (2 Timothy 1:10).
- Christ destroyed the elements of Satan's government that bring death "by his death he destroyed him who holds the power of death that is the devil" Hebrews 2:14.

Christ died in order to eradicate the death causing principle of fear and selfishness and restore God's design law of love back into the human species.

His life on earth was accomplished through the exercise of human abilities. Jesus was tempted in His humanity, not His divinity. He chose with His humanity to say no to temptation, to trust the Father, to surrender His life in love.

And Jesus died when love overcame selfishness in His humanity, when He gave His life freely, when He chose to lay down His life voluntarily, when He refused to act selfishly, when He refused to use power to "save self."

In Christ the law of love, the law of life, was fully lived out when Christ refused to use His power to save self, but rather gave His life freely in love. **In Christ, giving destroyed taking, love destroyed selfishness, life destroyed death!**

So, because Jesus was a unique being whose mother was a sinful woman but whose Father was God, in the person of Jesus from His birth He had the ability to experience temptation in every way like we do, but He also had the ability, through trust to resist those temptations. It would be like you and me after rebirth—when we are reborn with new hearts that desire righteousness and we through faith can resist and say no to temptation. Jesus was born in this state. And because of this, Jesus never developed any bad, sinful, habits that needed to be overcome.

Jesus was,

- tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15 NIV84).

And,

- each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (James 1:14 NIV84).

If both of these passages are true, and they are, then Jesus had a humanity that could tempt Him. And we see that in Gethsemane, when He experienced terrible human emotions that tempted Him to not go through the cross, to “save Himself.” But with each temptation, Jesus chose, with His human abilities, to say no to the desire to save self and instead trust His Father, carry out the mission, and lay His life down freely.

And thus, Jesus He destroyed the infection of fear and selfishness that all humanity inherits from Adam, and restored perfectly God’s love and trust and became the second head of humanity. **And this is why He rose again**, and could so accurately tell His disciples that He was going to die and rise again, because He understood that death is caused by deviation from God’s design and that He was going to eradicate all deviations that He inherited from Mary, and He understood that life comes from God and is sustained by living in harmony with God’s design laws for life and once He completed His mission, life would be restored into the humanity He possessed.

Thus, Christ’s death destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light!

Christ’s experience on the cross stands in sharp contrast to that of those who die in the lake of fire where they are overcome by selfishness. The differences between Christ’s death and that of those who die the second death are stark:

Christ died trusting the Father – Luke 23:46

The wicked die distrusting the Father – Revelation 6:16

Christ died longing to see the Father – Mark 15:34

The wicked die hiding from the Father – Revelation 6:16

Christ died when the Father's presence was hidden – Mark 15:34

The wicked die when the Father is fully revealed – 2 Thessalonians 2:8

Christ died less than 72 hours – Luke 24:1-8

The wicked die eternally – Malachi 4:1-3; Romans 6:23; James 1:15; 2 Peter 3:10-12

Christ died when love overcame selfishness – John 3:16, 10:17,18; 1John 3:16

The wicked die overcome by selfishness – Revelation 21:8

If the Scriptures teaches that Christ did not die the second death, then why do so many insist that He did?

Because they have accepted the lie that God's law functions like human law and therefore they have misdiagnosed the problem of sin as being a legal problem rather than a terminal problem. And in the legal fantasy view, the problem is the inflicted second eternal death, and someone as to pay that penalty, thus it is taught Jesus died the second death so they can teach their penalty is paid.

Where some get confused is in focusing on the Father's actions, what the Father did do to Jesus at the cross, where the Bible describes the wrath of the Father being poured out on Jesus.

But this is because they confuse God's wrath with Satan's wrath. Satan's kingdom is the kingdom of imposed rules, made up laws, enforce through inflicted punishments. Thus Satan's wrath is always the use of power to inflict harm.

God's kingdom is the kingdom of reality, built by the Creator upon design laws that are the protocols for life, health, and happiness. Breaking God's design laws always results in pain, suffering, and eventual death unless remedied or cured by God. Thus God's use of power **is to hold at bay** the harm that sin brings and God's wrath is *not* the use of power to inflict harm, **but the stopping of the use of power that has been preventing the harm**. And on the cross, Jesus experienced the wrath of God when God let Him go, gave Him up, stopped using power.

And why did God do this? So that They, the Godhead, could accomplish the mission for which Jesus came—for Jesus to destroy the death causing principle and restore the life causing principle into the humanity He assumed and destroy the devil's power and lies, and to secure the universe into loyalty to God. And the only way for that to happen was for the Father, the source of life, to let go of His Son and allow Jesus to experience what Jesus had freely chosen, to be our Savior! If God would not have let go, then Jesus could not have completed His mission—He could not have died.

And in the end, God treats the wicked the same, **God lets them go** to reap what they have chosen, but they have chosen selfishness and rejected love, they have chosen rebellion rather than loyalty, distrust instead of trust, unfaithfulness rather than faithfulness, wickedness and not righteousness, evil rather than goodness, dishonesty rather honesty, and preferred lies to the truth. They have chosen to harden

themselves in evil, sin, guilt, shame and when God ceases to use His power to shield them they reap what sin does, eternal destruction and they die the second death and never rise again.

WEDNESDAY

Read last paragraph,

- However, a mere repetition of the words of the Psalms with only a slight comprehension of their meaning will not produce the authentic transformation intended by their use. When praying the Psalms, we should seek the Holy Spirit to enable us to act in the way demanded by the psalm. The Psalms are the Word of God by which believers' characters and actions are transformed, not simply informed. By God's grace, the promises of the Psalms are made manifest in the lives of believers. This means that we allow God's Word to shape us according to God's will and to unite us with Christ, who demonstrated God's will perfectly and, as the incarnate Son of God, prayed the Psalms, as well. (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 16).

Have you ever heard, pain is fertilizer for the soul?

Paul wrote,

- We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3-4 NIV84).

What does this mean?

Is this true? Is this what is being taught today?

I read a very interesting book entitled *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* by Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt.

- Lukianoff is a graduate of American University and Stanford Law School. He has described himself as a "pro-choice liberal" and an atheist.
- Jonathan David is an American social psychologist, Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University Stern School of Business, and author. His main areas of study are the psychology of morality and moral emotions.

I share their backgrounds because I want you all to understand, universal truths of God's kingdom can be understood by anyone with an honest heart to know the truth. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:20:

- For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20 NIV84)

These writers are not conservative Christians, but they have discovered eternal truths, which are outworking of God's design laws and methods.

In their book they do an excellent job of describing three lies, they call them untruths, that are ravaging college campuses and society in general and have become dominant with the iGen or generation Z, which is the group that began college in 2013. The three big lies or untruths are:

- What doesn't kill you makes you weaker
- Always trust your feelings
- Life is a battle between good people and evil people

They identify from ancient wisdom writings—Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Plato etc. common truths that all the great sages agree upon and then demonstrate that the three core untruths popular and taught on campuses today are opposite ancient wisdom.

- What doesn't kill you makes you weaker
 - Truth—what doesn't kill you makes you stronger—the idea being that we only grow through challenges, through overcoming obstacles, through the painful and difficult experiences in life. This is an outworking of one of God's design laws—which one? The law of exertion.
 - “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character” (Ro 5:3–4 NIV84).
 - So accepting the lie has led to concepts of avoiding things that are difficult, trials, obstacles, emotionally upsetting things. We must be safe, we need safe spaces, places where our ideas won't be challenged, where our concepts won't be exposed as flawed, where words won't upset us. We must remove names from buildings, or statues, or books, we must change names of teams because these are insensitive and hurt us and it isn't safe to be in a society that would injure us in this way. And in the church we must remove people who challenge our orthodoxy with evidence and truth we can't refute. Rather than struggling through in deep study and embracing unfolding truth, we instead must create safe theological spaces where the minds of our members are never challenged by new ideas. And what happens to minds and characters when the lie that what is challenging makes you weaker is accepted? Destruction of minds and characters, people get weaker, they don't get stronger.
- Always trust your feelings
 - All the great sages have taught that emotions energize us but are not to be trusted as emotions can lie. Can you think of a Bible text that supports this?
 - When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire” (James 1:13–14 NIV84).
 - When people accept this lie then if they feel pain they conclude that the other person has assaulted them. And anything that hurts is aggression, words are redefined as violence and it is okay to use physical violence to stop the speech of others because their words hurt us and are violent. Facts, evidences, and truths don't matter, only our feelings matter.

- They create falsehoods like this: Words that offend cause stress; stress increases inflammatory factors in the body which causes physical harm; thus offending words are acts of violence. What is wrong with this thinking? Replace words causing stress with anything else—such as your boyfriend or girlfriend break up with you causes stress, stress causes physical harm, therefore a breakup is an act of violence. Or, making a poor grade on an exam causes stress, stress harms the body, therefore if a teacher gives a bad grade it is an act of violence against you. Or being held accountable for sin, being brought to conviction, this causes stress and stress harms the body therefore the Holy Spirit convicting of sin is an act of violence.
- Life is a battle between good people and evil people
 - Throughout human history the sages have described that there is a battle between good and evil occurring *in every human heart*. But the new view is there isn't a battle between good and evil as principles, methods, motives of our hearts—there are only good and evil people. Thus, if someone disagrees with your view, challenges your beliefs and hurts your feelings, they are evil and evil must be destroyed.

They cite several studies on how humans divide into groups, and that it doesn't matter how people get divided into groups, once they are divided into groups they begin thinking of "us versus them" and they treat people in the "us" category better than the "them" category. Studies have demonstrated that it doesn't matter if people are divided by a coin toss, or by guessing the number of dots on a page full of dots, once they are divided into groups, people that are not in their group are treated worse than those in their group.

THURSDAY

Read last paragraph which is a historical quote from EG White:

- “This world is a vast lazar house, but Christ came to heal the sick, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan. He was in Himself health and strength. He imparted His life to the sick, the afflicted, those possessed of demons. He turned away none who came to receive His healing power. He knew that those who petitioned Him for help had brought disease upon themselves; yet, He did not refuse to heal them. And when virtue from Christ entered into these poor souls, they were convicted of sin, and many were healed of their spiritual disease, as well as of their physical maladies. The gospel still possesses the same power, and why should we not today witness the same results?”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 24, 25. (*Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024*, Psalms p. 17).

The gospel does still possess the same power—but only if we are presenting the actual true gospel and not a counterfeit. What do you understand the gospel to be, the good news that is eternally good?