



F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

PSALMS

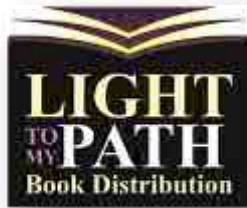
Volume 1

*A Devotional Look at Books
1-2 of the Psalms of Israel*

PSALMS

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of the Psalms of Israel*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

LIGHT TO MY PATH BOOK DISTRIBUTION
Sydney Mines, NS CANADA

Psalms (volume 1)

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A special thanks to the proof readers:

Pat Schmidt, Lee Tuson, Marilyn Tuson

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PREFACE

The intention of this commentary on the book of Psalms is to be devotional in nature. That is to say, my goal is to show the application of the book to life and our relationship with God. I am not attempting to be scholarly or academic in this book. I leave this to those who are more qualified than myself. I want the reader, however, to be strengthened, encouraged and comforted by the truths revealed in this vital part of the Bible.

Take the time to read each psalm. This commentary is not the Bible. It is, however, designed to help the reader understand the Bible and its application. As you read the Bible passage and the comments in this book, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truths He wants you to see. Take the time to consider the questions at the end of each chapter and pray about what you have read. I am convinced that the Holy Spirit can use the exposition of His Word to encourage and strengthen those who will take the time to read and meditate on its truth.

As you read the book of Psalms, let the Lord challenge your attitudes. Let Him reveal Himself to you in new and fresh ways. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit would be

pleased to use this commentary to draw His people closer to Himself and strengthen them in their commitment to Him amidst the storms and trials of life.

F. Wayne MacLeod

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

AUTHORSHIP

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 psalms written by a variety of authors. They were gathered and put into this collection over a period of many years. King David is credited with writing about two-thirds of the psalms found in this collection. Other authors include the following:

AUTHOR	PSALMS
Solomon	72, 127
Asaph	50; 73-83
Moses	90
Heman the Ezrahite	88
Ethan the Ezrahite	89
Sons of Korah	42; 44-49; 84-85; 87-88

BACKGROUND

Psalms is divided into five books. The division of these books is clearly marked.

BOOK	PSALMS CONTAINED IN BOOK
Book 1	Psalm 1-41
Book 2	Psalm 42-72
Book 3	Psalm 73-89
Book 4	Psalm 90-106
Book 5	Psalm 107-150

There is no clear reason for this particular division into five books. It is possible that they were added over time to form the collection we have today. The psalms were used in the worship of God from the time of David onward. In some cases, they were written to be sung by temple musicians on a particular occasion. Some of the psalms contain instructions regarding the type of instrument to be played while the psalm was sung. For example, Psalm 5 was written for flutes. Psalm 6, on the other hand, was written for stringed instruments.

Some psalms were written to common tunes. For example, Psalm 9 was written to the tune of "The Death of a Son," while Psalm 22 was written to the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." Obviously, these tunes were well known in the day. There also appears to be a variety of musical styles used in this collection. Musical terms found in the opening comments of certain psalms indicate the type of music to be used for particular psalms.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK FOR TODAY

The book of Psalms is probably one of the most beloved books of the Bible. The reason for this may simply be

because of the honesty of the psalmists. They share their struggles and pains. They also share their victories and hope in the Lord. They offer comfort to those who struggle and instructions for those who face the trials of life. They point us to a Lord who is over all pain and suffering and whose purposes will always succeed.

The psalmists express themselves to God in an honest and open way. They tell Him about their struggles. They show us that while we will not always have answers to the problems of life, we can still put our confidence in the Lord God.

One of the great themes of the Psalms is that of the Lord's care and concern for those who belong to Him. The Lord is a shepherd, a warrior, a fortress and a rock for all who will come to Him. The God of the Psalms is worthy of praise. He hears the cry of His children. He is not a God who is far off but one who is very near to those who love Him and trust in His name. He forgives and restores His children to fellowship with Him.

The book of Psalms reflects the intimacy God desires from all of us. The honest questions of God's children do not threaten Him. The failures of His children do not change His love for them. God delights in the thirsting and repentant heart of His people. The book of Psalms is a book of praise and thanksgiving. It reveals the ups and downs of life on this earth under the care and provision of a loving and compassionate God.

1

THE BLESSING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Read Psalm 1:1-6

The first psalm begins with a blessing. The word "bless" speaks of a happy condition. We can sometimes confuse blessing with possessions. While there may be physical possessions included, blessing is not dependant on wealth or physical possessions. The blessing spoken of here is a condition of life and mind. It is a state of contentment and happiness in general. The one who is blessed is one who is happy and satisfied. His or her life is full and meaningful. There is an overflowing of contented joy in the heart and soul.

The world in which we live is in need of this blessedness. Many people cry out for meaning and purpose in life. The state of blessedness they long for is not found in large bank accounts and big houses and cars. Money does not buy this blessedness. Even spiritual activities cannot fill the void left in the hearts of men and women across this

world. Churches are filled with people who have not yet experienced the state of blessedness the Psalmist speaks of in this passage. Notice that the Psalmist tells us five things about the blessed person.

First, the person who is blessed is one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. When he speaks of the wicked, the Psalmist speaks of those who do not follow the ways of the Lord God. The wicked do not listen to God's law or concern themselves with His purpose for their lives.

The blessed person does not walk according to the advice and counsel of the wicked or ungodly. To walk in the counsel of the wicked is to walk away from God and His purpose. There is a conscious decision being made here. The blessed person is one who has chosen to seek the Lord and His purposes and consciously chooses not to be distracted by ungodly influences. Blessedness can only be found in obedience to the purpose of God for our lives.

It should be said here that the counsel of the ungodly can seem very reasonable. There are times when the ways of the Lord do not seem to make sense. Imagine Daniel saying: "It wouldn't make any sense for me to make the king angry and get thrown into the den of lions, so I think I will stop praying to God." Imagine the apostle Paul saying: "It wouldn't make sense for me to be arrested in Jerusalem. This would only bring my ministry to an end, so I will just not go there." These men chose to listen to the Lord their God. Sometimes, it did not make sense but they chose to be obedient. They refused to listen to the counsel of their friends. They would not even listen to the wisdom of their own sinful heart. To know the blessedness the Psalmist

speaks of here, we will sometimes have to face the wrath of the enemy in our obedience to God's call.

Second, the blessed person is one who does not stand in the way of sinners. To stand in this sense is to linger. In other words, the person who wants to know the blessedness of which the Psalmist speaks will not linger in the paths of ungodly people. They will not be content to remain with sinners in their evil. The blessed person takes no joy in "hanging out" with those who disregard the law of God. They find no entertainment in evil. They see sin as God sees it and they are grieved when God is grieved. There is no blessedness in lingering around those who practice sinful ways. The blessed person is one who separates himself from evil and takes no delight in being with those who practice it.

Thirdly, the blessed person does not sit in the seat of mockers. There are many who openly mock and ridicule the ways of God. These individuals openly criticise those who follow the way of God. In my experience, I have met university professors who have openly mocked those who believed in a personal salvation or a Bible that is inspired of God. Some of these mockers may speak religious language but they are opposed to the truth of God's Word. The Pharisees of the New Testament were in this category. Though they saw themselves as spiritual, they mocked the purposes of God in Jesus. There can be no blessedness in the place of the mocker. Those who want to know the blessedness of this Psalm must take God and His Word seriously.

In verse 2, the Psalmist tells us that the blessed person is one who delights in the law of the Lord. To delight is to

take pleasure in or to long for something. There are several things we need to mention in this context.

It may be more helpful to see this delighting in the law of the Lord as a fruit of blessedness rather than a condition for being blessed. In other words, one of the characteristics of a blessed person is that they find great delight in the law of the Lord. God has opened their eyes to the truth and the joy of living in that truth.

We should also notice that delighting is a strong word. It involves the emotions and heart. The blessed person is one who moves beyond the legalistic requirements of the law to a heartfelt and joyful life of obedience. Again this is the fruit of blessedness. Those who have discovered the joy of obedience are experiencing the blessing the Psalmist is speaking about in this psalm.

Finally in verse 2, the Psalmist tells us that the blessed person meditates day and night on the law of God. The picture that comes to mind is of an individual locked up in a room reading his or her Bible 24 hours a day. This is not the case. There are many ways of meditating on the Word of God. We may start out the day with its promise as our strength and allow it to bless us at each step of the way. We will need to prayerfully consider how it applies to the particular situations we encounter throughout our day. We may find our hearts rejoicing over its promises for the difficulties we face at a given moment. At the end of the day, we might look back with rejoicing and praise as we see how God has been faithful to His word. This practice of prayerfully considering the Word of God is one that brings tremendous blessing to the believer. Through it, the heart of the Father is communicated and His strength and

purpose revealed. All this encourages deeper intimacy with God which in turn leads to greater blessing.

Verse 3 tells us that the blessed person is like a tree planted by streams of water. That tree is sustained in times of struggle. It is healthy and fruitful because its roots are deeply rooted and drawing water from the stream. We have seen that the blessed person is one who delights in the law of God. He meditates on that law day and night. He soaks up its promises and is strengthened by those promises. He prospers because he is rooted in good soil and drawing strength from the law of his God. There is a close connection between the state of "blessedness" and drawing strength from the Word of God. The Word of God encourages the believer. It sustains him in difficult times and guides him in the way he should go. The Spirit of God too is pleased to refresh and strengthen the believer who walks in obedience. He fills that believer to overflowing with his strength, gifts and grace so that he is truly blessed.

This is not the case with the wicked person. The wicked person is compared in verse 4 to the straw, stems and leaves that blow in the wind after being separated from grain.

The chaff (straw, stems and leaves) left over after the grain has been separated is of no use to the farmer. He takes no concern for it. The straw blows in the wind and the wind takes it wherever it wants. The Psalmist compares the wicked person to this straw not only because they are of no use to the kingdom but also because of the life they live. It is a life without foundation. The chaff is blown from one place to another. Unlike the tree that is firmly rooted the chaff has no roots. It is not being sustained by the cooling

water of the stream. The chaff is disconnected from any life giving source. It is tossed from one thing to another wherever the wind blows it. There is no comfort or security in this type of life. It is a life without the solid foundation only God and His Word can give.

On the Day of Judgment, the wicked will not stand. This is not to say that they will not have to be judged but rather that they will have no ground to stand upon. They will have no defence. Their accusation and condemnation is sure. They will have no place with the righteous.

The Psalmist concludes by reminding his reader that the Lord will watch over the righteous person but the wicked person will ultimately perish. There is no hope for the wicked.

The blessed person is one who has found great strength and delight in the law of the Lord. We need to be careful not to assume that if only we can obey that law of God we can be blessed. What this psalm seems to tell us is that obedience is the blessing. The blessed person is not one who obeys so that he can get some blessing from God. The truly blessed person is one who finds the fullness of blessing in being in a relationship of trust and obedience to God.

For Consideration:

- Is the blessedness the Psalmist speaks of here about receiving material things or is it a state of mind that finds deep satisfaction and meaning in

God and His purposes? Has this been your experience?

- What is the connection, if any, between blessing and possessions?
- What is the difference between obeying to get blessed and obedience as the blessing?
- The Psalmist speaks of the godly person "delighting" in the Law of God? What does this tell us about the heart of God for us and our relationship with Him?
- How has the Word of God sustained and comforted you?
- Is it possible to lose everything we have in this life and still be truly blessed because we have been faithful to God and His Word?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to meditate more often on the Word of God. Ask Him to bring it to your mind throughout the day.
- Take a moment to thank God for a particular promise in the Bible that means a lot to you.
- Ask God to give you the ability to "delight" in His law.
- Ask God to give you strength to turn from anything that is contrary to His purpose for your life.
- Ask the Lord to show you the joy of full obedience and intimacy with Him.

2

RAGING NATIONS, RULING LORD

Read Psalm 2:1-12

Have you ever read the news and wondered about the state of this world? Have you ever wondered where God was in the midst of chaos and evil? If so, you are not alone. The Psalmist, long ago, expressed his frustration with the way events were unfolding in his day.

He begins his psalm with a question. "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?" There appeared, in the mind of the Psalmist, to be a deliberate plan unfolding among the nations. Verse 2 tells us that the kings of the earth and their rulers were taking a stand against the Lord and His Anointed One.

The New International Version of the Bible capitalises the words: "Anointed One." This indicates that the term refers to the Lord Jesus. The Greek word "Christ" literally means

"anointed one." The nations and the people of those nations were rebelling against God and His purposes. This would make life very difficult for those who loved the Lord God and wanted to serve Him.

The words used here are quite strong. The nations conspired, plotted and took a stand against the Lord. This is not an innocent thing that is happening here. There is a deliberate attempt to stand up against the Lord God and the principles of His Word. We can understand that our enemy Satan is behind this.

The Psalmist sees opposition to the purposes of God. The nations were saying: "Let us break their chains and throw off their fetters." There is some debate over what these chains and fetters are. It may be best to see this from the perspective of the heathen nations. These nations wanted nothing to do with the Law of the Lord or His purposes. They saw the faith of the Israelites as being restrictive. These heathens wanted to be free to do as they pleased. They wanted to be free to believe as they pleased. Even in our day, there are those who feel that Christianity is restrictive. They feel bound by the purposes of God and the life He calls His people to live. They cast off all the "chains and fetters" of faith and do what they feel is right in their own mind.

The Psalmist grieves over what he saw in his day. He saw nations rebelling against the purposes of God. He saw people who ignored God's plan for their lives. His heart was broken when he saw this. Why is this happening? Why is there such injustice and evil in our land? Why do whole nations turn their backs on God and ignore His

purpose? These were some of the questions running through the mind of the Psalmist as he wrote this Psalm.

As the Psalmist reflects on the situation before him, he is aware of the danger that lurks over the head of those who trusted the Lord. These nations were openly conspiring against God and His people. This would make things difficult for believers. There was reason for concern.

Though aware of the danger that lurked in the shadows for the believer, the Psalmist turns his eyes upward to the One who was enthroned in heaven. As he looks upward to God, he sees Him laughing. The Lord is not laughing at believers or the rebellion of the nations. He is laughing at the foolishness of the nations to think that they could ever succeed in hindering His purposes.

In verse 5, the Psalmist watches as the Lord rebukes the nations in anger. He terrified them with His wrath. In that instant, the Psalmist knew that God ruled from heaven. He was a sovereign God, whose purposes would stand. These rebellious nations were no match for Him. God's people were safe because their God was a sovereign God who would care for them and judge their enemies.

As the Psalmist listened, he could hear the Lord God speaking: "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." There may be a sense in which this passage refers initially to David. God may have been telling David that He had established him as king in Jerusalem and that no one could stand against him. Beyond this, however, is a very clear reference to the Messiah, who was to come to be a king forever.

The Lord God would send His Son, the Messiah, to Jerusalem to die on the cross. His death and resurrection would bring absolute victory for the people of God and destroy all their enemies. He would rule forever as king over His people and no one would ever challenge His reign. God had a purpose. The rebellion and plotting of the nations against Him would be defeated. The Messiah King would come and destroy rebellion and give victory to His people.

The Psalmist continues to share what he heard the Lord say that day: "He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (verse 7). Again it may be that these were words of comfort to the Psalmist who was struggling with the fact that the nations were conspiring against him and God's purpose. Beyond this, however, it is a clear reference to the Lord Jesus who came as the Son of God to live among us and bring victory and hope over this rebellion.

To that Son, and to those who belong to Him, God says: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (verse 8). The nations that plotted and conspired against God and His purposes would be given to the Son as His inheritance. He would rule over them with an iron sceptre and dash them to pieces. These nations would never overcome the purpose of God. Any nation that attempted to do so would suffer the consequences of their actions.

For this reason, the Psalmist warns the kings of the earth to be wise. He warns them prophetically of the danger of conspiring against the Lord and His purposes. There was only destruction and defeat for all who would turn from

God. The Psalmist challenges them to serve the Lord with fear. He calls them to turn to the Lord and rejoice in Him with trembling. He was a God to be feared but would be compassionate and merciful if only they would turn to Him. They are called upon to kiss the Son lest be become angry with them. Only those who took refuge in the Lord God would be safe and blessed.

We see from this Psalm that while things will not always be easy in this life, there is tremendous hope for those who love the Lord and trust in His name. It is true that all around us we see evidence of evil. Whole nations seem to be turning from the principles of God's word. Sometimes we wonder if there is any hope. Maybe you find yourself overwhelmed with the circumstances that surround you. Like the Psalmist, in those times, we need to lift up our eyes to see the God of heaven laughing at the foolishness of those who think that they can hinder His purpose and plan. Take comfort that while the nations rage; our God reigns.

For Consideration:

- Is there evidence of a spiritual battle in your midst? How is it evident?
- Have you ever found yourself feeling overwhelmed by problems and difficulties? What encouragement do you find in this Psalm?
- What do we learn about the security we have in the Lord Jesus?
- What does this passage teach us about the judgement of God? Will evil continue forever?

- What difference does it make in our difficulties when we fix our eyes on the Lord?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He is a sovereign God who rules over all.
- Ask the Lord to help you to keep your eyes fixed on Him in times of difficulty and trial.
- Ask the Lord to break the evil and rebellion you see in your midst. Ask Him to bring your nation to Himself.

3

THE LORD IS MY SHIELD

Read Psalm 3:1-8

This psalm was written by David at a very difficult time in his life. 2 Samuel 15 describes this time. Absalom, David's son, wanted to become king. In fact, he had already declared himself king and set himself up in opposition to his father. When Absalom's conspiracy against David began to gain momentum, David felt it necessary to leave Jerusalem to escape Absalom's wrath. This psalm was written as David reflected on this time in his life.

David understood that he had many enemies. His own son was among those enemies. At the moment he wrote this psalm, those enemies were rising up against him declaring that even God would not deliver him from their hands (verse 2).

David heard the words of his enemies but he knew that the Lord God would not abandon him in this time of need. David saw his enemies but chose to place his confidence and trust in the Lord God. God was a shield for him. He was

confident that God would lift him up in this difficult time. There are a couple of points we need to emphasise here.

First, David believed that God would lift up his head. At present, David's head was not lifted up. The idea here is that he was feeling the weight of the situation. It was not easy to have his son stand up against him. It was not easy for David to flee from his enemies. He walked each day with his head hung low. He knew what it was like to be disappointed and overwhelmed. He felt the pain of betrayal. The pain was real but so was David's confidence. He believed the day would come when God would lift up his head. God would give him reason to rejoice again. God would not let him continue in his pain and agony forever. Victory was coming.

Second, David believed that God would bestow glory on him. Right now, as he fled from his enemies he did not sense that glory. There was nothing particularly glorious about running from his own son. Again, David believed that this was only temporary. God would restore his glory in time. David would be honoured. Right now, he had to run from his enemy but God would give him victory in the end. The enemy could not overcome him because the Lord God surrounded him like a shield. Nothing could penetrate that shield.

God was not deaf to the cries of His children. He would answer David's cry from His holy hill. Like a loving mother or father, He would come running to the aid of His child in need. Of this David was absolutely confident though for now he had to flee in shame.

For a time, David's head hung low. He knew however, that the Lord would take care of him. In verse 5, he tells us that he could lie down and sleep and wake again because God sustained him. Again there are two issues we need to see here.

First, David was able to sleep. How often in times of trouble and difficulty do we find ourselves tossing and turning on our beds, unable to sleep. The lack of sleep is an indication of worry and concern on our part. Because David knew that God was able to take care of him, he was able to set his mind at ease. He was able to go to sleep in peace because he knew that the Lord would take care of his situation. Nothing would harm him outside of the will and purpose of God. He was fully confident in the Lord. He was shielded by the Lord. This meant he could sleep peacefully.

Second, David was able to wake the next morning. The reason David woke in the morning was because the Lord God kept him safe through the night. He kept the enemy from invading or disturbing his sleep. As he slept peacefully, the Lord guarded him and kept him from harm.

David knew that even if tens of thousands of enemies drew up against him on every side, he was still protected by the Lord God. The enemy would have to penetrate the shield that God had put around him. To get to him, they would have to get through God first. One or ten thousand, it really didn't matter to David. God could stop them all.

With this confidence David cries out to God in verse 7:

Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.

David understood the source of his strength and victory. He does not take up arms to fight the enemies in his own strength. He commits the matter to the Lord and lets Him take care of it. "From the Lord comes deliverance," said David in verse 8. He called out to God to pour out His blessing on His people in their time of trouble.

How often in my trials have I chosen to take matters into my own hands? David could have refused to allow his son to send him into hiding. He had won many battles and was a very seasoned and skilled warrior. He could have taken his stand and defended his honour and reputation. He could have fought for the throne that had rightfully been given to him by God. He chose not to do this. Instead he chose to let God deal with the matter in His own way.

The challenge for us in our difficulties is to seek God's heart and will. In those times (and all other times as well) we are to look to Him for direction and guidance. Our confidence should not be in our ability but in the will and purpose of God to defend and lead us. We rest behind his shield confident that, in time, he will lift up our heads.

For Consideration:

- Does David feel the pain of betrayal in this passage? Will Christians suffer today?

- How was David able to sleep in this time of trouble? What application is there for us in this?
- What is the difference between trusting the Lord and trusting ourselves?
- What problems are you facing today? What does this psalm teach you about dealing with those problems?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is our shield.
- Ask the Lord to help you to learn how to distinguish between taking matters into your own hands and trusting Him and His leading.
- Thank the Lord that He will not abandon you in your time of trouble.
- Thank the Lord that, while for a time our heads may hang low, He is the one who lifts our head.

4

A PEOPLE SET APART

Read Psalm 4:1-8

Psalm 4 is a psalm of David. In the music of the temple it was intended for stringed instruments.

In this psalm, David looks around him and sees the ungodly and their lack of concern for righteousness. Many of these individuals were seeking false gods. He felt the grieving and angry heart of God as he looked around him at those practising false religions. Notice in verse 1, how he pleaded with God to answer him and give him relief from his distress. The reason for his distress is found in verse 2. He saw the people of his day turning glory into shame. They loved delusions and sought false gods. Let's examine this in more detail.

David begins by lamenting the fact that people of his day had turned his "glory into shame." It is difficult to understand exactly what David was thinking here. What did David consider his glory? It could be that he saw his glory as a king in following the Lord and His ways. If this is the case,

then David is lamenting the fact that the people of the land were not following the glorious way of the Lord. In fact, they were seeing the way of the Lord as backward and old fashioned. It may also be that the glory of David was the Lord Himself. In this case, the psalmist is lamenting the fact that the people of his day were turning their backs on God and despising those who honoured Him. In any case, David grieved because the Lord and His ways were being dishonoured in the land.

Instead of turning to the Lord, the people of his day loved delusions and sought false gods. The delusions were their own ideas or the teachings of the false religions. These ideas and teachings offered no hope but people still clung to them. In doing so, they turned their back on the truth of God and His Word.

David cries out, asking how long these individuals will let themselves be deceived by delusions and false teachings. There is a tone of sorrow and grief here. His heart is both angry and sorrowful at the thought of so many individuals falling prey to falsehood and deceit. David's heart questions what is happening around him. Why are so many people caught up in the lies of the enemy, he asks. Why do these false religions seem to prosper? Why do they seem to lead so many people into their trap? These same questions could be asked today.

In verse 3, David is comforted by the fact that the Lord had set apart a godly people for Himself. David found comfort in the fact that he was not alone in his pursuit of God. There were others who shared his heart. These individuals had been set apart for God and His glory. They had not been deceived by the ways of the world and false religion.

Like David, they loved and served the one true God of Israel.

These people the Lord had set apart were not always accepted by the world. Sometimes they were persecuted and ridiculed. David found comfort in the fact that the Lord would hear the cries of those He had set apart for Himself. When they cried to Him, God would answer them.

While David's heart grieved because of the state of his society, there were two things that encouraged him. The first was that he was not alone in his effort to live the righteous life. God had set apart a people for himself. The second encouragement was in the fact that no matter what happened to them, they had a God who was concerned about them and would listen to their cry for help.

In verse 4, the Psalmist told his readers that in their anger they were not to sin but instead search their hearts and be silent. There would have been many reasons for God's people to be angry. The ungodly oppressed those who followed the Lord. These ungodly individuals perverted justice and lived dishonestly. In David's day, he watched as his own son sought to overthrow him. These things gave legitimate cause for anger. We should be angry at injustice, immorality and dishonesty.

David reminded his readers, however, that while there was legitimate cause for anger, they were to be careful not to sin. Anger can lead us to sin. In our anger, it is easy to lash out. Instead of leaving the matter to God, we take it on ourselves. Anger must be controlled lest we fall into sin ourselves.

In verse 4, David tells us that when we are angry we are to search our hearts. The searching of our hearts may have to do with examining our own lives and attitudes. Anger is fertile soil for sin. It is in this time that we need to be very careful to look for any signs of sin sprouting in the soil of anger. When we see a wrong attitude, we need to root it out.

David also tells us in verse 4 that not only are we to search our hearts when we are angry but we are also to be silent. This is not to say that we are never to speak out against the injustice around us. What it does mean, however, is that we take the time to be silent before the Lord and to listen for His leading and direction. There may be times when the Lord will call us to step out and be very vocal about the injustice and evil. At other times, He will lead us to wait on His timing. When we are angry for a legitimate reason, David tells us that we should take our time before acting. We need to seek the Lord for guidance and protection. We are to wait on Him and let Him lead. Only then should we respond, and then only as He directs. As we wait and listen, we are kept from sinning in our anger.

David tells us in verse 5 that when we see evil around us and people seeking after falsehood and lies, we are to continue to offer right sacrifices to the Lord and trust in Him. We must not let the ways of the world shape our thinking. We are not to be influenced by evil men and women. We are not to lose hope. Instead, we are to trust in the Lord and do what is right. We must shine as an example of truth and righteousness in the midst of darkness. We are not to allow our sacrifices to the Lord to be stained with sin or evil attitudes.

At the time David wrote this psalm, there were many people asking: "Who can show us any good?" It may have been that it was becoming more and more difficult in that society to see good. Those who sought after the delusions of the false religions were becoming more numerous. It was becoming more difficult to find those who truly sought God. The evil practices of the day may have overshadowed the practice of God's Law, so that people began to ask if there was any good at all in the land.

In light of this question, David simply calls out to the Lord to let His face shine on him and His people. David asks God to show His favour and to pour His blessing. He was confident that, even in the darkness of his day, God's blessing could change everything.

David was not without hope. God had filled his heart with more joy than when the new wine and grain abounded. He was experiencing the joy of the Lord in his heart. That joy came in the midst of all the evil that abounded around him. It was a joy that the world could not take away. He took comfort in this.

Notice also that David was at peace in his life. This peace was the result of his relationship with God. He told his readers in verse 8, that he could lie down and sleep in peace because God kept him safe.

David grieved over the condition of his society. His heart was overwhelmed because evil people were becoming more numerous. The righteous person was mocked. His society had come to a place where people were asking if there was any good in the land. David found comfort in the fact that God had set aside a people who belonged to Him.

God surrounded those people and listened to their cries. He protected them and kept them safe. For this reason, David took courage. He challenged his readers to persevere in offering righteous sacrifices to God. They were to trust in their God because He would listen to their cries. They were in the minority but God was on their side. For this reason, they were joyous and confident.

For Consideration:

- What evidence is there in this passage that David grieved because of evil in his society? How much does the evil in your society grieve you?
- Is there a time to be angry? What does David teach us about anger in this passage? What two things does he tell us to do when we are angry?
- What does it mean to be set apart by God? What encouragement does this bring you personally?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to bring your community to the Lord. Ask Him to deal with sin and open the hearts of men and women to the truth of the gospel.
- Ask the Lord to help you in your anger not to sin. Ask Him to teach you to search your heart and be silent before Him.
- Thank the Lord for the joy He has put in your heart.
- Ask the Lord to keep you true to Him no matter what happens around you.

5

NO PLEASURE IN EVIL

Read Psalm 5:1-12

This psalm was written by David. It was put to music and sung in worship of the Lord. According to the heading of this psalm, the music for this psalm was written for flutes.

This psalm is closely related in theme to the fourth psalm. In it, David's heart is heavy. Notice in verse 1 how he speaks of his sighing, an indication of something weighing heavily on his heart. As we begin the psalm, David pleads with the Lord, his King and God, to listen to his cry.

Notice that he calls the Lord his King and his God. David knows that he is subject to a higher authority. Even though he is king, he bows in submission to the Lord his God and recognises his need of Him.

David cried out to the Lord in the morning. The sense here is that David habitually cried out to the Lord in the morning. In the midst of a busy schedule, David found time to commit his problems to the Lord. Notice that this was not an

empty tradition for David. David believed the Lord heard those requests (verse 3). More than that, however, in verse 3, David told God that he waited before Him in expectation. David believed that God would answer his requests. He waited for God's answer. When he got out of bed in the morning, David committed himself to the Lord and watched to see what God would do. He did not doubt that God would move in answer to his prayers.

What was it that grieved David's heart? It seems to be the wickedness around him. In verse 4, David recognised that God took no pleasure in evil. The wicked person could not dwell with God. Evil grieves His heart. The proud and sinful person cannot stand in the presence of God. David goes as far as to say that God hates all who do wrong (verse 5).

What did David mean when he said that God hated all who do wrong? Every one of us has sinned. My life is far from perfect. What are God's feelings toward me? What we need to understand here is that even David who wrote this Psalm understood that he was a sinner. There were things in his life that grieved the heart of God. David is not telling us that we have to be perfect for God to love us. If this were the case, then God would not be able to love any of us. It seems best to understand this to mean that the anger of God is directed toward those who have rejected His purposes and live in sin. Because He is a holy God, God will turn His back on those who choose to live in sin and reject Him. He would not hesitate to judge them. They will be separated from Him for eternity.

David went on in verse 6, to say that God destroyed those who told lies. He dealt with bloodthirsty and deceitful men. David praises the Lord for His justice. He was thankful that

God dealt with sin. Wickedness would not prosper. Evil would not prevail. God was watching over His creation and would one day come to judge. Goodness and righteousness would prevail. This was a great comfort to David.

Notice in verse 7, that David has great confidence in his own personal relationship with the Lord God. It was not that he felt he deserved this relationship. He knew that he too had sinned in his life and grieved the heart of God. It was only because of the mercy of God that David could come to the temple and enter the presence of the Lord. He did not take this relationship with God for granted.

Notice in verse 7, how David approached the Lord God. He came to the temple where God's presence was revealed with reverence. He bowed down toward His temple where God's presence was revealed. David has an interesting relationship with the Lord God. He is free to come to Him and open his heart to Him but he comes with great reverence and honour.

David realised he needed the strength and wisdom of God. In verse 8, he asks God to lead him into His righteousness. He did not pretend that he could live the life God required by his own strength and wisdom. He drew his strength from God. David knew that because of his role as king, he especially needed the strength and wisdom of the Lord. In verse 8, David told God that he needed to be led in righteousness because of his enemies. In light of the evil enemies that surrounded him, David pleaded with God to make His way straight or clear to him. In this time of trouble, David especially needed clarity to know the ways of the Lord and strength to walk in them.

As David looked around him, he saw many who were not living for the Lord. Their hearts were filled with destruction. Their words were filled with evil and death. Their mouths spoke deceitful words. Maybe David had been hurt by some of those words.

David pleads with God to declare these individuals guilty. "Let their intrigues be their downfall," he said to God in verse 10. In other words, he asks God to let them fall into their own trap. All the things they were planning for others would one day be what destroyed and condemned them. David called the Lord to act justly and banish those who practised evil.

Notice the request of David for those who loved God. He asked first that God allow His people to take refuge in Him. When evil abounded and seemed to be crowding in on them, they could find a hiding place or a place of refuge from the storm and trials that surrounded them. David prayed that God would shelter those who belonged to Him in the day of their trouble.

Second, he asked that God would give them joy. David knew what it was like to live with negative emotions. Sorrow, grief and a sense of hopelessness were enemies to what God wanted for His people. Yet they were the natural result of being surrounded by evil. David asked God to give His people joy in their time of struggle. He wanted his people to be able to sing for joy even in days of despair.

Thirdly, David asked God to spread His protection over His people so that they could rejoice in Him. We understand from this that God not only wants to give us victory but also wants us to live in joy and rejoicing no matter the situation.

Notice the subject of their rejoicing. It was not in their problems but in the Lord God, Himself. David was asking the Lord that in time of deep trouble, He would draw close to His people and that they would find great joy in His presence and person.

David concluded with a clear statement about the Lord God. He believed that God blessed the righteous and surrounded them with His favour like a shield. What he was asking God here in this Psalm was not against His character. It was the heart of God to bless and surround His people with favour. David only asks God to do what he knows He would delight in doing. For this reason, he had every reason to wait in expectation. God did not take pleasure in evil. He would judge evil and protect His people, surrounding them with joy and rejoicing in His presence.

For Consideration:

- Is it important that we have time with the Lord? When David spent time with the Lord, he waited in expectation on Him. Is this part of your time with God? Do you wait on Him in expectation throughout the day? If not, how can you make this part of your time with God?
- Do we have to be perfect for God to accept us?
- Do you have confidence that you can stand before God? What role does mercy have in your standing before God?
- We see in this passage that David comes to God for wisdom and strength to live in the way of righteousness. To what extent do we need God's

strength and wisdom to live as He would have us live?

- What is the subject of rejoicing and joy here in this psalm? What is the difference between rejoicing in circumstances and rejoicing in God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to learn how to wait in expectation on Him each day.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He accepts those who come to Him in faith and repentance.
- Thank God that He is a God of justice who will deal with sin.
- David's prayer for the righteous of his day who faced opposition from the evil was that God would be a refuge for them, that He would give them joy and that He would spread His protection over them. Take a moment to pray this prayer for someone who is facing opposition today.
- Ask the Lord to help you understand more of what it means to rejoice in Him and His presence.

6

UNFAILING LOVE

Read Psalm 6:1-10

The Psalmist trusts in the Lord but still felt pain and agony. God does not always take our agony away but He does promise to be with us in the difficult times and in this we can find great joy. In Psalm 6, David openly expresses the pain he feels but also shows us that in this pain, his confidence is in the Lord God.

The psalm was written by David and intended for use in the public worship of the Lord God. It was put to music and played with stringed instruments. Notice in the prelude to the psalm, it was written according to "sheminith." The term appears to indicate a specific musical style.

David opens the psalm by asking God not to rebuke him in anger or discipline him in wrath. The key to understanding this verse has to do with how God disciplines and rebukes. God often disciplined David. As we examine the life of David, we see that he was willing to accept this discipline. David is not asking God to stop disciplining him. He

is asking God to do so with gentleness and compassion. Where would we be if the Lord God lashed out in vengeance and fury on us? What would happen to us if, in His wrath, God did not remember mercy and love? Surely in His holiness and justice, God would consume us. In love and compassion, however, He spares us from the severity of His wrath.

David is not asking God to ignore sin and rebellion. He is asking Him to show mercy toward him in his weakness. He speaks particularly about himself here. As a king and a servant of God, David certainly had his share of suffering and trials. These trials were taking a lot out of him. He asked God to be merciful to him because he was weak and faint. He asked to heal his bones for he was in agony.

Notice in verse 3, that not only was his body tired but so was his soul. David told the Lord that his soul was in anguish. The reality of the matter is that the Lord's people will have times of anguish and sorrow in this life. Even Jesus was troubled in His heart (John 11:33). Being a believer does not guarantee that we will never have sorrow. In verse 3, the anguish of David was such that he wondered how long he would have to endure it. He does not see the end of his suffering.

David knew that the Lord was a God of unfailing love. It is on the basis of this love that he pleaded with Him to deliver Him from the anguish of his soul. God's healing is not so much a demonstration of power as it is a demonstration of love. It is love that moves Him to respond to our cries for help.

Notice in verse 5, that the suffering of David was such that he feared for his life. There were many times in the life of this great man when suffering seemed to overwhelm him. David had a heart to worship the Lord. For him to live was to worship and praise the Lord. "Who praises you from the grave?" David asks in verse 5. Maybe he was asking the Lord to let him live so he could continue to live and praise His name on the earth.

The pain and suffering David experienced was so great that in verse 6, he reminded the Lord that he was worn out from groaning. The agony was so deep that he wept all night and soaked his bed with tears. It seemed that all joy was gone for David. His eyes were constantly weighted down with tears. His enemies were the cause of these tears. They made his life very difficult.

Have you ever been in a situation where you could not see an end to the problems and pain you were experiencing? There have been times in my life personally when there was no song in my heart. The weight of trouble seemed to be so great that I wondered if there was any reason to continue.

While David knew deep pain and affliction, he also knew the Lord God. Knowing the Lord God made a difference. As long as God was on His throne, there was hope. In verse 8, he lifts up his eyes and cries out: "Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping." I wish I could have been there when David spoke these words. In that instant, his eyes were lifted from his pain to the victory of the Lord. What a blessing this must have been for him. He knew that God had heard his cry and was touched by his pain. God would come to his rescue.

David knew that the Lord would not abandon him in his time of need. He trusted in the unfailing love of his God. In times of trouble, it is important for us to be assured of our relationship with God. David knew God. He knew that He would never leave him in his time of need. God had heard his cry and had accepted his prayer. His enemies would stand before God and answer for what they had done to David. They would be ashamed of what they had done. They would be dismayed and turn back in sudden disgrace.

This would happen because God loved David and cared about what he was going through. In his time of need, David took great comfort in his relationship with the Lord God. He knew God would never leave him. He knew that because of God's unfailing love, his enemies could never ultimately triumph over him. Do we have such a deep assurance of our relationship with God today?

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt the discipline or rebuke of the Lord? Explain.
- Do Christians suffer today? How does having a personal relationship with God give us strength to face the trials that come our way?
- How did David's relationship with God strengthen and encourage him in his time of suffering and trouble?
- What does our reaction to suffering tell us about the type of relationship we have with our Lord?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He hears our cry for help.
- Thank the Lord for His unfailing love. Thank Him that we can face life with confidence because of this love.
- Ask the Lord to draw you closer so that you can face your trials with confident assurance in Him.

7

ARISE, O LORD

Read Psalm 7:1-17

Psalm 7 was written at a time in David's life when his enemies were pressing in on him. In the prelude to this psalm, we are told that this psalm was written regarding Cush, a Benjamite.

Various ideas have been suggested regarding the identity of Cush in this verse. Some propose that "Cush" is a name used for Saul.¹ Those who propose this idea do so on the basis that Saul was a Benjamite and the fact that Saul was the son of Kish a word quite similar to "cush" (see 1 Samuel 9:1-2). Others propose it was one of Saul's servants

¹ Adam Clarke, Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible, converted for Palm Bible Plus: Geneva Bible Translation Notes (From Sword Project converted for Palm Bible Plus by Alistair Baty.

seeking to harm David.² A third proposal is a man by the name of Shimei who according to 2 Samuel 6:5-6 cursed David as he fled from his Son Absalom. Ultimately, we do not know who Cush is.

What is clear is that Cush opposed and troubled David. In verse 1, David found a refuge in the Lord. He asked Him to deliver him from those who pursued him. David knew the intentions of his enemies. In verse 2, he made it clear that if God did not deliver him, his enemies would tear him apart like a lion devouring its prey.

David was quite willing to receive discipline from the Lord. In verse 3, he told God that if he was guilty of tearing his enemy apart like a lion or if there was any guilt on his hands he was willing to let his enemy overtake him. If he had done evil to someone who was at peace with him or robbed his enemy, he was willing to let his enemy pursue him and trample his life into the ground (verse 5).

The context indicates, however, that David's problems were not the result of any personal sin. David was being pursued by his enemies even though he had done no wrong. Bad things happen to good people at times. We see this in the case of Job or even the Lord Jesus. We are not promised a trouble free life. The apostle Paul, speaking to Timothy said:

² John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Public Domain, Extracted from freegrace.net

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

David was no exception to this principle. He loved the Lord and sought to serve Him but also knew what it was like to run from his enemies.

How many of the Psalms would never have been written were it not for David facing trouble in his life? How often have godly people turned to the book of Psalms in their time of need and found wonderful comfort? Because of his troubles, David is able to identify with those who suffer to-day. God will sometimes allow us to suffer so that we can minister to others.

David does not hesitate to come to the Lord and ask Him for help in his time of need. In verse 6, he asked Him to rise up in anger against the rage of his enemies. He cried out to God for justice. He asked God to gather His people around Him and rule over them. This is a picture of protection. God gathers His people around Him in their time of trouble to protect them. Like a loving shepherd He gathers His sheep next to him and takes a stand against their enemies.

Notice in verse 8 that David asked God to judge him according to his righteousness and integrity. He was confident that he was walking with God in all sincerity. He knew that he was not sinning against the Lord. The trouble he was experiencing was not the result of some personal, hidden sin in his life.

David asked God to bring an end to violence and make the righteous secure (verse 9). He was confident that God,

who searched hearts and minds, would be his shield. God knew the intentions of the wicked. He also saw the heart of the righteous. He would not allow injustice to triumph. God was a righteous judge.

David knew that if the wicked person did not stop his evil, God would sharpen His sword and bend His bow to judge and punish. Even now, God's weapons of justice were ready to be shot from His bow. His flaming arrow of justice would soon hit its mark and give relief for His people.

Those who were pregnant with evil and conceived trouble would give birth to disillusionment. In other words, they would be disappointed with what they conceived. They had great plans but those plans would leave them disappointed and defeated. Those who dug a hole would fall into the hole they made. Those who plotted and practised evil would suffer the consequences of that evil. The evil they practised and plotted would destroy them.

In his time of trouble, David found refuge in God. Though he suffered, he knew God was holy and just and would not let injustice and evil triumph. David chose to give thanks and praise to the Lord. Though for the moment, he was pursued by his enemies, the Lord heard his cry and would arise and come to his aid. God would triumph over evil.

In times of trial, it is very easy for us to focus on our pain and suffering. David teaches us here that it is better to set our eyes on the Lord and what we understand about His character. He will gather us around Him and shelter us in our day of trouble. He will rise up and defend the cause of justice and righteousness. When we look up from our pain

and trials to the Lord, we can find comfort and assurance even in the deepest pain.

For Consideration:

- How does David's confidence in the justice and holiness of God encourage him in his time of trouble?
- How did God use David's trouble to accomplish good?
- What does David ask God to do for him in his time of trouble?
- In what way does the evil we practice come back to us in the end? Have you seen this in your experience?

For Prayer:

- In his trouble, David had reason to praise the Lord. What reason do you have to praise the Lord today?
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of justice and holiness.
- Thank the Lord for the times when He was a refuge for you in your time of trouble.
- Ask the Lord to help you to take your eyes off your suffering and lift them up to His face where there is comfort and assurance.

8

WHAT IS MAN?

Read Psalm 8:1-9

We have seen in the previous psalms that David had his share of troubles. In those times, he would turn to God for help. He was overwhelmed by the grace and compassion of his God to deliver him. In this psalm, David expresses his amazement at God's interest in His people.

He begins in verse 1 with a statement of praise.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

A name represents the character of the individual who bears that name. The Lord was majestic. Majesty is the quality of royalty. Majesty inspires awe. When majesty passes by, we bow in reverence and praise.

David also tells us that the Lord God set His glory above the heavens. The sense here seems to be that the glory of

the Lord is greater than the glory of the heavens. The heavens were, from an earthly point of view, the most glorious part of all of the creation of God. Who among us has not looked out at a sunset and been awe struck at the glory? Who among us had not lain on our backs looking up at the sky and been impressed by the vastness of it all? The glory of God is far greater than anything the heavens could ever display. Nothing on earth could ever compare to God.

This glorious and majestic God ordained praise from the lips of children and infants. There are two possible interpretations of this verse. It is possible to see this reference to refer literally to children and infants. If this is the case, David speaks of the miracle of birth and life in small children and how this speaks of a creator God. I remember after the birth of each of our children, the sense of awe that struck me when they were born. Their birth was nothing short of a miracle. Who among us can watch the birth of a child and not be brought to praise and thanksgiving for the miracle of life. Even those who do not believe in God or who are living in rebellion stop for a moment and in silence reflect on the miracle of birth and life.

It may also be possible to see a reference in this verse to spiritual children. Jesus speaking in Matthew 11:25 said:

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

In speaking of children here the Lord is not necessarily speaking about those who are under a certain age. He

uses the illustration of children to speak of simple people, young in their faith and understanding of God. In this sense, we are all children called to bring praise and glory to our Living Lord.

The Lord moves in power through simple children of faith. Through them, He accomplishes His purposes on this earth. Through them, He overcomes His enemies. These simple children of faith silence their enemies who are powerless before them because of God's strength in them.

As David looked at the vastness of the heavens, he realised that they were the works of God's fingers. He saw the moon and the stars that God had set in place and was amazed at the wisdom and power of this almighty God. Then he looked at himself and was even more amazed that such a powerful God should be concerned for human beings.

Why should God be concerned about men and women? Why should He be interested in what they were going through? What would move such a big and awesome God to reach out to people like you and me and treat us with such love and compassion? Over and over again, David saw the awesome God of this universe reach down from heaven to touch him in love. He watched this God silence his enemies in defeat. This never ceased to amaze David. Why should God treat him with such love and compassion? He knew he didn't deserve this attention but praised God that He considered him so precious in His eyes.

God created men and women a little lower than the heavenly beings. In terms of creation, mankind was not as powerful or as glorious in nature as the angels. The angels live

in the presence of God in heaven. Men and women live on this earth and were subject to the effects of age and death. Though not like the angels of heaven, God yet crowned mankind with glory and honour. That is to say, God honoured men and women by creating them in His image. He honoured them by placing value on their lives. He made them the ruler over the earth and all that He created on the earth. He put all things on earth under their authority. They were to rule over the flocks, herds and the beasts of the field. They were rulers over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. This was an honour given to human beings by the Creator of the universe. David is amazed at how the majestic and awesome God of the universe would bless men and women in such a way. He praises Him from the bottom of his heart for such love and compassion.

There are three things we need to understand in this psalm. The first is the value the Lord God places on a human being. David wonders why the Lord would even consider human beings at all. He understood, however, that the Lord honoured them and gave them authority over the earth. The Lord God places great value on human life.

The second thing we need to understand from this passage is that if God values human life, so should we. This has implications in our relationship with each other in the body of Christ. It has implications in regard to how we treat the unbeliever or the outcasts in society. We need to understand the implications of this psalm on our relationship with people of other cultures. God created us all and values men and women from all cultures and ranks of society. There is no room for prejudice or racism. This psalm has implication for abortion. Even the life of the unborn child must be respected because God values that life.

Finally, this psalm shows us our responsibility to care for this earth. We do not always take this matter seriously. If God has given us authority over his creation how important it is that we respect the environment and do our best to honour God by being responsible for what He has given us.

For Consideration:

- What is majesty? How is God majestic?
- How is the glory of God shown in the earth and the sky?
- What does this psalm teach us about the value of human life?
- What does this psalm teach us about our responsibility to care for this earth? What are some practical ways we can do our part in caring for the earth?
- If God values us as human beings, what implication does this have practically in our relationship with others?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His majesty. Take a moment to praise Him for being such a majestic God.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can be a better steward of the earth He has given you to care for.
- Thank the Lord that He values you as a human being.

- Ask the Lord to help you to value your brothers and sisters.
- Thank the Lord that He loves you personally and values your life.

9

KNOWN BY HIS JUSTICE

Read Psalm 9:1-20

David knew God to be a God of justice. Repeatedly in the psalm, the theme of justice comes to the surface. The justice of God was David's hope. He knew that while evil things happened all around him, God would one day call all people to account for their actions.

David begins Psalm 9 by praising the Lord with all his heart. Notice that he tells the Lord that he will praise Him and tell of all His wonders. The idea is that he would praise Him and speak of His wonders on an ongoing basis. This was not a one-time event for David. He had come through many troubles in life. It was very likely that he would go through many more. Despite the fact that he would face great trials, David made it his absolute commitment to praise the Lord. He would praise Him in the good times as well as in the difficult times.

In verse 2, he told the Lord that he would be glad, rejoice and sing praise to the Most High. Again it is important for

us to realise that David's life was full of problems. His commitment was to be glad and to rejoice in the Lord. This was a choice he had to make. There would be many things that came to rob him of this joy. Notice, however that the joy David experienced was not in his problems but in the Lord. This is an important distinction. When we rejoice in the Lord we remind ourselves of His goodness and sovereignty. We remember that He is a God of justice and holiness. We recognise that He will use everything that comes our way to refine and shape us into His image. To rejoice in the Lord is to know that He is still in control and that the enemy can do nothing to us that God will not use for good (Romans 8:28). We may not always be able to rejoice in the suffering we face but we can know the joy of being held in the arms of a sovereign and loving God.

At this point in David's life, it seems that the Lord was demonstrating His power by turning his enemies back. David did not take this for granted. His heart exploded with joy and thanksgiving because the Lord had reached down to him in his time of trouble. His enemies were stumbling and perishing before the Lord God. This moved his heart to praise and thanksgiving.

The Lord saw the trouble David was facing. He knew the heart of his servant and came to his rescue. God sat on His throne and judged with righteousness. He was a sovereign God who would not allow injustice to triumph over His servant David. In justice, God rebuked the nations. He destroyed the wicked, wiping their names from the earth forever. These enemies were uprooted from their cities never to be remembered again.

David tells us in verses 7-8 that the Lord reigned forever and established His throne for judgement. He would judge the world in righteousness. Because the Lord's judges with righteousness, He will always do what is right. He will not allow evil and wickedness to triumph. While we live in a world where wickedness and evil abound, God sees this and will one day judge. Evil cannot triumph because God is a God of righteous judgement. There is great hope for us in this.

David goes on to remind us that God will be a refuge for the oppressed (verse 9). He will be a stronghold for them in their time of trouble. His arms will always be open to those who need Him. In this, David could rejoice. He knew that while trouble may come for the believer, God would also be there for them.

Those who knew the Lord could fully trust Him. God would never forsake anyone who sought Him. What a wonderful comfort this is in the face of life's conflicts. God has never forsaken anyone who came to Him seeking help and comfort in their time of need. He may not come right away. He may not even take the problem away but we can be sure that He has heard our cry and will not abandon us in our time of need.

This was cause for rejoicing. David again breaks out in praise to the Lord who was enthroned in Zion. He was ruling and in control of everything. Nothing was out of His control. The nations needed to hear the wonders of our God. His people need to declare aloud the good things God has done for them. Our God will avenge the blood that the enemy has spilt. He will not ignore the cry of the afflicted.

As David writes this psalm, he is struggling personally. Notice in verse 13 how he cries out to the Lord: "See how my enemies persecute me!" He asks God to have mercy on him and to lift him up from the gates of death. This shows us just how deeply oppressed David was. He had been brought to the "gates of death." His only hope was in the Lord God and what he knew about Him as a loving, compassionate and just God.

Notice in verse 14 the reason why David wanted to be lifted from the gates of death. His desire was to praise the Lord God. His deliverance was not for himself alone. He wanted fuel for the furnace of praise. He delighted in praising the Lord. Each trouble and trial the Lord delivered him from was another reason to praise Him. Notice that David wanted to stand in the gates of Zion and rejoice publicly in the salvation of the Lord. He was not ashamed to praise the Lord and boast to others about the goodness of God on his behalf. He wanted everyone to hear about the goodness of his God.

David had seen nations fall into the pit they had dug for him. He had seen them fall into their own traps. God was a just God. He would not allow the nations to continue in their wickedness forever. The day would come when the evil they did to others would fall on them.

How important it is that we understand the truth of what David is saying in this passage. He is reminding us that God is very much aware of the evil that is happening all around us. He is telling us that those who practice evil will one day have to pay for the evil they practise. They may seem to profit from that evil for the moment but it will all

come falling down on them in the end. Only death and judgement awaited those who did evil.

As for the needy, David reminded them that they would not be forgotten. It is true that there are moments when we wonder if the Lord hears our prayer. The Lord's timing is not the same as ours. While the Lord may delay in answering our prayer, we will not be forgotten. He hears the prayer of the needy and will respond when the time is right. David reminds us in verse 18 that the afflicted can always have hope in their God.

David concludes the psalm with a cry to God for justice to prevail. He calls on God to arise so that mankind will not triumph over His purposes. He calls on God to rise up and judge the nations, striking them with terror so that they knew that they were mere humans.

Are there not times when we can forget that we are mere human beings? Has our history not revealed men and women who came to believe that they were gods? These individuals feel that they are in control of their circumstances and their lives. What a terrifying thing it will be when the Lord God rises to judge. The day will come when all will stand before the one true God. Though for a moment we may be oppressed and troubled, let us lift up our eyes. God will not forsake His people. He is a just God who reigns from His throne. Though He tarries, He will come. He will rise and judge the earth. He will not forget the cry of His children. He will be a refuge for them in trouble. We have every reason to praise and thank Him.

For Consideration:

- Is it possible to praise the Lord in the midst of opposition and trouble?
- What is the difference between rejoicing in the Lord and trying to rejoice in our problems?
- What do we learn about God's timing? Does He always answer in our time?
- What is the warning of this psalm to the wicked?
- What is the response of David to the Lord's deliverance and salvation?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the victory He has promised. Thank Him that He does not forget those who are His.
- Ask the Lord to shelter you in the midst of your trouble until He sees fit to deliver you completely from it.
- Take a moment to remember how the Lord set you free from a particular time of trouble in the past. Thank the Lord for this and the lessons you learned in it.
- Ask the Lord to help you to praise Him more in your time of trouble; knowing that He is a God of justice and righteousness.

10

THE LORD WHO HEARS

Read Psalm 10:1-18

There are times in the life of the believer when he or she wonders about the purposes and plans of God. Sometimes God seems to be very distant. The Psalmist understood this sense of isolation from God.

In verse 1, the Psalmist cries out:

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you
hide yourself in times of trouble?

There is probably nothing more devastating for the believer than the sense that God is distant. When the believer has a clear sense of the presence of God; there is nothing he or she cannot face. Believers have willingly laid down their lives and faced tremendous obstacles. Their strength to do this was in the sense of the Lord's presence with them. When the Lord seems distant, we lose courage.

While it is true that there are times when the Lord remains silent, there are also times when our trouble blinds us to His presence. Here the Psalmist cried out to God. In his time of trouble, he needed to see the Lord God. He needed to know that God was in control.

In verse 2, we see the reason for the Psalmist's discouragement. The wicked were hunting down the weak. They were devising schemes to trap them and to prosper from their fall. They boasted about their cravings and blessed those who were greedy. Their desire was for material possessions. They were caught up on the trap of materialism and greed. Worldly goods became their god. They would oppress and trouble the needy to enrich their own pockets.

These people had no time for God. They had no desire to seek Him. There was no room in their thoughts for God and His ways. All they could think about was how to enrich themselves. They lived for riches and possessions.

What troubled the Psalmist was the fact that these individuals prospered. They were proud people who didn't seem to suffer or struggle in life yet they would have nothing to do with the law of God. They laughed at their enemies. They felt protected and secure behind their wealth.

They felt that nothing could harm them. They believed that their happiness came from their riches and they would be happy forever. They believed their money could keep them from any trouble (verse 6).

These individuals treated those around them with disrespect. They felt they could do whatever their hearts desired. They cursed, lied and threatened their neighbours.

Their tongues were filled with evil and trouble. They felt that their money was power. They felt secure in their riches. Verse 10 tells us that they would lie in wait near the villages. They would ambush and murder those who passed by. They were a law unto themselves. They made their own rules. They took what they wanted and enriched themselves off the backs of the poor. Like lions hiding under cover, they would trap the helpless and drag whatever they could back into their nets. They crushed and destroyed their victims. Their wealth made them strong. They used their strength to devour anyone who stood in their way.

These individuals believed a lie. They believed that because God did not punish them immediately, He had forgotten their crimes. They believed that they could commit their crimes and God would not see or take into account what they had done.

The Psalmist cried out to God in verse 12 and asked Him to rise up and deal with the wicked. He pleaded with God not to forget the helpless. Though he could not see the Lord at this time, he did not lose hope.

What grieved the Psalmist was not only that the wicked person oppressed the needy but also that they cursed God and ignored His law. They believed that they were above the Law of God. Somehow, they felt that God would never hold them accountable for their actions (verse 13).

While God did seem far away, the Psalmist clung to the truth that God did see the trouble and grief His people were facing. He knew in his heart that God would take matters into His hands. He knew that the helpless victim could

commit himself or herself to God and God would be a helper to the fatherless (verse 14).

The Psalmist saw the trouble around him. He saw how evil men prospered. He saw needy people were being oppressed. He heard the threats and curses of the rich and powerful who ignored God and still prospered. How easy it would have been for him to be discouraged. Where was God in all this? Human reason questioned the existence of God or His purposes. The Psalmist, however, looked to the truth of the Word of God and what he knew about God. Sometimes all we will have is the Word of God and His character to trust. Human reason is not enough. Emotions and feelings will fail us. God's word remains.

In verse 15, the Psalmist cried out to God to take action. He asked God to break the arm of the wicked. The arm was a symbol of strength and power. He is asking God to break the power of the wicked over the righteous. He asked God to call the wicked to account for their evil. He wanted God to expose what they had done in secret.

The Psalmist concludes here in verses 16-18 on a very positive note. "The Lord is king forever and ever," he reminded his readers. In other words, the Lord ruled over all the earth. As king, He was in control. As king, every knee would bow before Him and give an account of their actions. The nations who had turned from the Lord would perish under His hand.

The Psalmist was convinced, on the basis of what he knew about God, that He had heard the cries of the needy. He knew their desire. He believed that God would rise up and come to the aid of the afflicted. He would listen to their cry.

He would defend the fatherless and the oppressed. The day was coming when the Lord God would stop the wicked so that they would no longer oppress and terrify the needy.

There is no question in the mind of the Psalmist that the Lord God was in control. He heard the cries of the needy and would come to their aid. Though presently the situation did not look bright, The Psalmist found great comfort in God. Though he could not see God, he did not doubt His character. The truth he knew about Him brought great blessing to his heart in his time of confusion. In times when you cannot see God or hear His voice, look to the truth He has revealed to you about Himself. That truth will bless and keep you until His presence is clearly revealed.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where God seemed distant? How did you handle that situation?
- What do we learn here about the importance of truth in getting us through those times when God seems distant?
- What do we see in this passage about the deceitfulness of materialism? What lies do those caught in its trap believe?
- What encouragement do you find in this Psalm for your time of need?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you more of His character so that you will have strength in times of trouble.
- Thank the Lord that He rules over all situations and that there is nothing out of His control.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord for what He has revealed to you about Himself.
- Do you know someone who is facing trouble right now? Ask the Lord to reveal Himself to them in a very special way.

11

THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS

Read Psalm 11:1-7

The eleventh psalm is a psalm of David. Notice that it is written for the director of music. This indicates that it was intended for public worship. David wanted the message of this psalm to be an encouragement to future generations. He knew that his struggles were not unique to himself alone.

David begins by reminding us that he found a refuge in the Lord. A refuge is a place of retreat from the trouble around us. It is a place of security and peace in the midst of the storms of life. It is this place to which we can retreat when things around us seem to be falling apart. The Lord was a retreat for David. In the Lord, he found security and peace from the trials of life.

David knew his share of problems. Both King Saul and his son Absalom sought to kill him. He had many enemies. A good part of his life was spent running from Saul. According to verse 1, there were times when David's friends

would advise him to flee to the mountains to escape these enemies. David did listen to the counsel of his friends but it was not in their counsel that he trusted. His trust was in the Lord God. He trusted God to deliver and protect him.

I remember speaking to a dear Christian friend some time ago who told me how much she prepared for her Sunday school class. I listened to what she was telling me and when she was finished, I asked her if she was trusting in her preparation or in the Lord. I know full well how easy it is to trust in our own efforts. While this commentary on the book of psalms is the fruit of many months work, I am fully aware that unless the blessing of the Lord is on these words, they will accomplish nothing of lasting spiritual value. I dare not trust in my careful wording or in my ability to understand Scripture. David had to learn that while he was a skilled warrior, God alone was his refuge and strength.

David was aware of the wicked people around him. Their bows were bent and ready to shoot their arrows. Those deadly arrows were shot from the shadows at the upright (verse 2). The enemy lurked behind these shadows waiting at any moment to take the believer by surprise. We must always be alert. Peter tells us in his first epistle:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

As David fled from his enemies, he had to be constantly watching every step he took. His enemy could be anywhere. When he least suspected it, the enemy arrow would be shot from its bow. This is the same for us as

believers. Satan has us constantly fixed in his sight. Whenever he has an opportunity, he will release his arrow. We must be constantly on guard.

In verse 3, David laments the fact that the foundations were being destroyed. The foundations he speaks of here are the foundations of his society. Principles of morality and righteousness were being eroded. Government and religious leaders were no longer submitting to the truth of the Word of God. There was no more justice in the society. Judges were corrupt. Spiritual leaders were no longer guided by truth. When these foundations are broken down, where is the man or woman of God to turn?

David answers this question in verse 4. He reminded us that the Lord was in his holy temple seated on the throne. While the foundations of society were destroyed, God was still in control. From His throne in heaven; He saw what was happening. He was aware of the struggle of His righteous children. They did not cry to Him in vain.

The day was coming when the Lord would judge those who practised evil. Notice how David said that the Lord hated those who loved violence. God would rain fiery coals, burning sulphur and scorching wind on those who loved violence. He would not allow them to continue in their rebellion.

When David said that the Lord hated the violent, he was not saying that there was no more hope for them. The Lord has always forgiven those who came to Him with a repentant heart. The apostle Paul was a clear example of this. He openly rebelled against the Lord and His ways. He dragged Christians from their homes in an effort to

persecute and stamp them out (Acts 8:3). Paul was forgiven. While the love of God extends to even those who persecute His people, His hatred and judgement is also very real. God does hate sin and cannot fellowship with those who continue in it. If they do not repent, His judgement will fall.

David concludes the psalm by reminding his readers that the Lord is a righteous God who loves justice. Those who lived upright lives would see His face. There are several ways to understand what David meant by seeing God's face. The day is coming when we will see the Lord's face. Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 13:12:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part;
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

It may be that David has this in mind when he speaks of the righteous seeing the face of God. He may be referring to the hope we have of heaven and eternal life.

There is another way that the righteous will see the face of the Lord. The righteous would see the Lord in how He came to deliver them from the evil that surrounded them. God would not leave His children in their pain forever. The day was coming when He would come to their aid and deliver them from their enemies. They would know His presence and see Him move in their midst.

What do we do when evil surrounds us? We run to the Lord. We seek Him and His strength. In Him we can find refuge from the evil that surrounds us. His justice will

protect and avenge our blood. He will not forget those who belong to Him.

For Consideration:

- Has the Lord been a retreat for you? Describe a time when the Lord was a retreat for you.
- David lamented the fact that the foundations of his society had crumbled. To what extent is this true in your society?
- What do we learn in this passage about the hope of the righteous? How does this encourage you to persevere in your struggles?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to strengthen the spiritual and moral foundations of your society.
- Thank the Lord that the day is coming when you will see Him face to face.
- Thank the Lord that while you may have to face trials here below, He is still in control.
- Take a moment to commit yourself and your problems to God. Ask Him to give you grace to trust Him when everything around you seems to be out of control.

12

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Read Psalm 12:1-8

There are times in our lives when we simply do not understand the purposes and plans of God. In these times it seems like wickedness reigns on the earth. The Lord seems distant and we are not able to hear His voice. David was familiar with these feelings.

The psalmist begins this psalm by expressing his concern to the Lord God:

Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men.

As David looked around him, he wondered where the godly were. All around him people seemed to be turning away from the Lord and the principles of His Word. It was rare to find someone who lived for the Lord. This was particularly evident in the way they spoke evil about each other and deceived their neighbours.

David was grieved by what he heard. People spoke lies and deception. A person could not trust his neighbour. This broke David's heart. The very fabric of his society was falling apart. We do not know what it was that stirred David to write this psalm. Maybe he had been deceived himself. Maybe people were speaking lies about him. What is of interest to us is how David deals with this matter.

Notice first how David's heart was broken because his fellow citizens did not follow the Word of the Lord God. We have to admire a person who feels what God feels when it comes to sin. How do we feel when people in our town disregard the Word of God? Are our hearts broken because the Word of our God is dishonoured in our society? David is a man after God's heart. He felt something of what God felt when it came to the lies and deception in his society.

Notice secondly that David took his concerns to the Lord God. What he sees around him brings him to his knees. He cries out to the Lord about the sin of his community. We need more individuals who will cry out to the Lord in prayer about the issues that grieve the heart of God. David does not grumble and complain here. He does not try to get even. He does not even seek to defend his honour and reputation against the lies that were spoken, maybe even against himself. The evil of his society brought him to God in prayer. We need more people like David who will intercede for our communities until the Lord breaks through in cleansing power to restore.

Notice what David prays in verse 3. He asks God to cut off all flattering lips and boastful tongues. As David looked around him he saw a people who trusted in the power of

the tongue. These individuals believed that they could defeat their enemies by speaking out against them. The tongue is a powerful weapon. Consider for a moment the power of the tongue.

With the tongue, a person can destroy the reputation of his neighbour. With the tongue, a person can point his neighbour to a path that will destroy his life. Consider the tempting words of Satan in the Garden of Eden, luring Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Consider the words of the false prophets of the Old Testament who turned the people of God away from the truth. Consider further the words of the people of Jesus' day crying out for His crucifixion. Words have the power to kill.

Notice what the people of David's day were saying: "We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips—who is our master?" (verse 4). These individuals believed in the power of the tongue. The tongue became their master. That is to say, they believed that the tongue could bring them whatever they wanted. By lying, deceiving or boasting they could get people to do whatever they wanted them to do. They elevated the power of the tongue. Who needed a sword when they had their unprincipled tongues?

David gives us a small picture of the power of the tongue here in verse 5. The weak were being oppressed. The needy were groaning in pain and agony because of what had happened to them. No sword was used here. Words alone were able to destroy. Who among us has not been hurt by the power of the tongue?

Having communicated the problem, David then turned his attention to God. He has a sense of the Lord speaking to

him as he writes. "I will now arise," the Lord told him. "I will protect them from those who malign them" (verse 5).

The tongue is a powerful weapon but the Lord is able to defend His people against it. People may say all kinds of evil things against us but God will give us victory. He knows what is spoken out against us. He hears the lies our enemies speak and the boasts they make. Speaking about this very issue, the Lord Jesus said:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12)

God knows what our enemies are saying. He will one day speak out in judgement. He will come to our aid. David was confident that the Lord would keep his people safe and protect them against evil people who used their tongues as weapons against the righteous (see verse 7).

The wicked were strutting about with their proud and boastful words. They felt that they were safe from judgement. What these individuals failed to understand was that as powerful as their words were, the Word of the Lord was even more powerful (verse 6). David reminds us in verse 6 that the words of the Lord were flawless. These words were refined in a furnace of clay seven times. The number seven in Scripture represents perfection. Something that has been purified seven times is perfect.

The word of the Lord is perfect and infinitely more powerful than any word spoken against us today. By that word, the world was created and by it, the world will be judged. David's confidence is in the word of the Lord. God will not fail to defend His people against the words spoken against them.

As we conclude, it is important for us to recognise the power of the tongue in our own lives. How important it is that we watch what we say. Our words can discourage and damage the reputation of our brother and sister in the Lord. They can also be used to build up and encourage. Jesus tells us plainly in Matthew 12:36:

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

May God help us to understand the power of our words.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever been hurt by words that someone spoke against you? Explain.
- What is the power of the tongue? What is it capable of doing?
- What do we learn in this passage about the Word of the Lord?
- What is the challenge of this psalm in regards to how we need to use our words?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to forgive you for any time you did not speak honestly about a brother or sister in the Lord.
- Ask the Lord to help you to honour Him with your words.
- Take a moment to pray for your community. Ask the Lord to restore honesty and integrity.
- Thank the Lord for His Word. Thank Him that you can count on that Word. Thank Him for the hope it gives you.
- Thank the Lord that He will defend you and take up your cause.

13

HOW LONG?

Read Psalm 13:1-6

The Lord's timing is not the same as ours. We are creatures of time. None of us likes to wait a long time to have our prayers answered. Here in the thirteenth psalm, David cries out to God concerning the problems he was facing and questions Him in regards to how long He was taking to answer his pleas for help. To some degree, we have all wondered why God does not answer our prayer as quickly as we would like.

"Will you forget me forever?" David cries in verse 1. We should not assume that David really believed God could possibly forget any of His children. From the conclusion of this psalm, we understand that God's love was unfailing and that He would move in the proper time. When David speaks of God forgetting him, he is speaking in human terms. He speaks about the delay in answer to his prayer. David struggles to understand why God was not moving faster.

In times of waiting on God, our faith is tested. We find ourselves wrestling with the same question David asked. Has God forgotten us, or will He come to our aid? Faith assures us that God will never forget His child, so we continue to wait on Him. At times, it is to strengthen our faith that God asks us to wait.

Notice also that in this time of waiting, David wonders why God had hidden His face from him. In this time of waiting, God seemed distant. Fellowship with God was difficult. Prayers seemed to bounce off the ceiling. These are difficult times for the believer. In this time, our faith is tested. Sometimes we begin to search our souls to see if there is any hidden sin that would cause God to withdraw from us and hide His face. We begin to wonder if there is any hope at all of seeing an answer to our prayer. The silence is terrifying. We wonder how long we can hold on.

We discover in verse 2 that during this time of waiting on God, David wrestled with his thoughts. We are not told what those thoughts were. There were many questions on his mind. Had he done something to make God angry with him? Why was God not answering His prayer? Why was there so much suffering? Why were the enemies of God triumphing over His people? (verse 2). These were deep and difficult questions. There was no easy answer. God's ways are difficult to understand. David felt confused. Maybe he was losing sleep at night because of those thoughts. David tells us that he wrestled with these thoughts. The word "wrestled" says something about the intensity of those thoughts. There was struggle and agony in those thoughts.

Notice also in verse 2 that David's heart was sorrowful. There was sorrow in the fact that God seemed to be so far removed. There was sorrow in the many unanswered questions. David was being stretched. The pain, at times, seemed unbearable. There did not seem to be any release from his sorrow. Every day it ravaged his heart and mind.

Also in verse 2, we see that David's enemies were triumphing over him. Why was God allowing the enemy to triumph over His own child? Why should these enemies boast of victories over the people of God?

The picture looks gloomy. David is suffering at the hands of his enemies. Though he prayed, God did not seem to answer. He wrestled in his mind with questions of why God was not hearing him. He walked on each day with a sorrowful heart while his enemies rejoiced over him.

It is faith that gives David the victory in this time. He continued to cry out to God. He knew that without God, he would die in his sorrow. "Look on me and answer, O LORD my God," he cries in verse 3. David knew that God alone was his hope. He refused to give up hope. He clung to God and continued to petition heaven with his requests. There was nowhere else he could turn.

In verse 5, he tells God that he would trust in His unfailing love. Though God seemed distant, David would continue to trust Him. He was convinced that the love of God would never fail him. He was sure that God would save him. He rejoiced in how God had rescued Him in the past and had every reason to believe the God would be true to His character this time as well. He had no reason to doubt God. He committed himself to trust Him in this matter.

With these truths firmly planted in his heart, David concludes in verse 6 with a commitment to sing to the Lord. Even though God seemed distant, David chose, by faith, to worship and sing praises to His name. He would not allow circumstances to distract him from God. He would not allow circumstances to keep him from praising and worshipping the Lord for who He was.

David refused to remain in a sense of defeat. He would not allow doubt and confusion to overcome him. He knew that as long as God was on His throne there was hope. God's love was unfailing. He would never abandon His child. David chose to praise God. He lifted up his heart in thankfulness to a God who was good and faithful to His people. He would not let his thoughts defeat him or keep him from what he knew to be true about God.

Our thoughts and attitudes can be enemies in our time of struggle. Satan knows how easy it is to pervert our thoughts and cause us to believe a lie. May God protect us from our own human thoughts and point us to the truth of His word in our times of trial.

For Consideration:

- What evidence is there that David is struggling with his thoughts in this passage? What are those thoughts?
- What does David cling to in this time when God seems to be silent?
- Why do you suppose God allows us to remain in our pain and sorrow for a time?

- What thoughts have you struggled with in your time of trial? How does the truth about God give us victory over those evil thoughts?
- How can struggle keep us from worshipping God? What is the commitment of David to worship in his trial?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His unfailing love.
- Take a moment to reflect on the blessings God has given you over the past few months. Praise Him for those blessings.
- Ask the Lord to help you to trust Him even when you do not have all the answers you need.

14

FORTUNES RESTORED

Read Psalm 14:1-7

Even in the days of David, the king of Israel, there was individuals who refused to believe there was a God in heaven. When we see the way God worked in the Old Testament period, this is really quite incredible. As incredible as this was, we find David speaking specifically about these individuals here in this psalm.

To David, it was only a fool who could say there was no God. There was abundant evidence of the reality of a God in heaven. The creation and the special acts of God were clear evidence of His presence and power. Even those who belonged to other nations, though they did not worship the God of Israel, were convinced that there had to be a god of some kind. Some even believed in many gods.

The only way anyone could believe that there was no God was if they denied reason. This would, according to David, make that individual a fool. Admittedly, there were times when that God seemed far away. There were times when

His ways did not make sense to the human mind. David struggled to understand the ways and purposes of God. There was, however, no question in his mind, even in these times of silence and confusion that the God of Israel existed and was in control of the events of this universe.

A footnote in the NIV translation of the Bible indicates that the word for fool implies that the individual was "morally deficient." In other words, the individual who refused to believe in God was one who wanted to live without regard for God's standard. They lived their lives as though there was no God to obey. They denied God for the purpose of living an immoral or ungodly life.

Only a fool would openly and rebelliously disregard the creator and sustainer of the universe and live with no regard for God and His purposes. Only a fool would live with no concern for the coming judgement.

According to David, these individuals were corrupt and their deeds were vile (verse 1). They were an immoral people. They lived without a fear of judgement. It was convenient for them to refuse to accept there was a God in heaven. If there was no God they could do as they pleased.

David reminded his readers that the God of heaven looked down from heaven to see if there was anyone who understood the truth and sought Him. The person who understood this context is one who had come to realise that there was a God to whom they were accountable. This God in heaven was a personal God who desired that men and women find Him and follow His ways.

David is telling us here that God wants to be found. He longs for individuals who will seek Him and His ways. What a privilege we have, to be among those who have found Him.

The fact of the matter is that we cannot take credit for seeking and finding God ourselves. In verse 3, the Psalmist reminds us that when God looked down from heaven to see if there were any who sought Him. He could find none. All he saw were individuals who had turned from Him and lived their lives with no concern for Him. Everywhere He looked men and women were corrupt. There were none who were good, not even one.

This statement may be somewhat confusing. Were there not individuals such as David in Israel who sought God? Why does the Psalmist tell us that there was no one who sought God?

What David is telling us here is that every man; woman or child ever born was a sinner, separated from God. In their natural state they did not seek God. Admittedly, there were some who sought after religion, idols and various philosophies. To seek and find the one true God, however, was not something that came naturally to humanity. God needed to reveal Himself to His own creation. Sin and evil had blinded the eyes of all God's creation. Men and women chose to follow their own way. As God looked down from heaven, He did not find one person who naturally sought after Him. How this must have grieved the heart of God.

To remedy this situation, God would reveal Himself in a special way to the Jewish nation. He spoke to them

through His servants the prophets, gave them His law and proved His existence through great and mighty signs.

In verse 4, we understand that those to whom God revealed Himself were being devoured by evil-doers. They were devoured like men eat bread. Evil-doers wanted nothing to do with God or His people. They persecuted those who sought God. The history of Christianity shows us clearly that the church has been persecuted from the beginning. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:11-12:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We can expect that if we accept this God in heaven, we will suffer persecution in this world. Naturally, this world does not accept God's revelation of Himself. Those who do will be mocked, ridiculed or even persecuted.

David reminds us in verse 5, however, that the day is coming when God will judge. The evil-doer will be overwhelmed with dread because God will reveal Himself in the presence of those who sought Him. His presence would surround and protect His people.

The Lord would be a refuge for the poor. He would frustrate the plans of unbelievers against them. The poor were those who knew their need of God. They sought Him because they had nowhere else to go. God had a special place in his heart for them. He would protect them in their time of need.

As David concludes this psalm, he cries out prophetically: "Oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!" (verse 7). Inspired by God, he proclaims that the Lord God would bring salvation to His people from Zion or Jerusalem. That salvation would come in the person of the Lord Jesus. He would bring deliverance for God's people who were oppressed by those who did not seek God. The Lord Jesus would restore His people and their fortunes. He would bring salvation, forgiveness and empowering. Israel had every reason to rejoice. God had chosen to reveal Himself to them. He would protect and keep them. He would open their eyes to His presence and keep them from the hand of those who persecuted them. This was an act of grace on God's part. No one sought God but God sought them and in love revealed Himself to them.

What we see in this psalm is that when the Lord God looked down from heaven, He saw that all of us were lost in sin. None of us naturally sought Him. To remedy this, the Lord God chose a people. He opened their eyes so that they could see Him, He revealed Himself to them and put His spirit among them to lead and guide them. These people were not well accepted by the surrounding nations. They were persecuted and oppressed. The Lord was not blind to the cries of His people. He would come to their aid. He would rescue them in their time of need and restore all that the enemy had taken from them. God watches over His people.

For Consideration:

- What does this Psalm reveal to us about our sinful nature?
- What does David mean when he says that only the fool says there is no God?
- What evidence do you have to prove that there is a God?
- What evidence is there in your heart that you do not naturally seek after God?
- How did God reveal Himself to you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He revealed Himself to you.
- Ask the Lord to reveal Himself to a friend or relative who is not seeking Him.
- Thank the Lord for His protection and how He watches over those who belong to Him.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to be faithful to Him despite the opposition you will receive from those who do not believe in Him.

15

DWELLING IN GOD'S SANCTUARY

Read Psalm 15:1-5

As we begin Psalm 15, David asks a question. "LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?" Before we examine the answer to the question; we need to understand what David is asking. David speaks here of the Lord's sanctuary and the Lord's holy hill. The word "sanctuary" in the Old Testament refers to the tabernacle where God revealed His presence on the earth (Joshua 22:27). The inner sanctuary was known as the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies into which the High Priest alone could enter but once a year (1 Kings 6:16). When David speaks of the sanctuary of the Lord he is speaking about the temple where God made His presence known.

As for the reference to the holy hill, this refers to the city of Jerusalem which was located on a hill. We see this from Psalm 2:6:

I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.

Jerusalem in Scripture is often a symbol for the heavenly city. The apostle John spoke of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:10

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

The reference to the holy hill is to the dwelling place of God in heaven. The question David asks in this psalm is this: "Who can enter the presence of the Lord?"

In the remainder of this psalm, David describes the characteristics of the person who can enter the presence of God. We will break these verses down and examine each characteristic individually.

David begins by reminding us that it is only the blameless one can enter the presence of the Lord. What we need to understand is that blameless does not mean we have never sinned. Only the Lord Jesus is blameless in this sense. We have all sinned before the Lord. While we have all sinned, it is still possible for us to be blameless. To be blameless is to have no sin standing between God and ourselves. This is possible by means of the forgiveness of God. While we have all sinned, the forgiveness of the Lord sets us free from any guilt. He forgives us and makes us blameless in His sight. To be blameless is to have our sins forgiven. Only those who have been forgiven of their sin can enter the presence of the Lord.

David goes on next to say that it is the one who does what is righteous who can enter the presence of the Lord. If we want to have the assurance of our salvation and our right standing before God we need to examine our works. Jesus told His disciples that they could recognise a believer by their fruit:

By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (Matthew 7:16-17)

We can recognise those whose sins have been forgiven by the way they live. When God forgives our sins, He makes us a new person. The one whose sins are forgiven lives a life that is righteous and holy. These individuals want to please God in all they do. If you do not see evidence of righteousness or a desire to please the Lord in your life, you have cause to wonder if you will ever enter the presence of the Lord.

We need to say here that a righteous life is not the reason we will see God but a character of the one who is in a right relationship with God. Salvation is not based on our good works but the one who is forgiven shows evidence of this by the way he or she lives their lives before God.

David moves on to a third characteristic of the one who will see God and enter His presence. He tells us next that this individual speaks truth from his heart. The emphasis is on the phrase "from the heart." When we speak from the heart we are speaking from the very core of our being. There is sincerity here. This person is not a hypocrite. Jesus spoke often against the Pharisees of His day who were holy on

the outside but sinners on the inside (Matthew 23:27). The one who will see God and enter into His presence is one who is sincere from the heart.

The evidence of this sincere heart can be seen in different ways. In verse 3, David tells his readers that the one who will enter the presence of God does not slander his or her neighbour with their tongue nor do they do wrong to their neighbour. In other words, the one who will see God is in a right relationship with those around him. Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 5:23 that when we come to offer our gift to Him at the altar and remember that our brother or sister has something against us, we are to leave our gift at the altar and be reconciled with them. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus tells us that if we do not forgive our brother or sister for what they have done against us, neither will our heavenly Father forgive us. If we want to worship God, we need to be right with our brother or sister. If we want to be forgiven we need to forgive those who have offended us. What David is telling us is that the person who will see God and enter His presence is one who forgives those who sin against him. How can we who have been forgiven by God not forgive our neighbour for the lesser things they have done against us?

In verse 4, David goes on to say that the person who will enter the presence of the Lord is one who despises vile men and honours those who fear God. We need to understand that the heart of the person who has been touched by God is dramatically changed. The ones God has forgiven no longer delight in sin and evil. They realise that sin is an abomination to God. They realise that sin grieves His heart and is contrary to everything He stands for. These individuals hate sin and love righteousness. They have the

heart of God in this matter. They despise the ways of unrighteousness. They have no delight in watching unrighteousness and sin. Nor do they enjoy fellowship with those who turn their backs on God. Instead, they delight in fellowship with those of like mind. They rejoice to be with those whose hearts are righteous. David is not telling us that we are to hate the unbeliever. He is, however, showing us that the heart of the one who will enter the presence of God no longer delights in evil or evil people. Instead, it honours those who fear the Lord and walk in His path.

Notice finally that the one who will enter the presence of God lives a life that is sacrificial. They are willing to make great sacrifices to be obedient to the Lord and follow His ways. David gives us three examples of this in verses 4-5.

This sacrificial attitude is demonstrated in the way the righteous person keeps his or her oath (verse 4). David tells us that he keeps his oath even when it hurts. They will be true to their word even when it requires great sacrifice on their part. They will willingly suffer loss in order to be true to their word.

Second, this sacrificial attitude is demonstrated in how they freely lend money to their neighbour without interest. It is not their purpose to profit from their brothers and sisters in need. When they meet an individual in need, they loan to them without interest. They will do without the money they need themselves to help their brother or sister.

Third, this sacrificial attitude is demonstrated in the way they refuse to accept a bribe against the innocent. In other words, no amount of money will make them speak falsely or hurt an innocent person. They cannot be bought. They

willingly turn down great profit to themselves to be true to their Lord.

Those who will see God and enter His presence take their example from the Lord Jesus who willingly sacrificed all things for His people. There is nothing of any real significance that can ever be accomplished without sacrifice in the Christian life. We must all learn to lay down our lives for the sake of the kingdom of God. A soldier entering battle knows that he must lay down his life if he or she is to advance the cause they represent. The same is true in our Christian life. He, who enters the presence of God unashamed, will have an attitude of sacrifice.

David concludes by reminding us that those who demonstrate these characteristics are true servants of God and they will never be shaken. That is to say, they will be kept to the end. They will see God and demonstrate a true salvation by their lives. The salvation of the Lord changes us. Those who know the salvation of the Lord will never be the same. Those who will see the Lord are those who belong to Him. Those who belong to God will show evidence of this by their lifestyles.

For Consideration:

- There are at least six characteristics of those who will see God in this psalm. What are these six characteristics?
- Take a moment to examine your life in regards to the characteristics found in this passage. What needs work?

- What sacrifices have you been making for the sake of the kingdom of God? How easy is it for us to become comfortable and not make any sacrifice?
- Do all Christians demonstrate the characteristics found in this chapter? What keeps them from doing so?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to demonstrate all these characteristics in your life today.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful work He has been doing in your life. Thank Him for the changes He had made in you.
- Chose one of the characteristics mentioned here in this psalm and make this a matter of special prayer this week. Ask God to increase the evidence of this characteristic in your life.

16

A DELIGHTFUL INHERITANCE

Read Psalm 16:1-11

In the last psalm, we saw the characteristics of the one who would enter the presence of God. Here in Psalm 16, David shows us something of the inheritance of those who love and serve the Lord.

David begins in verse 1 by telling his readers that he found refuge in the Lord God. We need to understand that the believer will have many trials in this life. It may be that the believer will have even more struggles than the unbeliever. While trials are a reality; so is the comfort and shelter of the Lord. David often found refuge in these times in the Lord his God. A refuge is a place of security. It is a place of relief from the pain and trials we face. The Lord was a refuge for David as He is for all who come to Him. He surrounds us with His arms and protects us in the day of strife. He calms our anxiety and heals our wounds. This is a reality for the believer. We can move out in confidence

because the Lord will surround us and protect us in our hour of need.

Notice in verse 2 that David tells us that all he had of value came from the Lord. The Lord God was the source of all good things. Satan will do his utmost to make us believe that we are missing the “good” life. Way back in the Garden of Eden, the devil, disguised as a snake, offered Eve all the pleasures of this world if she would eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He made her believe that she was missing something because she was being obedient to the Lord. Eve believed him and she and her husband Adam ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. The result was devastating. Adam and Eve experienced the reality of sin and evil. They took what the world had to offer and died spiritually.

The good that David speaks of here is greater than what the world has to offer. There were times when David had to flee from his enemies, leaving all his worldly possessions behind. Could he experience the goodness of the Lord in those times? A quick examination of the book of Psalms will show us that David knew the goodness of the Lord even when he had nothing but trouble in his life. He knew the presence of the Lord. He knew the comfort of the Lord. All these things were of infinitely greater value than anything this world could offer him.

This is not to say that God did not bless David with many material blessings as well. These things too, came from the hand of God. David recognised in all this that God was the source of all the wonderful blessings he had experienced in life. Our God delights in blessing His children. It may not always be in material possessions but it will

always be good. All of God's children know something of His goodness in their lives.

Another blessing that belongs to the saint is the blessing of fellowship. Notice in verse 3 how David tells us how he delighted in the saints who were in the land. David had his share of opposition at the hand of the unbeliever. It was rare to find those who truly loved the Lord but when David found such people, his heart delighted in them. There is something very wonderful in the fellowship of believers in the Lord. Comfort, encouragement and blessings are the result of such fellowship. How often have we been encouraged by a brother or sister in the Lord? How often have we found support and help when we needed it from fellow believers? What a delight it is to share with each other. David took great delight in the relationship and companionship he had with the other saints in the land.

David reminds us in verse 4 that only sorrow awaits those who seek other gods. He committed himself to seek God alone. He refused to offer sacrifices to these gods because he knew that the way of other gods led only to great sorrow and emptiness.

What a difference David found in the Lord God of Israel. The Lord had assigned a secure portion to David (verse 5). In other words, David's lot in life was given to him by God. The boundaries of that lot were a delight to him. David describes God's purpose for him as being delightful (verse 6). This is in direct contrast to the sorrow that awaited those who turned to other gods. As a follower of the Lord God, David discovered that the Lord's plan for his life was a delight. God has a purpose for each of us. It is

our privilege to find and walk in the purpose. Our greatest joy in life will come from following that purpose.

There are times as believers that we find it difficult to accept what God has given us. There have been times when my ideas of what I wanted have stood between myself and God. I have discovered, however, that by dying to my own ideas and accepting what God has given, I have found great contentment and satisfaction. David's lot in life was certainly not easy. He had many enemies. He had a wife who turned against him. He had a son who sought to kill him. He had a daughter who was raped. He had citizens who cursed him. He fell into the sin of adultery. He was responsible for a great plague that wiped out thousands of people in his land. These are difficult things to deal with. How could David possibly say that the boundary lines had fallen for him in pleasant places? This was only possible when he came to accept the purpose of God for His life and opened his heart to know the comfort and joy of His presence in these trials. Even the Valley of Trials can be a pleasant place when the Lord walks with us through it.

Notice how David praises the Lord in verse 7 for His counsel. Even at night God would instruct his heart. There is intimacy in this verse. God the creator of the universe took the time to instruct and counsel His servant David in the night of his life. He guided him and showed him the way He wanted him to go. That same God still leads and directs His people today. David had the privilege of fellowship with the Lord God in the night times of his life. God walked with him when everything was dark and dreary. He knew the fellowship of His Creator in the trials he faced.

What confidence David had because he knew the wonderful presence of the Lord God. David knew the presence of God beside him at his right hand. The right hand was a place of honour. What is important for us to note is that while God did go before him, He also walked beside David to comfort, protect and guide. What a wonderful thing it is to know that God goes before us but He also walks with us on the path He has set for us. With God before him and God beside him David was secure. No enemy could overcome him. He would not be shaken.

Notice in verse 10 that David knew the Lord God would never abandon him. Even if he had to lay down his life, God would not abandon him in the grave. David had a hope of life after the grave, in the presence of the Lord God. For this reason, David was glad and rejoiced in the Lord. Even in death, he was secure and confident.

Peter used this verse in his first sermon in Acts 2:23-32. There, Peter explained that David spoke prophetically about the resurrection of Christ and ultimately of our hope because of His work. This verse reminds us that even as Jesus rose from the dead we too, who know the Lord Jesus, can experience eternal life after the grave in the presence of the Lord our God. This was David's hope. In the Lord his God, he had victory even over the grave. Death was not his enemy. The Messiah would conquer death and the grave. What could his enemies do to him if even in death, he was victorious?

David concludes in verse 11 by reminding his readers that the God he served revealed the path of life to His people. If they listened, their God would show them the way. They would not be lost in this world of confusion. God had a

purpose and would make that purpose clearly known. The path God had for His servants was a path filled with joy in His presence and eternal pleasures at His right hand. The Lord honours the believer and gives him or her eternal joy at His side.

The joy and pleasure in the presence of the Lord is eternal. This means that it will never cease. God fills the heart of the believer with this joy and pleasure and nothing can ever strip it away. The inheritance of the believer is a delightful one. Consider the inheritance of those who love the Lord as David describes in this psalm:

- 1) A Refuge in time of need
- 2) Good things from the hand of the Lord
- 3) Fellowship with fellow believers
- 4) A pleasant lot in life
- 5) Counsel in time of confusion
- 6) Intimate fellowship with God
- 7) Victory over death
- 8) Eternal life filled with joy and pleasure

How we need our eyes opened to the reality of our inheritance and the wonderful privilege we have to know such a God. How thankful we ought to be for such blessings.

For Consideration:

- How has the Lord God been a refuge for you personally?

- What good things have you received from the Lord God?
- How does knowing the Lord give you security in life?
- How does the Lord counsel us as believers today?
- How does David describe the eternal inheritance of the believer in this psalm?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He promises to be our refuge in times of trouble.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the good things He has given you in life. Be specific.
- Are you in a situation where you don't know what direction to take or what decision to make? Take a moment and commit this issue to the Lord. Ask Him to counsel and guide you in this matter.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not appreciated all the good things you have received from His hand.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord for the wonderful hope He has given in eternity for all who belong to Him.

17

THE APPLE OF HIS EYE

Read Psalm 17:1-15

Psalm 17 is a prayer of David's. Here in this psalm, he cries out to the Lord God for help in a time of need. David's enemies have surrounded him and seek his life. He turns his eyes to the Lord and looks up to Him as his hope and salvation.

As David begins his prayer he searches his own heart. This is a good place for us to start. There are times when we bring a situation on ourselves. Sometimes, we cry out to God for deliverance when what we need instead is to cry out for forgiveness. Sometimes, the situation we find ourselves in is God's way of disciplining or warning us about some sin or failure on our part. Before praying that God would deliver him from the sins of his enemies, David takes a moment to examine his relationship with God. Only when he is sure of this relationship does he come to God and ask for deliverance.

Notice here in the opening verses of this psalm what David says about himself. He asks God to listen to his prayer because it did not come from deceitful lips (verse 1). There was no falsehood in the plea of David. As he searched his heart, he knew that he could bring this request to God because it did not come from the lips of one who spoke one thing and did another. What basis would David have to come to God asking for deliverance from his enemies if he was practising the same sin as his enemy? There was no hypocrisy in David's request.

Notice second in verse 2 that David wants his vindication to come from God alone. We know how easy it is, when we are offended or hurt by an enemy, to take matters into our own hands. We come to God and ask for justice but secretly, in our heart we have our own plans to get even. David searched his heart in this regard. When he searched his heart, he was confident that he had surrendered the matter completely to God. "May my vindication come from you," he said. He wanted God to take this matter. He chose not to take it on himself. God would judge and do what was right. David trusted God to deal with his enemies.

In verse 3, David was confident that if God searched his heart, He would find him to be pure. If He tested him for sin, He would find none in him. David knew that hidden sin in his life would only hinder his prayer. He came to God with full assurance of a clean heart before God. He was resolved to keep himself clean. There would be nothing to hinder his prayer.

David reminded God that he had kept himself from the violent ways of men (verse 4). This is an important statement because if David had not kept himself from violence,

how could he ask God to protect him from the violence of others toward him. We cannot pray that God would deliver us from the harmful ways of others if we are guilty of doing the same. This would only be hypocrisy. David is absolutely confident, in verse 5, that he had held on to the path the Lord had set out for him. His feet had not slipped from that path.

Notice what David says in verse 6. He told God that he called out to him because he knew He would answer him and listen to his prayer. This shows us that David was trusting God and believing by faith that God would hear him and do what was right. We cannot come to God in prayer if we doubt in our hearts that He will answer. Faith is a necessary ingredient in prayer. Why would we pray if we didn't believe that God would answer? Why would we pray if we did not believe that our prayer would make a difference?

There is one more thing we need to see in verse 7 and 8. Notice that as David came to the Lord in prayer, he was confident in his relationship with the Lord and the Lord's desire for him. In verse 7, David asked the Lord to show him the wonder of His great love. He is confident that he can come to the great God of the universe and ask Him to show him His love. When we understand how big God is, it is a wonder that He loves us. We are so weak and small compared to God. David knew how small he was. He knew how unworthy he was to ask Him to shower him with His love but he was confident that he could. As unworthy as he was, he came to God and asked Him to open His arms to receive Him. When we come to God in prayer, we must have this same confidence. Our God does delight in

opening His arms to us. He delights in showing us the wonder of His love.

Notice also in verse 7 that David is confident that the Lord would save those who took refuge in Him from their foes. He knew that when he came to God and jumped into His arms there was nothing the enemy could do. He was confident in the love of God but he was also confident in His power and strength. The enemy may have boasted and puffed himself up but David knew that in the arms of God, they were no match for him.

David speaks of himself as the apple of God's eye in verse 8. He knew that he was special in the eyes of God. He knew that he was favoured. He asked God to keep him as the apple of his eye and to hide him in the shadow of his wing. The picture is of a mother hen (or some other bird), sheltering her little chicks under her wing. There is a relationship of love here. God was like that mother hen; sheltering David in His wing of love. Nothing could harm him as he rested under that wing.

The first eight verses of this psalm show us how David came to the Lord in prayer. He had searched his heart and mind and was confident in his relationship with God. He came in faith, with a clean heart to a God who deeply loved him. He knew he could trust Him completely.

Verse 9, changes the scene. The focus now is on the enemy and what the enemy was doing. David reminded the Lord that the enemy had been attacking him. In verse 9, he describes his enemy as a mortal enemy. In other words, this enemy sought to kill him. These enemies would stop at nothing short of death for David. At the present time they

had surrounded him. Verse 10 describes their hearts as being callous or hard and unbending. They spoke with great arrogance and pride, boasting of their abilities and what they could do. They had tracked David down like a hunter tracking his prey. They waited in hiding like hungry lions ready to pounce on him. They were waiting for the moment to throw him down to the ground and destroy him (verse 11). The intention of the enemy was clear. To any normal human being, this enemy was terrifying. As big as they were, David's confidence was in the Lord his God and in his relationship with Him.

In verse 13, David asked the Lord to confront this enemy. He knew that he was not big enough to do it himself. He asked the Lord to draw His sword and fight on his behalf.

Notice in verse 14 what David says about his enemies. He tells us that their reward was in this life. In other words, they had no reward in heaven. The only hope they had was in whatever they had on this earth. The day was coming, however, when they would have to face the Lord and give an account of their actions. What a terrible day that would be.

The enemy surrounded David but he was confident in the Lord his God. In the concluding verses of this psalm, David praises the Lord that He stilled the hunger of those He loved. God would not abandon His children in their hour of need. God would hear their cry and feed them. God would provide them with all they needed and even more.

As for David he was confident that he would see the Lord's face when he awoke. Even if his enemies took his life, David knew that he would still be victorious. The day was

coming when David would see the Lord. He would be satisfied in the depth of his soul with the wonderful presence of God. Even in death there was victory.

For Consideration:

- What does this psalm teach us about the importance of examining our lives before coming to God in prayer?
- What does David teach us about the relationship between faith and prayer?
- Describe David's relationship with God from what we have seen in this psalm. Is this the relationship you have with God?
- What is David's hope in eternity?
- What particular concern do you have in life? What encouragement does this psalm offer you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the relationship He wants to have with you.
- Ask God to search your heart to reveal any hypocrisy that might keep your prayers from being answered.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful and eternal hope you have in Him.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord for the relationship He wants to have with you. Ask Him to draw you closer.

18

THE VICTORY OF THE LORD

Read Psalm 18:1-50

Psalm 18 is a psalm of victory. It is David's prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for victory over his enemies. In particular, David worships the Lord for victory over his father-in-law Saul.

As David begins the psalm, he worships the Lord for who He is and what He meant to him. Notice first that he tells the Lord that he loves Him. It is true that the Lord already knows what we feel toward Him but worship is about giving words to those feelings. David does not hesitate to tell the Lord how he felt toward Him.

Notice second, that David tells the Lord what He meant to him in this time of trial. David had been running from Saul who sought his life. In this time of trouble, the Lord was David's strength. He knew that it was not his own natural strength that gave him the victory. He gave God credit for strengthening him.

The Lord had also been a rock for David (verse 2). A rock is a firm and solid foundation. David had something solid to stand on in his time of need. Nothing could shake the Lord and His purposes. His promises would withstand the storms. Though his enemy tried to shake him, David was standing on a solid foundation. The Lord was an unshakable Rock.

The Lord was also a fortress. A fortress was a place of refuge. Its strong walls would not allow the enemy to penetrate. As a fortress, the Lord surrounded David on all sides.

God was also a deliverer. The Lord gave him victory over his enemies and delivered him from them.

David went on to describe the Lord as a shield in verse 2. The shield protected the soldier from the arrows of the enemy. In a similar way, the Lord surrounded David to protect him from those arrows. What is particularly interesting about this illustration of the shield is that to protect the soldier, the shield had to be struck by the arrows intended for the soldier. In a similar way, God was willing to take on what the enemy intended for David. The Lord Jesus became our shield. He took the punishment that was intended for us.

God was also a horn for David. For an animal the horn was its defence. The horn became a symbol of power. The horn, to an animal, was like a sword for the soldier. David sees the Lord as his defence. Notice that this horn is described as the horn of salvation. The Lord defended David and saved him from his enemies.

Finally in verse 2, David saw the Lord as a stronghold. A stronghold is a place of safety and security. It was called a stronghold because it could not be taken by the enemy. David knew that as long as the Lord was his stronghold he was safe and secure from any attack of the enemy.

How did David receive this salvation from the Lord? Verse 3 tells us that all he did was call out to Him and the Lord came to his aid. David did not have to pay any money or offer a sacrifice. Salvation is just that simple. There is nothing we can do but call out to the Lord. So many people miss the Lord's salvation because they feel that they have to merit it somehow. Verse 3 tells us that all David did was call out to God and God saved him.

In verses 4 and 5, David tells his reader something of the situation he found himself in. He tells us that the cords of death had entangled him. If you have ever seen a spider catch a fly you will understand what David is talking about here. Death like a spider had trapped David in its web. Even now the spider of death was coming to roll him up in that tangled web. Death was at David's door.

The torrents of destruction overwhelmed him. The picture is of a man or woman trying to fight the raging waters of a mighty river. They are losing the battle and being taken by the force of the river to their deaths.

In verse 5, David tells his readers that the cords of the grave had coiled around him. Like a hungry snake coiling around its victim, David was in the final stages of life. He was at a place in life where all hope seemed lost. He was caught like an animal in the snare of death.

It was at this point of despair that David cried to the Lord for help. He had been brought to the end of his resources. He had no strength in him to fight. All he could do was cast himself on the Lord and ask for mercy. God heard David's cry and answered him in his hour of need.

Notice the response of God to the cry of his servant for help. God was angry. Verse 7 tells us that the earth trembled and quaked. The very foundations of the mountains shook as the Lord rose to assist his servant in need. The full power of an almighty God came to David's defence.

David paints a picture of the Lord as He rises to his aid. The smoke of fiery judgement rose from His nostrils. Fire of consuming justice came from His mouth. The Lord God parted the heavens and came to David's side. David tells us in verse 9 that dark clouds were under His feet. Something terrible was about to happen. The dark clouds are usually an indication of a storm. The storm of God's revenge was about to break out on the earth against the enemies of God's people. Like a mighty warrior on a charging war horse he came soaring on the wings of the wind (verse 10).

Dark rain clouds covered the dreadful presence of the Lord (verse 11). There was going to be a storm on the earth as the Lord unleashed His fiery judgement. Flashes of lightning and hailstones announced that judgement. The Lord thundered with His voice from heaven. He shot His arrows, scattering the enemy (verse 14). His lightning routed them so that they fled for their lives.

On the day the Lord came to David's defence, nothing was hidden from Him. The valleys of the sea were exposed.

The foundations of the earth were laid bare. The breath of his nostrils exposed everything for what it was. The great God of this universe reached down from heaven and gently drew David from the deep waters where he was drowning. David's enemy was too powerful for him but God rescued him.

The Lord supported David in his time of need (verse 18). Were it not for the Lord, he would have fallen. Instead, God brought him out to a spacious place. That is, a place of abundance and prosperity (verse 19).

Why did God rescue David? David himself asked this question. He also knew the answer. He tells us in verse 19 that that Lord rescued him because he delighted in Him. God knew the heart of David. He knew he had a heart to honour Him. God's favour was on David because he loved His God and served Him with all his heart. David turned his back on the ways of the nations to serve the Lord God. God rewards those who serve Him faithfully. He delights in those who honour Him. God honoured David because he kept himself pure.

David tells us in verse 25 that to the faithful God will show Himself faithful and to the blameless and pure, He would show Himself blameless and pure. God does take note of our lives. He rewards us according to our deeds. On the other hand, those who are crooked would be judged. We will all have to give an account of our lives before God. God will save the humble but bring the proud down.

David was confident in his relationship with God. He knew that the Lord God would keep his lamp burning. God would turn the darkness of his suffering into light, hope and

victory. He knew that as long as the Lord God was with him, he could advance against the army of his enemy. With the Lord on his side, he could overcome any obstacle that stood in his way. David knew the source of His strength. There was a powerful relationship between God and David. David honoured the Lord and the Lord delighted in David. David trusted the Lord and the Lord strengthened him against his enemies.

David had full confidence in the ways of the Lord. His ways were perfect. His word was without error. God was a shield for those who took refuge in Him. There was no other God like the God of David. David believed Him to be the only God.

David made it quite clear to his readers that his strength was not in himself. All his strength came from the Lord his God. It was the Lord who went before David to make his way straight and perfect. He gave him feet like the deer enabling him to stand securely on the heights. David gives God credit for his victory in battle (verse 34-35). He credits God for making him great as a king. He refuses to take any glory himself.

Notice in verse 36 that God broadened the path David trod so that he would not turn his ankle. In other words, He went before him to prepare his way. Every step David took, he knew that God had gone before him to secure the path. What a comfort this was to David.

Because God was with him, David pursued his enemies until he overtook them. He destroyed them by the strength God provided. His enemies fell beneath his feet. Though

his enemies cried to Him, God refused to listen. They were utterly destroyed.

God honoured David and made him the head of the nations, the most powerful king of his day. Nations bowed to honour David. They feared him and the strength the Lord had given him. They trembled before him.

David praised God for all He had done for him. He was a great king because God avenged him and defeated his enemies. He was a great king because God had chosen to exalt him above his enemies. He was successful because God rescued him. For this, David praised the Lord and sang to His name. He was not ashamed of his God. He would proclaim his worth among the nations.

There is a powerful connection between David and his God. David demonstrated the power of God in his life. He was successful and victorious because of God. The Lord heard his prayer and rescued him from enemies who were too powerful for him. With his words, David lifted up the God of Israel. With his life, he demonstrated the reality of His power and mercy. May God enable us too, to know the reality of His grace and power in our lives.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself before enemies who were too powerful for you? How did the Lord deliver you?

- What is the connection between David honouring God and God honouring him?
- Have you ever found yourself taking some of the credit for things the Lord has done?
- What was the secret behind the success of David as a king and warrior?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His grace in your life. Thank Him for the victories He has given you.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to His grace and mercy. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have not given Him credit.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any way in which you are not honouring Him in your life. Ask Him for strength to overcome in this area.

19

A REVELATION OF GOD AND HIS PURPOSE

Read Psalm 19:1-14

Our God is a God who delights in revealing Himself and His purposes to humanity. Here in Psalm 19, David reflects on two ways God reveals Himself and His purposes.

David begins by showing us how the heavens reveal the glory of God. By the heavens, David is referring to the skies. Who among us has not marvelled at the immensity of the heavens? The sky does not seem to have any end. We can look up into the sky and see the burning sun millions of miles away, warming the earth and keeping us comfortable. We look into the evening sky and see the stars and wonder at the God who created them all. It is impossible for us to look into the sky and not be amazed at the wonder of the Creator who put all these things in place. If the sky is glorious, how much more is the Creator of the sky?

Each day the sky proclaims the wonders of its Creator. It speaks without words both day and night, declaring His works. The skies speak to every culture and language. God has so designed the sky that anyone who has an open mind can understand that the God who created it is an awesome and glorious God whose ways are beyond our ways and whose wisdom is beyond our ability to understand.

David reminds us in verse 4 of how the Lord God pitched a tent for the sun. In other words, He gave the sun a place to set. Like a bridegroom, that sun rises up each morning in all its glory. Like a champion runner, each day it runs its course rising in one part of the sky and setting in another. In the process, it warms up the whole earth. Who put the sun in its place? Who made it rise and set? It is the Lord God of Israel; the glorious One. Our God is an awesome and powerful God. His creation speaks loudly of His presence. He reveals Himself through His creation. He wants to be known. He wants to be worshipped. He is deserving of our respect and praise.

Not only does the Lord God reveal His presence through creation but He also reveals His purposes by means of His law. That law was given through Moses and reveals the heart of God for His creation. David reflects on this law in verses 7 to 11.

David reminds us that the law of the Lord was perfect. Those who followed it found their soul revived. We were created to live in harmony with God. Only when our heart is in a right relationship with Him can it know full joy and contentment. Those who followed this law, according to

David, knew this wonderful revival of joy and peace in their soul.

"The statutes of the Lord," David tells us, "are trustworthy" (verse 7). They make even the simplest person wise. We can trust what the Word of God tells us to be the exact representation of His purpose and plan. The one, who does not know the Word of God, does not know the meaning and purpose of life. Even the simplest person on the earth will find the wisdom they need revealed in the truth of the statutes and laws of God.

The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart, David tells us in verse 8. Because we were created by God we will only be truly happy in communion with Him. There is no lasting joy in anything outside of the purpose of God. True lasting joy comes from living in harmony with God and walking according to His precepts.

David tells us in verse 8 that the commands of the Lord are radiant and give light to the eyes. Outside of the purpose and plan of God as revealed to us in His Word, there is only darkness. Scripture often refers to those who are outside of the will of God to be in darkness (Matthew 4:16; John 3:19). The truth of the Scriptures brings light to those who are living in darkness.

The law of the Lord sheds light on the dark path of life. God's word is a light that shows us the way (Psalm 119:105). It gives clear direction. It reveals the path that God would have us walk.

In verse 9, David tells us that the fear of the Lord is pure and endures forever. Those who fear God respect and

honour Him in all their ways. They come with reverence before Him and live in obedience to His laws. That fear endures forever. Those who fear God will be given eternal life. They will be given the privilege of honouring Him forever in His presence.

God's ordinances are absolutely sure and altogether righteous. There is no evil in the path of the Lord. Every law is perfect and right. We can trust His laws completely. David took great delight in the law of the Lord. He considered His ordinances to be more precious than gold. Gold can never buy happiness. Gold can never give meaning and purpose to life. The ordinances of the Lord were sweeter than honey. They brought more delight and satisfaction than the finest of foods.

By God's laws and ordinances, the servant of God was warned. The law showed the dangers on the path of life. It revealed the snares of the enemy. It steers us in the right direction and keeps us from evil.

In keeping the laws and ordinances of the Lord there is a great reward. God blesses those who are faithful to His purpose (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:8; 1 Peter 5:4).

God has revealed Himself to us by creation and by His Word. By creation, He shows His glory and power. In His law, He reveals His purpose and will. What is our response to this clear revelation of God and His purpose? David's response was to cry out to God to forgive him for hidden faults. David knew that God had spared no expense to reveal His purpose. He saw in the creation that God was a wonderful and awesome God. He wanted to be in a right relationship with Him. He feared that his sin might, in some

way, dishonour his God. He wanted to be pure before Him. He asked God to search his heart and forgive any hidden sin He might reveal.

David also prays that God would keep him from wilful sins (verse 13). He knew his sinful nature. He understood that he could easily turn from God to evil. He knew how dependent on God he was to live and walk in the path of righteousness. He prayed that God would strengthen him and keep him from wilfully rebelling against Him and His revealed purpose.

David also prays that God would keep his mouth and the thoughts of his heart pleasing to Him. David is not just concerned about the externals. He wanted to be pure from his heart. He wanted even his thoughts to be right before God. He wanted to be pure inside and out.

He concludes by acknowledging God as his Rock and Redeemer. In other words, God was his protection and sure foundation. As a Rock, the Lord could keep him and shelter him from evil. A redeemer is one who buys something back. David saw the Lord God as his Redeemer. He had bought Him from the grip of Satan and sin. God had redeemed him and as a Rock, He alone could protect and keep Him on the right path. David knew that he could not live in the purpose of God unless God strengthened and protected him.

The heart of God is to reveal Himself to us. He has a purpose for our lives. He, who created us, knows how we should live and what will bring us peace and contentment. David committed himself to seeking his Creator and living

in His purpose. This alone is our only reasonable response to God's revelation of Himself.

For Consideration:

- To what length has God gone to reveal Himself to humanity?
- What does creation reveal to us about God and His character?
- Why did God give us His law?
- Can we experience true contentment and meaning in life outside of obedience to God and His ways?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He wants to reveal His purpose to us.
- Thank the Lord that He reveals Himself through creation.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any hidden sins in your life.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from wilful sin.
- Thank the Lord that He is a Rock and a Redeemer.

THE GOD WHO ANSWERS

Read Psalm 20:1-9

Psalm 20 begins as a benediction. We are not told the particular circumstances that gave birth to this Psalm. As we examine the psalm, however, it is possible that it is a prayer for David and his army as they prepare for battle.

The Psalmist begins in verse 1 by saying: "May the LORD answer you when you are in distress." The picture is of an individual who is weighted down with affliction and trouble. They have nowhere to go or nothing they can do to ease the pain. In anguish, they cry out to the Lord God for help. The Lord hears that weak cry of despair and comes to their aid. In this case, it may be that the army of David is facing their enemies and felt the weight of battle heavy upon them. The prayer is that God would hear their cry of despair.

The Psalmist goes on say: "May the name of the God of Jacob protect you" (verse 1). The name of the Lord God is a powerful name. The very mention of His name will cause

the demons of hell to flee. The despairing soul that cries out that name can know the wonderful forgiveness and salvation of God. The Psalmist's cry to God is that His name would shield and protect them from any harm the enemy devised against them.

David's heart cry in verse 2 is that God would send help from Zion and His sanctuary. The sanctuary refers to the temple where God revealed His presence on the earth at that time. Zion is the city of Jerusalem where that temple was located. God is seen moving from His earthly dwelling place in response to the cry of His servants for help. If this psalm is a prayer for David and his army, then David's cry is that God would go before them into battle against their enemies.

In verse 3, David prays that God would remember the sacrifices of His people and accept their burnt offerings. When God accepted an offering or a sacrifice He was approving what that sacrifice symbolised. In other words, if the sacrifice was offered for the forgiveness of sin, then by accepting the sacrifice, God showed that He had forgiven that sin. If the offering was a thanksgiving offering, then by accepting the offering, God also accepted the praise and thanksgiving of the individual who offered it.

Before any battle the kings of Israel and Judah would offer a sacrifice to the Lord God. David's cry was that God remember their sacrifice and accept their offerings thereby assuring them victory in the battle they faced.

The next request in this psalm is that the Lord God give His people the desire of their hearts and make their plans succeed. There are many things our heart desires. Not all

of them are good for us. We need to interpret this verse in the context of the whole psalm. David is speaking about an individual whose sacrifice and offering has been accepted. This is an individual who is living in communion with the Lord God. His desire is to honour and glorify the Lord God. David's prayer for this person is that the Lord God would give them the desire of their hearts. The greatest desire of the hearts of these individuals is that God be glorified in their lives and that they would live in all things as He requires.

There is another possible interpretation to verse 4. David's prayer is not so much that God would give His servants what they wanted as that He would put the right desires on their heart. In other words, God would reveal His desires to those who were living in communion with Him. He would burden their hearts and as they moved out with that burden He would give them success. He would put His purposes on their heart and as they lived in obedience they would know His blessing as they succeeded in all their ways.

In verse 5, David tells his reader that they would shout for joy when they were victorious. David and his army would lift up their banner in the name of the Lord God. The banner was used to identify an army or a people. The banner was lifted up, in this case, with pride as the soldiers returned victorious from battle. As they lift up that banner, they shout in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord their God for He had done wonderful things in their midst.

David reminds us in verse 6 that the Lord saves those he has anointed and set apart for Himself. He gives those He calls victory over their enemies. He answers them from heaven and defends them with His powerful right hand.

When God anoints us or calls us to do something we can be sure that He will not leave us alone to do this work. He will come to our aid and defend us as we walk in obedience to that call.

There are many who trust in their own strength. In David's day, some trusted in their chariots and horses. David's confidence was not in his army, however. His confidence was in the Lord God. Those who trust in their own strength are brought to their knees and fall. Those who trust the Lord, however, rise up and stand firm in the midst of the battle. How easy it is to trust in our own efforts. The preacher trusts in his preparation, study or gifts rather than in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The businessman trusts in his experience or wisdom rather than the leading and blessing of God. We don't use chariots in our day but the temptation to trust in ourselves is still the same. David challenges us to seek the Lord and serve in the strength and wisdom He gives.

As David concludes this psalm, he asks God to save him as king. He knew that God had called him to the role of king and now he trusted Him to come to his aid and strengthen him as he stepped out to do battle and to govern the people he had been called to lead.

What we see in this Psalm is that distress and trouble are part of life. God hears the cry of His people for aid. He delights in ministering to them in their time of need. As David confronted his enemies, his confidence was not in his army and military strength. His confidence was in the Lord who called and equipped. Because the Lord was his aid, he could not fail.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever been in distress? How did the Lord come to your aid?
- What desire has God put on your heart? Can you step out in confidence that the Lord has given you that desire and will fulfil His purpose through you?
- How has the Lord God equipped you for ministry? What strengths has He given you? What calling has He placed on your life?
- What, apart from God, have you been tempted to trust for success in ministry? What is the lesson of this psalm for us today?
- What does this Psalm teach us about the desire of the Lord God to strengthen us in service?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He comes to your aid in times of distress.
- Ask God to open your heart to His desire for your life.
- Thank the Lord that when He calls us to do something, He also equips us for that task.
- Ask the Lord to increase your confidence in Him and in His strength. Ask Him to give you more boldness to step out in the strength He provides.
- Thank the Lord that, no matter how difficult the battle before us may be, His strength and wisdom is sufficient to give us victory.

21

GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

Read Psalm 21:1-13

Psalm 20 appeared to be a prayer for the king as he went into battle. This psalm is a prayer of thanksgiving for victories won. There is no question in the mind of David about the source of his victory. David knows that the Lord God was the source of his strength and the reason for his victories. He gives Him full credit.

What a glorious thing it is to see the Lord strengthen us in ministry. I remember a time in my ministry when I was asked to speak at a meeting in a nearby community. At that time, I was quite depressed and did not feel like I had any strength left in me to encourage anyone. As I stood to speak that day, I knew the presence of the Lord enabling me to communicate encouragement. The message spoke particularly to certain individuals at that meeting. What a joyous thing it is to know the presence and strength of the Lord in our weakness. In verse 1, David rejoices in the strength God gave him for battle. He knew his victory was

a result of the Lord's enabling. He took no credit for the victory. He gives God all the glory.

God knew the desire of David's heart. He granted him that desire. He heard David's request and answered from heaven. The context would indicate that this request was for victory over his enemies. It is important to note that David had a practice of committing all his battles to the Lord.

David tells us in verse 3, that the Lord God placed a crown of pure gold on his head. God chose David to be king. David's leadership was initially met with resistance. Followers of Saul did not want to accept David as king. David waited on the Lord and in time God opened the way for him to rule both Israel and Judah.

There were times when David's life was threatened. King Saul sought to kill him. Even his own son sought his life. In those times, David committed himself into the Lord's hands. God spared his life. Though a mighty warrior, David died as an old man, blessed of the Lord. David saw the hand of God sparing his life.

Though his leadership was originally contested, David became king in the plan of God. He became a great and glorious king as the Lord gave him one victory after another. God gave him splendour and majesty as a king. Though undeserved, God showered His blessings on David. David gives God all the glory for this splendour and majesty. He recognised his kingship as a gift from God. His fame, glory and wealth were all gifts from God. He never forgot this.

Throughout his reign David rejoiced in the presence of the Lord (verse 6). God drew near to David. As David went into

battle, he knew that God went with him. As David faced important decisions in life, he knew that he did not have to make those decisions alone. David knew the presence of God and this made his heart leap for joy. What an incredible blessing it is to get up each day and know that the Lord is with us and will walk with us throughout the day.

Why did God favour David? David tells us in verse 7 that it was because of His unfailing love. God blessed David, not because he deserved to be blessed, but because He loved him. There were times in the life of David when he fell into deep sin. God's love for him was unfailing in those times as well. David trusted in that love of God. He knew that, no matter what happened, God's love would sustain him so that he would not be shaken.

David was confident that God would deal with his enemies. There was not an enemy that God could not overcome. Like a fiery furnace, God would consume David's enemies until there were none left. The enemies we face are not always people. The greatest enemies I have live inside me. These enemies keep me from ministering as I should. God is able to deal with pride, lust, wrong attitudes or anything that would stand between us and the victory He wants to give. What a comfort it is to know that God is bigger than the sin that lives in our flesh. He is able to conquer every enemy for His glory.

In verse 10, David reminds us that not only would God destroy our enemies but He would also destroy their descendants. Sometimes when we cut down a tree, a shoot will spring up from the root and form another tree. When God deals with our enemies, He does so in a way that there will never again be a shoot springing up from that old

root. He will consume the enemy until there is no hopes of any offspring springing up to trouble us again. God's work is thorough.

God will foil the plots of the enemy against us (verse 11). He will overrule their plans so that they cannot succeed. God will aim his bow at our enemies so that they will turn their back on us and flee for their lives.

David praised the Lord for the wonderful victories God had given him. For the presence of God and His tremendous love, he exalted His name. He committed himself to singing praise to the Lord God for His might and power. All this favour David experienced was the fruit of God's unfailing love. God loves us with that same love. As we look back over our lives, we too should be surprised at the incredible grace and favour God has showered on us. May our response be the same as David's.

For Consideration:

- What blessings has the Lord God showered on you?
- How has the Lord made His presence known to you this last week?
- What particular victories has God given you?
- What has been your response to the blessings of the Lord in your life?
- What encouragement do you receive in this psalm to step out in your ministry?

For Prayer:

- What "enemies" have yet to be conquered in your life? Ask the Lord for complete victory.
- Thank the Lord for specific evidence of His presence in your life and ministry.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord for His unfailing love. Thank Him that this love does not fail even when we do not deserve it.

22

WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

Read Psalm 22:1-31

If we are honest with ourselves, there are times when the Lord seems far away. David was in one of those times. He was facing sorrow and suffering and although he cried out to the Lord, there was no response. He felt abandoned and alone.

He cried out in 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?

Jesus spoke these words from the cross. He too felt as if the Father had abandoned Him. When the Lord Jesus took our sin on His shoulders, the Father did turn His back on Him. For the believer, there is nothing as terrible as the

sense of God's abandonment. Countless individuals have willingly laid down their lives with joy. These individuals were strengthened by a sense of the Lord's presence at that time. When Jesus died on the cross, he did not have the sense of His Father's presence.

David was experiencing one of those moments in life. He could no longer sense evidence of the presence of God in his life. David cried out day and night in his agony but no answer came from heaven. He did not doubt that God existed; nor did he doubt that God was in control. He expressed this in verse 3, when he said: "You are enthroned as the Holy One." In saying this, he confessed three important theological facts. First, that God existed. Second, that God was enthroned in heaven and in control of the events of the earth. Third, that God was absolutely holy and as such incapable of evil. As such, He was worthy of praise. These three truths were an encouragement to David. The problem was not there, however. The problem was in the fact that David was not personally experiencing the reality of God's presence.

It is one thing to believe a set of doctrines and quite another to experience those doctrines in our lives. David knew that God was real and that He was in control. He knew that this God had done wonderful things in the history of His people. The stories of these deliverances were wonderful stories and brought encouragement but they were stories of what God did in the past in the lives of other people. David longed to see God do the same in his day and more specifically at the very hour he was suffering. David's fathers cried out to God and saw His deliverance. They were not disappointed. God broke through and revealed Himself and His power in their lives.

There are many who believe in a God who was powerful in the time of David and the apostles but they do not expect to see evidence of that power in their day. God has never changed. God's power and presence is as real today as it ever was. David believed this deep down in his heart and cried out to God to demonstrate that power in his trial.

In verse 6, David paints a picture of the struggle he experienced at this time in his life. "I am a worm and not a man," he said. David is not teaching theology here. He is expressing his feelings at a time when he felt depressed and abandoned by God. He is telling us that he felt like a worm, one of the lowest forms of life. He was being scorned and despised by the people around him. People mocked him and hurled insults at him (verse 7). They even mocked his faith in this time of abandonment. "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let Him deliver him, since He delights in him," they cried. At that time, God seemed distant for David. He was experiencing his own crisis of faith. He wondered why God was not answering his prayers. The enemy mocked both him and his God in this time of need.

In this silence, David clung to the truth he knew. The Lord had given him life and brought him out of his mother's womb. The Lord reached out to him and gave him faith to trust Him and to believe in His name. From the time he was at his mother's breast, he had known this Lord and experienced His presence. All his life, the Lord had been David's God. On this basis, he pleads with God not to turn from him now that he was in trouble. There was no one but God who could help David. He cast himself completely on Him and waited for Him to answer.

David tells us in verse 12 that the bulls of Bashan surrounded him. Bashan was known for its rich pasture land. Ezekiel 39:18 speaks of the fat cattle of Bashan. The bulls of Bashan were well fed and strong. They represented the enemies that surrounded David at this time in his life. His enemies were well fed and strong and seeking to devour him.

David also compared his enemies to roaring lions tearing apart their prey (verse 13). They came at him with mouths wide open to devour.

David describes himself as water poured out (verse 14). Water poured out on the ground is of no more value. It is soaked up by the earth. David felt as if all his bones were out of joint. When the bone is out of joint not only is it painful but also it renders the limb useless. That is how David felt. His heart was as wax. With the fiery oppression that surrounded him, his heart melted with fear. He had no more courage. David's strength was dried up like a potsherd. The potsherd was an old clay dish. This particular dish was dried up and cracked. It was of no more use to the owner. Again, this is how David felt at this time in his life. He felt useless, powerless and like he was of no more use to anyone.

Physically, David's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He was like a man perishing for lack of water. He lay helplessly in the dust waiting to die. Dogs surrounded him ready to devour. Evil men surrounded him. Notice in verse 16 that they had pierced David's hands. We are not told how the enemy pierced the hands of David. What is important for us to note here is that the Lord Jesus had His hands pierced when He was nailed to the cross for us. This

is the second time in this psalm that allusion is made to what the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross. This helps us to understand something of the reason for David's suffering here. David was prophetically symbolising what the Lord Jesus would suffer for us. He felt what David felt when He laid down His life for us on the cross.

David tells us in verse 17 that he could count all his bones and that people stared at him and gloated over him. This is an indication of the intensity of his suffering at this time.

We see in another prophetic reference to the Lord Jesus in verse 17. In this verse David speaks of his enemies dividing his garments among them and casting lots for his clothing. Matthew 27:35 tells us that this is what they did with the clothing of Jesus. Once again, David prophetically symbolises what the Lord Jesus would have to go through for us. It is unlikely that David knew what was happening here. There are times when the Lord hides the significance of what we are facing. The suffering of David was not without cause, however. Believers, after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus would look back at what David spoke prophetically when he went through this time. They would be encouraged in their faith and trust in God as they saw how these prophecies came to pass perfectly in the Lord Jesus.

Despite the suffering and pain David was going through, his faith held fast. He cried out to God in verse 19: "But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me." His hope is still in God though, at this time, He seems far away. David's strength is fading so he asks the Lord to come quickly. He calls on God to deliver him from the sword and the enemy dogs that sought to devour him. He sought God for deliverance from the mouths of the lions

and the horns of the wild oxen (verse 21). He compares his enemies here to lions and wild oxen chasing after him with their powerful horns.

Though God seemed distant, David knew He would not abandon him. In verse 22, he reminded his readers that the day would come when he would declare the name of the Lord his God to his brothers in the congregation. In other words, the day was coming when David would testify to the goodness of God in the temple where his brothers were assembled. He would share with them the victory of the Lord God. He would praise the Lord God with his brothers.

In his trial, David calls all of Israel to praise the Lord and honour His name. Their God was worthy of praise and honour. What makes this statement so powerful is the fact that David is saying it while he is still struggling with his problems. He looks forward in faith to his deliverance. He knows that while the pain is unbearable at present, God will come to his aid. The God of David would not turn His face forever from the afflicted. God was listening to his cry for help.

In verse 25, David promises to fulfil his vows to the Lord. We are not told what vows David spoke of here but we can be sure that they were vows to live in obedience to the Lord and to serve Him.

David knew that the day was coming when the poor would be satisfied. Those who sought God would praise Him for His provision and victories. The day was coming when the ends of the earth would turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations would bow before Him (verse 27). This is

again a reference to the Lord Jesus, His death and the victory He would obtain by His death. The day was coming when all the rich of the earth would feast and worship the Lord God of Israel. In fact all who died would have to kneel before God. This is what the apostle Paul said would happen when he wrote in Philippians 2:10-11:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

David is assured that future generations would bow down before the Lord God. Whole generations would be told about the wonders of the Lord and proclaim His righteous deeds to a people yet unborn. In other words, people like you and me would hear of the goodness of God and declare His praise.

We see in this psalm how David has been brought very low. God seems far away and David is suffering physically and emotionally. God uses David's pain to show us something quite wonderful. By means of his suffering, David prophetically shows us what the Lord Jesus would face. Through his pain, David speaks powerfully of the Messiah who was to be born and suffer for our sake.

While David does not feel or see the presence of the Lord, it is quite obvious from the psalm that God was clearly with him. The prophecy of the Lord Jesus and what He would suffer shows us that God was working in David to reveal His purpose. We also see evidence of the strengthening presence of the Lord God in how He gave David hope and confidence in the midst of his pain. David's eyes are not

taken away from God. He cries out to Him and seeks Him with all his heart. Again, the strength to do this and not give up hope is an indication that God had not abandoned the psalmist. Though David could not feel or see the Lord at this time, it was God's presence that carried him through to victory.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt forsaken by God? What encouragement do we have in this psalm?
- How does God use David's suffering and pain for His glory? Can God use our pain to accomplish good? Explain.
- What references do we have to the Lord Jesus in this psalm?
- Can Christians feel depressed and discouraged? What is our strength in this psalm?
- Can God be present without us being aware of His presence? What is the role of truth when we cannot feel or see?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that no matter what happens He is in control.
- Thank the Lord that He can use the pain and suffering you are facing to accomplish great good.
- Commit yourself afresh to serve the Lord no matter what happens in life. Thank Him for the wonderful hope we have in Him.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord Jesus for coming to this earth to suffer for us as prophesied by David in this psalm.
- Are you in a place where you do not feel the presence of the Lord? Ask the Lord for strength to trust Him even when you cannot see or feel His presence.

23

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Read Psalm 23:1-6

The twenty-third psalm is probably the best known psalm David wrote. In it, David compares the Lord God to a shepherd and himself to a sheep under His care. Let's begin by looking at the role of the shepherd in this psalm.

THE SHEPHERD PROVIDES

David tells us that, as a shepherd, the Lord provides. The provision of the shepherd is such that the sheep has no need. The shepherd knows his sheep and provides them with everything necessary for their comfort and security. It is the responsibility of the shepherd to care for the sheep. God has taken on this role. He has chosen to care for us as His sheep. He promises to provide for all our needs. As a good Shepherd, the Lord knows exactly what we need and takes on the responsibility to make sure that we have all that is necessary for growth, comfort and security. We may not always agree with God about what we need. As a

good Shepherd, however, He knows us better than we know ourselves.

HE GIVES THE SHEEP REST

The second role of the shepherd is to lead the sheep to green pastures. Notice that the good shepherd makes the sheep lie down in these pastures. This is a picture of peace and rest. This does not mean that we will never have trouble in our life. It is sometimes because of that trouble that the Lord will take us to those green pastures. The pressures of life at times are such that we feel overwhelmed and tired. Jesus understands this need for rest. In Matthew 11:28-29 Jesus tells us:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you
and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in
heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

With the Lord as our Shepherd, we find relief from the tension and stresses of life. In Him, our soul is refreshed and renewed. In my own personal life, there have been times when I have not wanted to take that rest. I wanted to rush things and run ahead of Him. I have also heard God calling me back to that place of rest in Him.

Notice that the place of rest is in green pastures. We have all had times of wandering in spiritual deserts. The green pastures are places where we can be fed and renewed. There are those who believe that the Christian life is one of constant struggle and denial. This passage shows us that God is also interested in blessing us and giving us rest in rich pastures.

THE SHEPHERD LEADS HIS SHEEP

In verse 2, we see also that the role of the shepherd is to lead his sheep. David tells us that the Lord leads us beside quiet waters. There are many raging and troubling waters in this life. The quiet water is a place of calm serenity. The Shepherd takes no delight in seeing his sheep troubled and fearful. When that happens, he will do everything in his power to calm that fear.

This passage tells us that the Lord will lead His sheep in paths that are pleasant and good for them. We do not need to be afraid of the Lord's leading in our life. He will lead us beside still waters. This does not mean that things will always be easy. God's grace however, will always be sufficient for each task. And even in the midst of the struggles of life, we can experience the quiet waters of His comfort and assurance that all is well.

THE SHEPHERD RESTORES HIS SHEEP

There will be times of trouble and discouragement for us in the Christian life. Sometimes the wolf sneaks into the pasture and attacks the sheep. A good shepherd notices the wounds inflicted by the enemy on his sheep. When a sheep is wounded, the good shepherd will do all he can to restore that sheep to full health. God wants to restore us. Notice particularly in this verse that the Shepherd is concerned about the soul of His sheep. He wants their souls to be in good health and will do all He can to restore them.

THE SHEPHERD GUIDES THE SHEEP

The good shepherd guides his sheep in the way they need to go. In this psalm, David tells us that the shepherd guides his sheep in paths of righteousness. In our day, the Lord has given us his Holy Spirit to be our guide into righteousness. God will never lead us astray. He will always lead us to what is good and holy. Knowing this we can discern whether the leading is from God or not. God will only lead us in paths of righteousness and holiness.

As we have already said, this does not mean that the path we tread will be easy. Sometimes the path of righteousness is very difficult. It will sometimes go across steep and rocky mountains. At other times, it will lead through the valley of the shadow of death. This is a dark and cold path. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, however, we can know the peace and security of the Lord. God promises to go with us through the valley. The sheep have nothing to fear even in this dreadful valley.

By means of the shepherd's rod and staff the sheep are led safely through. The rod corrects the sheep when they wander too far from the path. The staff will draw them back. We don't always appreciate the rod and staff of God's discipline. It is however, always for our good. We should never despise the discipline and correction of the Lord. By it, the Lord teaches what is right and protects us from evil. The discipline of the Lord ought to be a comfort for us because it shows us that God is concerned enough for us to keep us from harm. When we stray too far, He will bring us back. He is always watching out for us.

THE SHEPHERD HONOURS HIS SHEEP

In verse 5, David tells us that the Lord prepared a table for him in the presence of His enemies. The Lord knows His sheep. He will honour them in the presence of their enemies. He sets them apart and invites them to His table. They sit beside Him and enjoy the richness of His banquet. The enemies look on with envy. The Good Shepherd anoints the head of His sheep with oil. In so doing, He sets them apart as a holy people. God loves His sheep and blesses them over all others. Their cup overflows with His special blessing on their lives.

David concludes by saying that because the Lord was his shepherd, goodness and love would follow him every day of his life. God protects, loves and blesses all who are His. He shows mercy and compassion on them. Ultimately, He leads His sheep to His very own house where they would live with them forever. The sheep do not deserve such blessings but God showers it on them anyway.

What a blessing it is to know the wonderful provision, guidance and favour of the Lord in our lives. As a good Shepherd, the Lord will care for us and provide for our every need. We can trust Him fully. His protection will surround us. His provision will fill us. His blessing will be poured out on us. He takes His role seriously. What an honour it is to be His sheep.

For Consideration:

- How has God provided for your needs?

- What does this passage teach us about rest? Why is rest important?
- Have you known a time when you had to go through the valley of the shadow of death? Where was the Lord at this time?
- How is the discipline of the Lord a comfort to us?
- How has God restored your soul? What does this passage teach us about God's desire to restore our soul?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His leading in your life.
- Ask the Lord to keep you from rush and worry. Ask Him to enable you to rest fully in Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the wonderful relationship you have with Him as His child.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you failed to appreciate all that He has been doing for you.

LIFT UP YOUR HANDS

Read Psalm 24:1-10

David begins this psalm with a word of praise to the Lord God. He reminds his readers that the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord. He bases this on the fact that the Lord founded the world on the seas and established it on the waters. In other words, God set the land mass in place so that it rose up from the sea and became fruitful, able to support life. Because God created and ordered this universe and everything in it, it all belongs to Him.

This is a very important statement. If everything belongs to the Lord then He has absolute right to do with it as He pleases. If we belong to the Lord, we must give Him the right to do as He pleases with our lives. We were not created for ourselves but for God. We will only find purpose and meaning when we recognise that we belong to God and surrender to His purpose for our lives.

Having stated that everything belongs to God and He is the creator and sustainer of all that is, David now moves

on to speak of the relationship we can have with Him as our Creator and God. He asks the question:

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?" (verse 3).

David believed that a relationship with God was possible. He warns us, however, that not just anybody could stand before Him. Let's take a moment to consider the kind of person who can approach God.

CLEAN HANDS AND A PURE HEART

Only those who had clean hands and a pure heart could stand in the presence of the Lord. Clean hands represent a good and righteous life. There is nothing these hands have done that would defile the person. Their hands were clean in the sense that they were used for good and righteous purposes. Notice also that it is not just that hands that are clean but also the heart. It is in the heart that attitudes and thoughts are formed. The one who has a pure heart is one whose attitudes and motivations are righteous and godly. The person with a pure heart is right with God not only in his actions but also in his thoughts and attitudes.

SEEKING GOD ALONE

This purity can be seen in the fact that the individual has not lifted up his soul to an idol. They do not bow to any other god. Their God has captured their hearts and wills. They seek Him alone and lived as He requires.

DOES NOT SWEAR BY WHAT IS FALSE

Notice in verse 4 that the individual who could approach the throne of God was one who did not swear by what was false. In other words, this individual was honest in his dealings with the men and women around him. You could trust their words and know that what they spoke was absolutely true. This individual stood for what was true and would willingly suffer rather than misrepresent the truth.

This person would receive a blessing and vindication from the Lord. The word vindication used in the New International Version of the Bible has the sense of justice or salvation. God will honour such a person and bring them justice in His time. Not only would these individuals be given the right to ascend the holy hill, but God would honour and defend them in their time of need.

Those who live for God recognising that their lives and possessions all belong to Him, will live lives that please Him. As they do so, they will know the blessing of the Lord and He will keep them in their hour of need.

We can only imagine what our city or country would be like if each individual sets their heart to seek the Lord God and His face. What blessings have we forfeited because we have not honoured God in all our ways? Sometimes, we believe we have a right to do what we want with our lives and possessions. David reminds us that everything belongs to the Lord and we have no ultimate right to anything. It is only as we remember God's ownership and right over all things and submit to this that we can know the joy and blessing of belonging to Him and following His ways.

In verse 7, David cries out from his heart:

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

It was the heart cry of David that his city would receive this wonderful King of glory. He calls the gates and ancient doors to lift up their heads and wait expectantly for the Lord. They were to lift up their heads from their worldly ways, confess their shortcomings and look to the Lord God as their Creator and Saviour. They were to open wide their hearts to receive the King of glory. He wanted to come to them. He wanted to bless.

Who is this King of glory who wanted to come to them? David makes it clear that the King of glory is none other than the Lord strong and mighty in battle. He is the great defender. He is the Lord of lords. He is pictured as a great military commander and valiant warrior. He comes to give victory and to defend His people. He is the Lord Almighty. No enemy can stand before Him.

This great warrior and Almighty Lord wanted to bless them and honour His people. He wanted to be their Saviour and Lord. The only thing that hindered these blessings was the sin of His people. If they wanted Him to come near, they would have to cleanse their hands and hearts. They would need to recognise Him as absolute Lord with total right over all His creation. They needed to surrender to Him and His ways.

What blessing we could know if we surrender to the Lord and His ways? David tells us that we can approach this wonderful creator God. We can experience His presence

and blessing if we would lift up our eyes to Him and surrender to His will. Whole generations can be changed and experience this blessing of the Lord.

All too many times we do not know the blessing of God because we are unwilling to admit that everything belongs to Him. We choose to ignore His purpose for our lives and live as we please. We fail to accept the call to honour Him with our possessions. Instead we claim these possessions as our own and use them as we please. Our hands are not clean. Our hearts are not pure. We have grieved the Lord and kept Him at a distance. We fear to give the Lord control of our lives.

David tells us that only in obedience and surrender of every right can we fully know the blessing and defence of the Lord. May God enable us to come to this place in our lives today.

For Consideration:

- What does David tell us in this passage about a relationship with God?
- What keeps us from the blessings of the Lord?
- What are the requirements for those who want to approach the Lord? How does the Lord Jesus give us this ability to approach God?
- What right does the Lord have over the earth? What right does he have in our lives?
- What does the Lord promise to those who will seek Him?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He wants to bless you?
- What keeps you from experiencing the blessing of God today? Ask God to reveal anything that keeps you from His fullness in your life.
- Take a moment to surrender yourself to the Lord. Offer all you have to Him, recognising that He has absolute right over everything you own.

25

LET ME NOT BE ASHAMED

Read Psalm 25:1-22

There were times in the life of David when he felt overwhelmed and uncertain. It appears that the context of this twenty-fifth psalm was one of those times. David cries out to the Lord by means of this psalm to ask Him for help against his enemies.

In his time of trial, David lifted up his soul to the Lord God, looking to Him for help and guidance. He knew that he could not find the help he needed in himself or any other human being. His attention was on the Lord God because he knows that God alone could deliver him from the trouble he now felt.

In verse 2, David told the Lord that he trusted Him. In the same breath, however, he pleaded with God not to let him be put to shame or let his enemies triumph over him. In saying this, David is fully aware of his weakness. He knew that if God did not come to his aid, he would be defeated. He knew that the enemy could easily defeat him if God

were not on his side. His trust is not in himself or his army. His trust is in the Lord.

David knew that those who put their hope in the Lord God would not be put to shame (verse 3). David prayed to God asking Him to show him the way He wanted him to go. David knew that as long as he walked in the ways of the Lord, he would be secure no matter how strong the enemy was. As long as the sheep stayed with the shepherd, he had the protection of that shepherd. Wandering away from the shepherd, however, was to invite defeat.

The safest place in the world is in the will of God. I am not saying that we will not have struggles in the will of God. The believer will suffer trials. In God's will however, we are sure of God's presence, protection and comfort.

In this time of trial, David cried to God for guidance and instruction. He recognised Him as Saviour and knew that he was secure in Him. His hope was in God as his Saviour (verse 5). His greatest concern in his trial was to remain close to God and not to wander from His path; for in that path alone could he be secure.

David asked God to remember him in His great love and mercy (verse 6). He pleaded with God to look down on him and see his struggle. He leans heavily on the mercy and love of the Lord in his crisis. David knew that he was unworthy of God's support and aid. In verse 7, he looked back at his youth and the foolish and sinful things he had done. He knew that there were times when he had rebelled against God and fell into sin. He did not approach God because he felt he was worthy. God owed him nothing. David called out to God on the basis of His love and mercy.

Mercy is unmerited. Those who receive mercy, receive what they do not deserve. This is the only reason any of us can come to God. If He were not a God of mercy, none of us could ever approach Him. It is because God is good, upright and full of mercy that He reaches out to sinners and teaches them His ways. Those who choose to live in God's ways and receive His instruction will find that God is loving and faithful (verse 10).

David's sins were great (verse 11). He did not deserve that God would teach him His ways and instruct him in His paths. This does not keep him from coming to God for forgiveness. There are many people who do not come to the Lord because they feel that their sin is too great. David knew that God was merciful and delighted in forgiving and teaching those who came to Him.

David reminded his readers in verse 12 that the person who feared the Lord would know His instruction. How often have we tried our own ways and failed? How often have we fallen because we have trusted in human wisdom? David promises us that the one who came to God and honoured Him would benefit from His instruction. God delights in showing us the way. This life is confusing and filled with the enemy's snares and traps. Human wisdom and sight is not sufficient. God will teach us and show us what is right. He will help us walk through the maze of life. We are not left without a guide as we walk the treacherous paths of life. The creator God will teach all those who reverence Him. He will teach them the way to walk.

Those who fear the Lord and listen to his instruction will know prosperity. Their descendants will inherit the land. That prosperity will not always be in earthly riches. God's

riches are not tied to this world. God's presence, salvation, provision, protection and guidance are among the richest of His blessings to those who follow His way and listen to His instruction.

David tells us in verse 14 that the Lord will confide in those who fear him. He will make His covenant known to them. The covenant spoken of here is a covenant God delights in making with His people. It is very similar to a marriage covenant where two people enter into a special relationship. God promises to keep, protect and guide. We promise to be faithful and true to Him. In this covenant agreement, God opens His heart to us and reveals His purpose. He enters into a very intimate and personal relationship with us.

In this time of trouble, David's eyes were on the Lord. He knew that God would release his feet from the enemy snares. He pleaded with God to be gracious to him and keep His covenant agreement. He reminded the Lord that he was lonely and afflicted (verse 16). His troubles had multiplied and he was filled with anguish. He asked God to look on him in his affliction and distress. He pleads with God to take away his sins. He knows that he is unworthy of God's affection but longs to be right with Him and to be drawn closer to His breast.

David reminded God of how his enemies had increased (verse 19). They hated him. David cried out to God for help. He asked Him to guard him and rescue him from these enemies who hated him so fiercely.

David's assurance of deliverance in verse 21 came from his integrity and uprightness. David walked with God and

was faithful to His commands. This is not to say that David was perfect. He has already told us that his sins were great. Despite these failures, David loved the Lord and followed after Him. When he fell, he sought forgiveness. David knew that there was no assurance in open rebellion. What assurance could David have of God's presence and protection on a path of rebellion and evil? Since he was in fellowship with God, however, and walking with him, David felt sure God would keep him in his hour of need.

In his trouble, David's confidence is fully on the Lord his God. He trusted Him and walked in His ways; assured that in so doing he would be victorious. David knew that in trusting himself he would be put to shame and experience great defeat. Only by looking fully to God and walking with Him could David be assured of total victory. His confidence was in a loving and merciful God. He could be assured of that love and mercy because, as His child, David was faithful to God and walking in His ways. Obedience brings great confidence.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt the shame of defeat at the hands of your enemies?
- What does this psalm teach us about the reality of pain and suffering in the life of the believer?
- How does God instruct us as believers today? What has He been teaching you recently?
- How has the Lord confided in you or revealed Himself and His ways to you?

- What is the connection between obedience and assurance of victory? Can we be assured of victory if we are not walking in obedience to the Lord?
- What things do people trust in besides the Lord. Can these things bring victory?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the desire He has to teach us His way.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of love and mercy. Thank Him that we can come to Him because of His love and mercy.
- Do you remember a time when the Lord gave you victory? Take a moment to thank Him for that victory.
- Are there areas in your life where you are not walking with the Lord as you should? Take a moment to ask the Lord for forgiveness. Ask Him to instruct you in this area of your life so you can learn to walk in greater obedience.

26

VINDICATION, TESTING AND REDEMPTION

Read Psalm 26:1-12

Here in Psalm 26, David has a threefold request for God. We will break this down and examine each request individually.

VINDICATE ME

The first request of David in the Psalm is that God would vindicate him. The word, vindicate, means to defend, bring justice or to plead a cause. Likely David is being oppressed or chased by those who sought his life. While David had done nothing wrong, he was being chased like a common criminal. He had to run for his life. Sometimes things in life are not fair. Sometimes the godly suffer. This is what is happening to David at this point in his life.

David reminds the Lord that he had done nothing wrong to deserve this treatment. As David examined his life, he saw himself as being blameless. All his sins were forgiven and he stood before God with a clean conscience. David also trusted the Lord without wavering. He asks God now to come to his aid. He calls on God to exercise justice on the earth and deal with his enemies.

TEST ME

The second request of David in this psalm is that God test him. David is asking God to examine his life and to put him to the test. Notice that David asks that God would test his heart and mind. In asking God to test his heart and mind, David is asking God to search his inner attitudes and desires. We can observe the outward activities but only God can test the heart and the mind.

In particular, David asked the Lord to test his motivation. What was David's motivation in life? He tells us in verse 3 that the love of the Lord was always before him. In other words, it was the love of the Lord that motivated his every action and deed.

David also asked God to examine his walk. David was quite confident that as God examined his walk, He would find that he was walking in the way of truth and righteousness (verse 3).

David had not sat with deceitful men. He did not consort with hypocrites and hated the assembly of evil doers. He absolutely refused to sit with wicked people (verses 4-5). David found no pleasure in associating with those who practised evil.

David “washed his hands in innocence” (verse 6). There were those who washed guilty hands. The hands of these individuals were stained with blood and the filth of an ungodly lifestyle. This was not the case for David. He kept his hands pure and undefiled. He refused to practise evil and took no delight in the ways of evil men. As he came to worship, he came with clean hands. Notice also that he was not ashamed of the Lord. He wanted everyone to know that he loved God and worshipped Him as the one true God (verse 7).

In verse 8, David makes it clear that he loved the house of the Lord. Notice the reason why David came to the house of the Lord. He came to spend time in the presence of God and to know His glory. There are many reasons why we go to church. Some go to be taught, others go to fellowship. David went principally to be in the presence of God.

In this second request, David is asking the Lord to examine his attitudes and his longings. He is not afraid to open up his heart to the Lord. He was confident that as God examined his attitudes and actions, He would find that his heart was sincere and godly. If God were to examine our attitudes and motives, what would He find? May we have the same heart as David.

REDEEM ME AND BE MERCIFUL TO ME

The final request of David in this psalm is that God would redeem him and be merciful to him. David loved the Lord and walked in His ways. He wanted God to recognise this in his life. He did not want to be classified with sinners and bloodthirsty men. He was not like them nor did he enjoy their company. The hands of these individuals were full of

evil schemes and bribes. David's third request is that God would redeem or rescue him from the hands of these wicked individuals. He asks God for mercy. He knew that though he had lived a life that was pure before the Lord, he still needed mercy. He cast himself on the Lord asking Him to rescue him from the plots of evil men intent on destroying him.

In this psalm, David asks the Lord to vindicate him. He wanted God to bring justice to the earth and especially in his situation where he was being opposed and oppressed by evil individuals. He also prayed that God would examine his heart and mind, revealing any evil attitude or thought. David wanted to be absolutely pure before God in thought and deed. Finally, David pleaded with God for mercy and deliverance. He wanted God to lift him up. He wanted to live a life of victory over his foes. The life of the believer should be a life of victory. David's prayer is for justice, integrity and victory.

For Consideration:

- What enemies do you have as a believer today? How have these enemies sought to hinder you in your walk with the Lord?
- Are there sins or wrong attitudes that you need to confess to the Lord God? Do you live with a pure conscience before Him?
- Are you living a life of victory over your enemies? By enemies we do not necessarily refer to people. These enemies can be particular sins in your life.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart and attitude. Open yourself to Him for examination.
- Are you living in victory over sin and evil today? Ask the Lord to give you victory?
- Thank the Lord for the way He has kept you in your trials.

WAIT FOR THE LORD

Read Psalm 27:1-14

One of the reasons the psalms of David have been such an encouragement to so many people down through the years is because David does not hide his struggles. Like us, he knows the pain and trials of life. In the midst of these trials, David points us to the Lord God. In this psalm, he shows us the confidence he has in the Lord God his Saviour.

David begins by reminding his readers that the Lord was his light. David speaks from personal experience. He knew what it was like to be in darkness. Many times in life he wondered where the Lord was. David experienced the darkness of sorrow, abandonment and pain. God was his light in this darkness. In that light, he found hope and courage to continue.

God was also his salvation. He had also saved him from his enemies on countless occasions. As long as the Lord

was on his side, David had nothing to fear. Who could overcome him if God was with him?

God was a stronghold for David. David had often run to that stronghold. As a stronghold, God was a refuge for him in the midst of his trials and suffering. When the enemy approached, David would run to the shelter of the Lord. There in the arms of his Saviour, the pain and trouble he felt was eased. There in his Saviour's arms he felt reassured and confident.

It is important for us to note that David was a powerful king. No other king in Israel had as many victories. To the human eye, David was the most powerful king of his day. It seems strange for us to hear him speak like a young child. He tells us that when he was afraid; he ran to his heavenly father and found comfort. When his enemies came against him; he ran to God for help. We have in this psalm, the secret of David's success. David trusted in God. He did not trust in himself or his experience but in the wisdom and guidance of his heavenly Father. This is where we all need to be. God is not looking for men and women who can deal with problems on their own. He is looking for those who, with childlike faith, run to Him in their time of need. True Christian maturity is found in dependence on the Lord. The more we mature, the more we find ourselves running to the Lord for wisdom and guidance like David.

When evil men advanced against him to devour his flesh, David ran to his stronghold. When his enemies attacked him, they stumbled and fell because he was sheltered in the arms of his Lord (verse 2). What wonderful, childlike faith we see here.

In verse 3, David tells us that when an army besieged him, his heart was not afraid. Even if war broke out against him, he was confident in his God. How many times have I fallen short of this type of faith in my life? Problems come and I begin to worry. Often I find myself becoming afraid. If only I had the childlike faith of David, what rest I could experience.

David had a wonderful relationship with the Lord. He trusted the Lord absolutely in his problems and difficulties. In verse 4, we catch a glimpse of his love for his God when he says:

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the
days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the
LORD and to seek him in His temple.

The one great desire of David's heart was not for military success and riches in this life. His heart was set on knowing God. More than anything else, David wanted to be with the Lord. Notice the reason David wanted to be with the Lord. He wanted to gaze on the beauty of God and seek Him in His temple. There are many reasons why we can look forward to heaven. Some people look forward to heaven because they will be reunited with their loved ones. Some look forward to heaven because they will be eased of their suffering and pain in life. David longed for heaven because he wanted to gaze on the beauty of God and be in constant communion with Him.

David had confidence that in the day of trouble, God would keep him safe (verse 5). He would shelter him in His tabernacle and set him high on a rock where he would be safe

from his enemies. The tabernacle, in the Old Testament context was where the Lord dwelt. God would draw David close and surround him with His presence. David did not need to fear. God would keep him safe.

David takes no credit for his victories. He brings all glory to God. It was God who lifted up his head above the enemies that surrounded him (verse 6). David worshipped God in His tabernacle because of the favour He showed him. There in the tabernacle, he shouted with joy and made music to the Lord. Again, notice the childlike faith of David. Like a joyful child receiving a long sought gift, David jumps for joy and sings to the Lord.

In his time of trouble, David calls out: "Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me" (verse 7). David's confidence was in the Lord. His relationship with Him is such that he could ask Him to hear his voice when he called. He knows that God will do so. For David, God was very personal and near. He could speak to Him and ask Him for guidance and protection. David knew that God would care for him as a father cares for his child.

More than anything in life, David wanted to seek the face of God. To seek the face of God is to get to know Him personally. It is one thing to read about God and study His characteristics in the Bible, it is quite another thing to know Him personally and seek His face. David was not so much interested in knowing about God, he wanted to see His face and bow down to Him. He wanted to talk with Him and know His smile.

David pleaded with God not to hide His face from him (verse 9). He begs Him not to turn away from him in his

time of need. There could be nothing worse for David than this. His heart longed to see God. He pleaded with God not to turn from him or forsake him in his hour of need.

This shows us that there were times in David's life when God did seem far away. There were times when David feared he would be separated from God. In those times, however, he felt confident that the love of God for him was more powerful than the love of any father or mother. Though a father and mother might possibly forsake their child, God would never forsake David (verse 10). This was his confidence in moments of weakness.

David's heart cry in verse 11 is that God would teach him His ways and lead him on the right path. Notice that David needed the Lord to teach him the way to go because of his oppressors. Humanly, David was struggling. He did not know where to turn. His enemies were crowding him and he didn't know what to do or where to turn. He needed the wisdom of his heavenly Father and sought it with all his heart.

David pleads with God not to turn him over to the desires of his foes (verse 12). False witnesses rose up seeking to devour him. They breathed out violent lies in an attempt to destroy him. Though things looked very bad for him, David still was confident in the Lord. He knew that he would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Though at the time things looked very bad, David was confident that God would come through. In his trouble, David waited on the Lord. He waited with confidence that, in His time, God would rescue him and lift his head above his enemies. He challenges us to do the same. He calls us to be strong.

He calls us to be patient and to bear with those trials for a while longer and God will come to our aid.

For Consideration:

- How is the faith of David like that of a child?
- David was a great military leader of his day. Where did his strength come from?
- Have you ever been tempted to trust in your own strength? Where did that lead you?
- What did David do when he was afraid?
- What does it mean to seek the face of God? How is this different from studying about God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you a childlike faith like David's.
- Ask the Lord to teach you what it means to seek His face. Ask Him to give you a deep passion to seek His face.
- Thank the Lord that he is a stronghold for us in our hour of need.
- Are you going through a particular trial today? Ask God to help you to wait confidently on Him at this time.

28

HEAR MY CRY

Read Psalm 28:1-9

As in Psalm 27, David recognises his need for the Lord. Though he was a mighty king, he knew the source of his strength. David cried out to the Lord in his time of need. The context of the psalm indicates that David was grieving because of his enemies. He knew that unless the Lord came to his aid, he would perish.

Notice his dependence on the Lord in verse 1. He cries out to the Lord; recognising that if the Lord does not help him he would be like those who went down to the pit. The pit refers to the grave or death. David is unashamed to recognise his weakness. Because he was so willing to admit his need for the Lord, David experienced many victories. Until we are ready to recognise our need; we will never know the wonderful solution to that need.

In verse 1, David called the Lord his Rock. A rock is a firm foundation. The storms of life could come against that rock but it would not move. The rock remains unchanged. David

called the Lord a Rock because He was unchangeable and unaffected by the trials and storms of life.

David cried out to the Lord to hear him (verse 2). He knew that if the Lord refused to listen, he would perish. Notice the boldness of David in asking God to listen. David had a relationship with God that allowed Him to speak to God in this way. He was confident in that relationship. He could come with boldness to ask the Lord to defend and show him mercy. The Lord gives us this privilege today as well. Like David, we can boldly ask the Lord for mercy in our time of need.

In verse 3, David asked for justice. He asked that the Lord not drag him away with the wicked and those who did evil. David knew that the Lord would one day judge the wicked. He asks for God's favour in the time of judgement.

The wicked of David's day spoke cordially with their neighbours but had malice in their hearts. In other words, on the outside they looked like saints but hated neighbours in their hearts. Obviously, this hatred and malice spilled out into their actions. In verse 4, David asked the Lord to repay the wicked for their evil deeds and for what their hands had done. He wanted the Lord to give them what they deserved.

The wicked showed no regard for the work of God. Because of this, David prophesied that the Lord would tear them down so that they would never be built up again. David believed that though the wicked were causing great trouble in his day, the time would come when the Lord would punish them for their evil deeds. David also knew that the Lord would spare him from this horrible judgement.

In verse 6, he praised the Lord that he had heard his cry for mercy.

Until the time that God brought justice, David trusted that the Lord would continue to be his strength and shield. He would continue to trust the Lord and His ways. In fact, his heart leapt for joy and thanksgiving because God was a fortress of salvation for His people. David concludes the psalm by asking God to save all His people and to be their shepherd forever. As a shepherd himself, David knew the care he had taken for his sheep. He expected that God would do nothing less for him.

There are several important lessons we need to see in this psalm. First, trials and struggles will come to God's people. David knew his share of problems, so did the Lord Jesus. We are not exempt from trials in life. In fact, if we want to live for the Lord Jesus we will likely have to face even more struggles.

Second, God will judge those who do evil. David had confidence in the Lord. God will not allow evil to continue. Sometimes judgement seems long in coming but it will come.

Third, God will sometimes allow us to face the trials that come from unjust and evil people. The context of this psalm indicates that David was facing opposition in life at the hands of evil men and women. What is also true, however, is that if God allows us to face opposition He will also shepherd and strengthen us through the opposition. David praises the Lord in this psalm for the assurance he had because God was a Good Shepherd to His people.

Ultimately God, as a Good Shepherd will deliver us from evil and the evil intentions of our enemies. We have every reason to praise God like David did. If we have to face opposition we can be sure that our Shepherd will not abandon us. We can be sure that He will judge evil and bring justice in the end. This gives us cause to praise the Lord and persevere.

For Consideration:

- David recognised his weakness in this psalm. What are your personal weaknesses?
- David was confident in the fact that God would deliver him from his enemies. Do you have this same confidence? How does this affect how you face your trial?
- Do the righteous go through trials and opposition at the hands of evil doers? What confidence do the righteous have according to this psalm?
- How has the Lord been your Shepherd? What have you experienced with Him as your Shepherd?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to strengthen you in your weakness.
- Thank the Lord that He promises to be our Shepherd.
- Do you know believers who are suffering right now at the hands of evil doers? Take a moment to pray that the Lord would reach out to them in their time of suffering.

29

IN PRAISE OF HIS VOICE

Reading Psalm 29:1-11

The occasion of this psalm seems to be a great thunder storm that David had the opportunity to watch. As he watched and listened to that storm, he expresses his feeling in this psalm.

David begins by calling his readers to recognise the glory and strength of the Lord God of Israel. Notice in particular that David speaks to the "mighty ones." The mighty ones may be the angels of heaven or the great and powerful leaders of the earth. As mighty as these individuals were, they were as nothing before the glorious and almighty power of David's God. I like to think of David watching a thunder storm. As the thunder rolls across the sky and the lightning strikes, David is awestruck by the power of his Lord. His heart breaks out in worship and praise of such a display of glory and majesty. Who can compare with this great God?

In verse 3, David tells us that the voice of the Lord was over the mighty waters. We can imagine David looking out at a downpour of rain. The noise of that rain can be heard everywhere. I remember a church service on the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean. We were meeting in a home with a tin roof. As the worship service began, the rain fell. The noise of the rain falling on the roof was so loud we could not hear one another. We had to change the format of the service and gather together in smaller groups to be heard. David listened to the sound of the mighty rains falling. He hears the deafening sound of the thunder as it spoke over the sound of the rain. In all this he saw the power and majesty of the Lord God.

"The voice of the Lord is powerful," said David. "The voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon" (verses 4-5). Those of us who have heard the loud blast of thunder can understand what David is talking about here. It is quite easy to imagine the loud blast of thunder accompanied by lightening striking the famous cedars of Lebanon and breaking them to pieces.

In verse 6, David speaks of the wind that accompanied the thunder, lightning and rain. The wind caused the strong cedars to wave back and forth like a calf or young oxen skipping about in the field.

God's voice struck with flashes of lightning (verse 7). As His voice thundered from the heavens, it seemed to shake the desert. The terrible storm twisted the strong oaks and stripped the forest bare. Maybe you have experienced the power of the wind in a great storm uprooting trees or snapping them in two.

David knew the source of the lightning, thunder and wind. He knew that the storm he watched that day came from his God and was a sign of His great power and majesty. He could not help but cry out "Glory!"

The Lord was on His throne over the great flood of waters resulting from this storm. He was king and the thunder listened to His voice. David was powerfully struck by the force of the storm and the awareness it brought to him about the God who sent it. That storm made David sit back in wonder at the power of his Creator God.

As David reflects on these things, he concludes with two powerful statements. First, he tells us that the Lord gives strength to His people. The power he saw in that storm made him aware of the power of His God. There was no God like him. What struck David was the fact that God made this strength available to us. The power behind the thunder and lightning can be ours as well. With this awesome power behind us, who shall we fear? We can step out boldly and confidently in the path He has laid out for us. Nothing can stop us because God's powerful resources are available to us and will go before us.

The second conclusion David brings in verse 11 is that God blesses His people with peace. In light of the incredible power of God, as seen in the storm, what a blessing it is to know the peace of the Lord. Those who belong to the Lord have nothing to fear. They can confidently approach this awesome God. The Lord Jesus has brought peace between us and the Father.

Those who have turned their backs on God, however, will one day stand before this powerful God to give an account

of their lives. What a terrible day that will be. For those who know and love Him, however, we have no cause for fear.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever witnessed the effects of a powerful storm? What does this teach us about God?
- What two conclusions does David make in verse 11? What encouragement does this bring to you?
- How does God reveal Himself through nature? What does nature teach us about God?

For Prayer:

- Thank God for His great strength and power.
- Thank the Lord that He has made His strength available to us.
- Do you know someone who is not yet in a right relationship with God? Take a moment to pray for them asking that God would bring them to Himself before it is too late.

YOU FAVOURED ME

Psalm 30:1-12

The introduction to this psalm in the New International Version of the Bible tells us that it was written by David and used for the dedication of the temple.

A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple.
Of David

This immediately poses a problem. The temple was built after David died. The solution may be in the fact that the psalm was written by David to be used by the singers when the temple of Solomon was dedicated at a later point.

The word translated "temple" in the New International Version could easily be translated by the word "house." While the New International Version uses the word "temple" a footnote indicates that the word "palace" could also be intended. This means that this psalm could have been used in the dedication of David's palace and not the temple.

The psalm is a psalm of praise to God. David begins in verse 1 by saying:

"I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me."

David's life was not always easy. He had many enemies in this world. He felt the pain and agony of rejection. He knew what it was like to run from his enemies and to be in the depth of despair and sorrow. In verse 1, David expresses his gratitude to God for lifting him out of the struggles he faced in life. David called out to the Lord and the Lord came to his aid. God did not keep him from getting wounded but when David called out to him He healed him of those wounds (verse 2).

Notice how David says in verse 3 that the Lord brought him up out of the grave. In other words, God spared his life. David owed his life to the Lord God.

Because of what the Lord had done for him, David invited all saints to sing to the Lord and praise His holy name. Notice that though the Lord allowed him to face opposition, David still calls Him holy. He does not blame God for his trials and disappointments in life. He does not accuse Him of wrongdoing. Though David did not always understand His ways, he accepted them as from the hand of a perfect and sinless God.

Notice also, that David's heart responded in worship and singing to God. There are people who naturally respond to God through music. David's heart was moved to sing. The hearts of other saints may be moved to give or to proclaim

through testimony the goodness of God. For David, however, music was the language of his heart.

Notice the reason for David's praise to the Lord. He tells us verse in 5 that while the anger of the Lord lasts for a moment, His favour lasts a lifetime. David knew that God would discipline His children from time to time. This discipline was for their good. David does not question the love of the Lord in this discipline. He knew that God was acting to correct him and draw him closer to himself through the suffering he experienced. He also knew that the discipline would give birth to something greater and that he would live in the favour of the Lord for all eternity. What is a moment of discipline compared to eternity? What is a moment of suffering compared to the lessons learned and the closeness we feel to the Lord when that discipline has refined us?

David tells us that while we may weep for a night, joy will come in the morning. Suffering will not last forever. Even if we must suffer all of our lives on this earth, we know that there is a place for us at the Lord's side in heaven where there will be no more suffering or pain. This is not the same for the unbeliever. Hell is a real place whose torments will never cease (Mark 9:47-48).

David confesses in verse 6 that there were times in his life when he felt so secure that he said: "I will never be shaken." There were other times when that confidence was shaken. God would sometimes bring him down to remind him of his weakness and frailty.

Notice in verse 7 that when the Lord favoured David, the mountain of Jerusalem could not be crushed. He was

secure. Nothing could stand against him when the favour of the Lord was on his life. David could not take the favour of the Lord for granted, however. There were also times in his life when the Lord seemed to hide His face from him.

When God hid His face, David was dismayed. This “dismay” was a sense of weakness and helplessness. David’s enemies would pursue him, plagues would come on the land and many lives would be lost. David confesses that without the favour of God he would have been destroyed. He was completely dependent on the grace and favour of God for all things. His strength, his wisdom, his prosperity and his life all depended on the favour of God being shown to him.

God allowed David to face opposition in order to remind him of how dependent he was on Him. In his trouble, David called to the Lord (verse 8). The Lord reached out to him in mercy and compassion. David gave God glory because God spared his life. David’s life was a powerful example of the great faithfulness of the Lord God.

God turned David’s wailing into dancing. God removed the sackcloth (worn by mourners) and clothed him with joy. David knew what it was like to wail and be dressed in sackcloth. God allowed him to experience these things in his life. David also knew the power of God to overcome.

David would make his heart sing praises to the Lord. He would not be silent when God had done so much for him. He wanted to shout out to everyone who would listen that God was a loving God who favoured him. For this, David’s heart would always sing.

The great lesson of this psalm has to do with the favour of the Lord on our lives. Where would we be without this favour? When the Lord favours us, we are blessed and strong. Without that favour we are weak. May we learn to cry out more and more for the favour of God on our lives, marriages and ministries.

For Consideration:

- How does David praise the Lord in this passage? What are some other ways of praising the Lord?
- David's trials and the Lord's deliverance seemed only to enhance his worship. How do trials enhance your experience of God and worship?
- What comfort does this psalm bring to those who are suffering?
- What was the source of David's strength? Have you experienced this strengthening yourself?
- Is it the purpose of God to set us free from every trial in life? Can our trials be a blessing in disguise? How has God used suffering in your life to draw you closer to Himself?
- What does this psalm teach us about the favour of God in David's life? Is that favour available to you today?

For Prayer:

- Thank God for times He has delivered you from your trials and suffering? Thank Him also that He has used suffering in your life to accomplish good.

- Thank the Lord for the strength He has promised those who love Him.
- Thank the Lord that He cares enough for you to discipline you when you need it. Thank Him for His Fatherly love.
- Ask the Lord for greater favour on your life, your marriage and your ministry.

31

THE LORD MY REFUGE

Read Psalm 31:1-24

We have seen that David had his share of problems in life. In Psalm 31, David cries out to the Lord for refuge. We discover that while God may not always remove the problems and difficulties we face, He will certainly be with us through those difficulties.

In verse 1, David reminds us that he had taken refuge in the Lord in times of difficulty. In these times he asked Him for four things. Let's examine these four requests of David.

First in verse 1, he asked that the Lord not allow him to be put to shame. For David to be put to shame one of two things would need to happen. Either he would deny the Lord his God or his enemies would have victory over him. He did not want either of these things to happen. In times of difficulty He did not ever want to deny the Lord his God or doubt His character. He asked for strength to be faithful to God in his trials.

If David's enemies had victory over him, he felt that this would reflect on the Lord his God. These enemies would believe that God was not able to deliver David. David could not bear the thought that the enemies would think that God was not able to deliver him. His heart was for the glory of God. David asks the Lord for strength that he would not be put to shame before the Lord by denying His name. He also asks that the Lord's name would not be put to shame by him falling under the weight of a burden he could not bear.

The second thing David asks from God in his trial is that God deliver him from his enemies. Notice in particular that David recognised God as a God of righteousness. He asked for deliverance in that righteousness. He is asking here that good triumph over evil. He is asking that righteousness prevail in his time of need. He does not want to see evil overcome. He wants the cause of God to triumph. He is not looking for deliverance for himself alone. He wants to be delivered so that God's righteous purpose would be accomplished, not only in him but also before his enemies.

In verse 2, the third thing David asked God was that He turn His ear to him and come quickly. He does not hesitate to ask God to listen to him. David knows that God is a personal God who is interested in the cries of His people. He has confidence that God will listen to his cry. He expected God to come. He relied on God's loving kindness and mercy. What he doesn't rely on is his own ability to overcome without God's favour.

The fourth request of David as he took refuge in the Lord was that God be a strong fortress for him. He is asking God

to surround him. A fortress was built of strong walls that would protect those inside from the attack of the enemy. The enemy could shoot their arrows at the fortress but those who remained inside were safe. David had confidence that as long as he remained in the fortress, he would be secure. There was no way the enemy could reach him if he was in this fortress. David's confidence is in the Lord God. He is asking God to surround him in his time of need so that the enemy's arrows would not harm him.

From verse 3, we understand that David knew that God was his rock and fortress. He was not asking God to do anything for him that God had not already promised to do. Because God had already committed Himself to be David's refuge, David asks two things more of God. First in verse 3, he asked that God would guide him for the sake of His name. In other words David needed great wisdom at this time in his life. David wanted to bring glory to the Lord in his weakness and suffering. He asked that God lead him so that he would always bring glory and honour to His name. The enemies would see this and know that the Lord God reigned as sovereign Lord.

The second request David has for the Lord his fortress is that God would free him from the trap the enemy had set for him. David believed that it was the desire of the Lord to set His people free from the snares and traps of the enemy. It is not God's purpose that we be defeated by the enemy. He wants to bring us victory. Satan seeks to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Many have fallen into his trap. What is even sadder is that there are many believers who live their lives caught in Satan's trap. Some never overcome the bitterness or anger of things done to them. Others refuse to

forgive their brother or sister for past offences. David had no intention of staying in that trap. He looked for victory.

In his trial, David committed himself into the hands of the Lord God. Jesus himself would use these words as He gave his life on the cross (Luke 23:46). Jesus too placed His life in the hands of the Father in His time of suffering. Both men surrendered their lives to the will of the Father seeking His glory and purpose in all that happened.

David has faith to believe that God would hear his request and deliver him. He commits himself to God alone. He realised it was futile to cling to worthless idols (verse 6). There was one true God. He alone could give victory. David committed himself not to bow the knee to any other god but to trust the Lord God of Israel alone for his victory.

It is not an easy thing to trust the Lord. The Lord's ways are not the same as ours. He will lead us on paths we do not understand. In times of trouble, we will be tempted to seek our own victory. David commits himself to trusting the Lord alone in his suffering and waiting on His victory.

In verse 7, David also committed himself to be glad and rejoice in the love of the Lord. David was a worshipper at heart. His commitment was that he would give God thanks and worship His name for victory received. He would praise God as the one who saw his affliction and the anguish of his soul. He would rejoice in the Lord because He had not handed him over to the enemy. He praised Him because he placed his feet in a spacious place blessing him with abundance.

What is most remarkable about these words of David is that they were spoken at a time of great turmoil. In verse 9, we see that David's eyes were weak with sorrow. His soul and his body were distressed. Anguish seemed to consume him. His flesh failed him and his bones grew weak because of the heavy load of affliction he was under. His neighbours held David in contempt. Even his friends turned their backs on him. He was in such anguish that even those who saw him on the street fled from him. He described his life as a piece of broken pottery that people quickly forget. He had been the subject of slander. Terror seemed to surround him on every side. His enemies conspired against him and planned how to take his life. These were not easy times for David.

David did not give up hope. He continued to trust in the Lord saying "You are my God" (verse 14). Nothing would shake his faith and trust in God. Though he does not understand what God is doing, he trusted Him completely.

David committed his life to the Lord saying: "My times are in your hands." In other words, God knew what He was doing. God's purpose was perfect. David accepted what God allowed him to face. He simply asked that God would deliver him through these trials.

David also asked God to let His face shine on him. The idea here is that God would pour out His blessing on him. David believed that the love of God was an unfailing love (verse 16). He understood that while things did not look good for him now, God was acting in love toward him. David did not doubt the love of God would be revealed in time.

In verse 17, David asked God to put the wicked to shame. He asked God to judge them so that they lay silent in the grave. He asked God to silence the lying lips that spoke with pride and contempt against the righteous. He wanted the justice of God to prevail in the land.

David concludes this psalm in verse 19-24 with words of praise and thanksgiving. He rejoiced in the goodness of the Lord stored up for those who feared Him (verse 19). Notice that this goodness is both “stored up” and “bestowed in the sight of men” (verse 19). This goodness is both here in this world and in the world to come.

In verse 20, David rejoiced in the shelter of the Lord's presence. In that presence, the believer can safely hide. There believers are safe from the plotting of evil men and women against them. Notice that the plotting and accusing does not stop. The unbeliever will continue to speak evil but the Lord will be our protection and security in those times.

David seems to mention a particular incident in his life in verse 21. At that time, he was besieged in a city. He felt helpless and cut off from the face of the Lord. He cried out to the Lord and the Lord answered his prayer and came to his aid. David praised the Lord because He had delivered him by His wonderful love when he was besieged in that city. David remembers this time and it brings hope to him in this new trial he faces.

David concludes in verse 23-24 with an exhortation to all believers. He calls us to love the Lord, be strong and take heart. Our hope in the Lord will not be in vain. God preserves the faithful and pays back the proud for what they have done.

In this psalm, we see how, in his pain and suffering, David's attention is on the Lord. His great desire is for the Lord to keep him faithful until he was delivered. The picture is one of a soldier holding a position under attack. He knows that reinforcements are coming but until they do he needs to be faithful and persevere. God will come to our aid. In the meantime, however, we must be faithful to His calling and persevere. In time, we will experience His victory.

For Consideration:

- How has God been a refuge or shelter for you? Think of a particular incident where God preserved and kept you safe.
- David asked God to free him from the trap the enemy had set for him. What traps has the enemy set for you. What traps has he set for your community?
- Do we ever have reason to doubt God in our time of trial and suffering?
- What counsel does David give those who suffer trials and tribulations today?
- How important is perseverance and faithfulness in our suffering? Have you been faithful in the things you have suffered?

For Prayer:

- Are you facing a trial today? Ask the Lord God to give you the faith and confidence of David.

- Thank the Lord that He hears our prayer and comes to our aid.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who is presently facing a trial in their life. Ask God to strengthen them in this time of testing.
- Thank the Lord that no matter what happens to you, His love and guidance will never fail.
- Ask God to give you grace to be faithful and persevere until He gives you the victory.

32

THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS

Read Psalm 32:1-11

While David enjoyed a wonderful relationship with the Lord his God, he was not perfect. There were times when David fell into deep sin. He knew what it was like to break fellowship with God. He also knew what it was like to be forgiven. Here in Psalm 32, David shares from personal experience the blessing of forgiveness.

David begins in verse 1 by speaking about the blessing of having our transgressions forgiven and our sins covered. In verse 2, he repeats a similar thought by saying that the person is blessed whose sin ("iniquity," KJV) the Lord does not count against him and in whom there is no deceit. There are some important details we need to see here. David uses four words to describe sin. He begins in verse 1 by speaking of transgressions. To transgress is to trespass or to cross a boundary into forbidden territory. The second word is "sin." To sin is to miss the mark or to fall

short of a target. To sin, is to fall short of the standard God has set. The third word used here is the word "iniquity". This third word refers to something that is crooked or something that has deviated from its proper course. A good illustration of this would be a river that has changed its course. The final word used here is the word deceit. This word speaks of falsehood, hypocrisy or slackness.

What is important for us to understand from these first two verses is that there is forgiveness for all who trespass into forbidden territory. The failures of those who miss the mark or fall short can be covered. It is possible for God not to hold the rebellion of those who have deviated from the path against them. Even those who act with falsehood and hypocrisy can be assured of pardon if they come to God and seek His forgiveness. For this, David praises the Lord.

Notice from verse 3 that while there is forgiveness for sins, those sins need to be confessed to the Lord. David, speaking from personal experience, reminds us that when he kept silent about his sinful ways, his bones wasted away through groaning. David could not remain silent. David could not be comfortable remaining in sin. Like a deadly disease, sin ate away at David. All day long, he felt the weight of that sin in his heart. It slowly destroyed him. The believer cannot be content to remain in sin. Like David, we will find sin eating away at us from the inside.

Notice that David felt the need to speak out about his sin. As long as he hid sin in his heart, he felt its terrible weight. In verse 4, David told his readers that day and night he felt that weight of this sin. His strength was being sapped from him. The solution, according to David, was to acknowledge and confess that sin.

In verse 5, David broke the silence and acknowledged his sin, exposed his iniquity and confessed his transgressions. David makes it clear that sin must be acknowledged to God. We need to admit to God what that we have fallen short of the mark. We must accept our guilt and expose our crooked paths. We must admit that we have trespassed onto forbidden territory. If there was to be any relief in David's life, he needed to speak to God about his sin.

David reassures us that when we confess these shortcomings to the Lord, He will forgive us. No longer will these sins and shortcomings be held against us. No longer do we have to bear their weight. No longer do they have to destroy us.

David called on everyone who was godly to pray in light of this wonderful possibility of forgiveness. As long as God could be found there was hope of forgiveness. Notice the result of this prayer for forgiveness? David tells us that when the mighty waters of judgement rose, they would not reach those God had forgiven. God would be a hiding place for the one who admitted and confessed his sin (verse 7). God would protect him in his time of trouble and deliver him from evil.

Notice also in verse 7 that God surrounds those who have been forgiven with songs of deliverance. Before being forgiven, there was no song in David's heart. He could not be content in sin. He carried a heavy weight of guilt. That weight would not allow him to sing praise to the Lord. When that weight was removed however, David exploded in praise and thanksgiving. His heart was filled with joy and praise to God. Joy and worship was restored. As long as we remain in sin, we will not be content. Our worship will

be affected and we will not be able to experience the joy of the Lord. Confession will restore joy and worship.

In verse 8, David reminded his readers that when they confessed their sin, God would instruct and guide them in the way they should go. God would counsel and watch over those who returned to Him and His ways. As long as we remain in sin, we are not open to the instruction and guidance of God. Sin blocks our communion with God. Confession will restore this.

David called on his readers; telling them not to be like the horse or the mule that had to be controlled by a bit and bridle. Unless they are forced in a certain direction, they would not move. It is not the desire of the Lord God to control us like a horse or mule. He does not delight in forced obedience. It is the heart of God that we respond willingly to Him and listen to His voice. Forced obedience is not really obedience at all.

In verse 10, David reminds us that while the woes of the wicked are many, God's unfailing love surrounds those who trust Him. This is not to say that the Lord no longer loves us when we wander from the path. Those who wander from the path, however, block the experience of God's love in their lives. When we run away from God in sin and rebellion, we separate ourselves from the intimacy we could experience with Him. Confession of sin can restore us to that experience of intimacy with God.

David shows us here that there is no peace in sin. He reveals the many blessings of forgiveness and challenges each reader to come to God and confess those sins. In

doing so, the blessings of God will be unlocked and poured out in abundance.

For Consideration:

- What four words does David use in this psalm for sin? What do these words teach us about sin?
- What is the result of living with unconfessed sin in our lives?
- What blessings does God give those who chose to willingly confess their sins?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the forgiveness of sin.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any sin that remains in your life.
- Ask God to restore you to fellowship and joy.

33

REASONS TO PRAISE AND FEAR THE LORD

Read Psalm 33:1-22

While the author of this psalm is not specifically stated, it seems to have a very similar style to the other psalms of David. It is a psalm that calls on the people of God to recognise the privilege they have to belong to the Lord God of Israel. It is a call to praise and worship. The psalm seems to have two main petitions. We will examine each of these petitions individually.

SING JOYFULLY TO THE LORD

The first petition or call to the people of God is to sing joyfully to the Lord. Notice that this call is to the righteous. This is not a call to the ungodly or the hypocrite. Their worship would not be accepted unless they repented of their sin. For the righteous, however, it was only fitting that they praise the Lord.

Notice in verses 2 and 3 that the Lord says three things about worship. First, the righteous were to praise Him with the harp. They were to make music to Him with the ten-stringed lyre. The Psalmist encouraged his readers to "play skilfully." He expected that the righteous would give their best. We should not understand from this that only skilful musicians should play in our worship services. Surely God accepts even the humble efforts of those who are less than skilled. What we need to understand here is that when it comes to our worship, God deserves our best whatever that might be.

The call of the psalmist is to use musical instruments in the worship of the Lord God. We should understand that worship can certainly take place without musical instruments but God does delight in the skilful tunes played by His children on musical instruments for His glory.

Notice second, in verse 3, that the psalmist calls the reader to sing a new song to the Lord. This would indicate that God encourages creativity in worship. This does not mean that we should throw out the old hymns that have been sung for generations. The Psalmist, however, does encourage new expressions of faith through music. He challenges his readers to write new songs expressing their heart of worship and show what God means to them personally.

Finally, the psalmist encourages joy in worship. In verse 3, he calls his readers to shout joyfully to the Lord. Worship according to the psalmist ought to be a joyful expression of faith. Some believers seem to frown on joyful expressions of worship. This passage tells us clearly that joy in worship is a delight to the heart of God.

In this first petition of psalm 33, the righteous are called to sing to the Lord skilfully and creatively and with joyful music. There are many reasons for this. In verses 4 to 7, the psalmist gives us a number of reasons why we should joyfully sing and play music to the Lord.

First, we should sing joyfully to the Lord because the word of the Lord is right and true (verse 4). What the Lord says He will do. He is absolutely trustworthy. We can count fully on Him.

Second, we should praise the Lord because He is faithful in all He does (verse 4). God will never change. We can always rely on Him. Even when we have been unfaithful to Him, the Lord remains faithful to us (2 Timothy 2:13).

The third reason to sing praises to the Lord is found in verse 5. The Psalmist reminded his readers that the Lord loved righteousness and justice. Where would we be today if the Lord did not love righteousness and justice? What a wonderful thing it is to know that evil will not triumph. Righteousness and justice will prevail. We have hope because God is infinitely good. This is reason to praise the Lord.

There is a fourth reason why the righteous need to sing praises to the Lord. In verse 5, the Psalmist tells his readers that the earth was full of His unfailing love. What a blessing it is to know that the love of the Lord fills the earth. There is ample love for each of us. That love is an unfailing love. Even when we do not deserve to be loved, He continues to love us. Nothing can separate us from that love (Romans 8:35-39). Again this is reason to sing to the Lord.

In verses 6 and 7, the psalmist tells us that the heavens, with all their stars, were made by the breath of the Lord's mouth and He gathered the waters of the sea together in storehouses. The idea is that the Lord gathered the waters so that they formed the great oceans of our day. He put those oceans in their place and by His command they remain. Who could not praise a great God such as this?

LET ALL THE EARTH FEAR THE LORD

The second challenge of this psalm is found in verse 8. Here the psalmist calls the people of the whole earth to fear the Lord and revere His name. As with the first challenge, the psalmist states his reasons for calling the earth to fear the Lord. It should be noticed that while only the righteous are called to sing praise to the Lord, the whole world is to revere and fear Him.

The first reason why the whole world should fear the Lord is because when He spoke the world came to be. By a simple word from the mouth of God the whole universe came into being. This is a power beyond our ability to imagine. Who in their right mind would not fear and respect a God with such power?

The second reason to fear the Lord is because the Lord foils the plans of the nations (verse 10). In other words, as powerful as these nations are, they cannot compete with God. All their plans and efforts will amount to nothing should the Lord decide to oppose them. Only the plans of the Lord and His purposes can endure. Nothing can thwart the plan of God. For this reason, the nation that fears the Lord God is richly blessed. Their plans will succeed (verse 12).

The third reason why the whole earth should fear the Lord is because the Lord looks down from heaven and sees all who live on the earth. He watches all they do from heaven. According to verse 15, He takes everything they do into consideration. If you knew that the all-powerful God of this universe was watching everything you did would you not be fearful? We will all give an account of our actions before God. Knowing this ought to cause us to fear the Lord and reverence His name.

The fourth reason why we need to fear the Lord is because He is bigger than all of us. The psalmist tells us in verse 16 that no king is saved by the size of his army. There is no army big enough to conquer the Lord God. No warrior can escape His strength. There is no warrior like the Lord. There is no war horse that can run fast enough to deliver a warrior from the hands of the Lord. To have the Lord as an enemy is to perish.

The final reason why we should fear the Lord is because His eyes are on those who fear Him and hope in His unfailing love (verse 18). These individuals will be delivered from death and kept alive in the famine (verse 19). Our only hope is in the Lord. All who turn from him have no hope.

The psalmist concludes in verses 20 to 22. Here he gives the reader his heartfelt resolution. He tells the reader that he and those of like mind would wait on the Lord. He was their shield and help. They would trust and rejoice in His name. There was nowhere else to turn. In the Lord alone was salvation. The psalmist concludes in verse 22 with a cry to God:

May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD,
even as we put our hope in you.

His confidence is in the unfailing love of the Lord. His hope is solidly fixed on Him. In Him alone was victory. Those who feared Him were blessed.

The psalm is a challenge to all who love the Lord to worship and fear His name. He is an awesome God to be praised and feared.

For Consideration:

- What does the psalmist teach us about worship in verses 2 and 3?
- What six reasons does the psalmist give for praising the Lord?
- Why does the psalmist tell us that we should fear or reverence the Lord?
- Do you see this fear of the Lord in your community?
- Do you personally have a heart of worship and praise?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a greater heart of worship?
- Ask the Lord to enable you to be more creative in the worship of His name so that your worship is a deep personal expression of your heart.

- Ask the Lord to put a greater reverence in the hearts of His people for His name.
- Reconsider the reasons why David calls us to worship the Lord. Take a moment to praise the Lord for one of those reasons.

34

TASTE AND SEE

Read Psalm 34:1-22

Psalm 34 is a psalm of David. There are two things we need to know about this psalm. The first is that it is an acrostic poem. That means that each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We cannot see this in the translation.

The other detail that is important for us to note is found in the preface of the psalm. The psalm was written when David pretended to be insane before Achish. We read this story in 1 Samuel 21. At that time David was fleeing from King Saul. He took refuge in Nob where he was sheltered by a priest by the name of Abimelech. When King Achish discovered that David was in his land, he had him brought before him. David pretended to be insane when he came before King Achish who was by this means reassured that David could not pose a threat to him.

David begins by telling his readers of his commitment to extol the Lord at all times. He tells them that the praise of

the Lord would be always on his lips. We need to remember that at this particular time David is fleeing for his life. Even in his trial, David was able to find reason to praise the Lord.

He goes on to say in verse 2 that his soul would boast in the Lord. In other words, he would tell of the great works of the Lord and declare, to all who would listen, the wonderful deeds of his God. He particularly wanted those who were afflicted to hear and to rejoice in the Lord. It is not easy to rejoice in the Lord when we are afflicted. In these times, the enemy wants us to focus on the problems and not on the goodness of our God. David chose, in these times, to set his heart on the Lord. In so doing, he found ample reason to rejoice. David calls his readers to join him in glorifying the Lord (verse 3).

David tells us the reason why he praised the Lord at this time in his life. In his trouble, he sought the Lord and the Lord came to his aid. He found relief in his flight from Saul in the region of Gath. David was safe from Saul and from King Achish. God had given him rest.

David reminded his readers in verse 5 that those who look to the Lord are radiant and their faces are never covered with shame. To be radiant, in this sense, is to be pure and holy. There are many times in our lives when we find ourselves in trouble. In those times, we are tempted to do all we can in our own strength or count on our own wisdom. David tells us that we should turn to the Lord and seek Him in these times. By doing this, we will have no reason to be ashamed. God will lead us. He will come to our aid and sustain us in our time of need. This was David's experience. He tells us in verse 6 that he had sought the Lord

and the Lord helped him and saved him from his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear the Lord and He delivers them in their time of need (verse 7).

What a wonderful thing it is to know that the angels of God are given charge over us, to protect us and keep us in our hour of need. In 2 Kings 6:15-17, Elisha the prophet and his servant were surrounded by the enemy. Elisha's servant was afraid and asked Elisha what to do. Elisha prayed the God would open his servant's eyes. When God did, he saw chariots of fire surrounding them. The Lord had given His angels the charge of caring for his servants. David understood what Elisha's servant learned that day. God surrounds His servants with angels to protect and keep them in their hour of need.

David invites all who will listen to him to taste and see that the Lord is good (verse 8). He reminds us that the person who made the Lord his refuge would be blessed. If you are facing a trial in your life today, David invites you to turn to the Lord and see for yourself. He is confident that God would not let anyone down who placed their trust and confidence in Him.

In verse 9, David challenged every saint to learn to fear the Lord. To fear the Lord is to honour and reverence Him. It is to live in obedience and follow the Lord with all one's heart. David reassures all who fear the Lord that they would lack nothing they needed. The strong lions of the forest would grow weak and hungry but those who sought the Lord would have no lack of good things. God blesses those who seek Him. He provides for their need. He cares for His own. This is reason to rejoice.

David invites all who will listen to open their ears to his teaching on this matter. David had advice to offer those who loved life and desired to see many good days.

In verse 13, he told his readers that if they wanted to see many good days, they were to keep their tongue from evil and their lips from speaking lies. There is a direct relationship between how we speak and the blessing of God in our lives. David tells us that by holding our tongue and speaking truth, we will experience life with the blessing of the Lord. It is important that we understand this principle. The Lord is concerned about how we speak. If we use our tongue to criticise and hurt our brother and sister we should not expect that God will bless. Instead we will live under His judgement.

The second principle David gives to those who want to see many good days is to turn from evil and pursue peace. The pursuing of peace has to do with our relationship with others. David's counsel to us is to always pursue peace. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:9:

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God.

The blessing of God is on those who seek to live at peace with their brother and sister. If we want to experience that blessing in our lives, we need to pursue peace in our relationships.

David went on to tell his readers that the eyes of the Lord were on the righteous. God listens to the cry of the righteous. In other words, if we want God to reach out to us in our time of need, we need to live in the truth of God's Word.

David makes it quite clear in verse 16 that the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Not only do these individuals miss out on the blessing of God but God will cut off every memory of them on the earth.

The Lord listens to the righteous in their time of need. He delivers them from their trouble. He is close to those who are broken-hearted. He reaches out to those who are crushed in spirit. The fact that they are broken hearted and crushed tells us that they are not spared from every evil. These individuals do suffer but the Lord comes to them in their suffering to deliver them and work all things out for good in their lives. A righteous man or woman will have difficulties in life. Some may have many troubles. David promises, however, that the Lord God will deliver them from all those troubles. He will protect them so their bones are not broken. There is a hint of the Messiah in this verse. When Jesus, the perfectly righteous, hung on the cross, the soldiers were going to break his legs but when they saw he was already dead, they chose not to do so.

This promise is also for us. No one can harm us outside of God's purpose and plan. Even the struggles we do face will be blessed by God so they bring us closer to Him.

In the end, the evil of the wicked will be their downfall. Evil will one day devour those who practice it. God will give them over to their ways. They will be devoured by the evil they practised. The wicked will not prosper for long. They may oppose the righteous for a time but the day is coming when they will be condemned.

Our only hope is in the Lord. David reminded his readers in verse 22 that the Lord will redeem His servants. No one who trusted in the Lord would be condemned.

For Consideration:

- What does David teach us in this passage about praising the Lord in the midst of trials?
- What does David tell us about the angel of the Lord in this psalm?
- What does it mean to fear the Lord? What are the blessings for those who fear the Lord?
- What is the connection between our relationship with others and the blessing of God in our lives?
- What is the connection between blessing and obedience?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment now to thank the Lord for His blessing on your life. Thank Him for victories He has given you.
- Thank the Lord that He loves us so much that He gives his angels charge over us.
- Ask the Lord to point out to you any area in your life where you are not living in absolute obedience to Him.

35

A CRY FOR JUSTICE

Read Psalm 35:1-28

We can identify with the psalmist David because he speaks of real life problems and struggles. David knew grief and sorrow in his life. At times, the pain he felt drove him to the Lord pleading for mercy. This psalm is one of these cries for help.

David begins by calling out to the Lord to fight for him. David had many enemies. He knew that he was not able to overcome these enemies himself so he asked God to fight for him. Notice that he imagined God putting on His armour like a great warrior. He called on this great warrior to take up His spear and javelin to pursue his enemies. He looked to Him for salvation from those who pursued him.

There were those who sought to kill David. David asks God that these individuals be put to shame and turn back in dismay (verse 4). In verse 5, he asked God to make them like chaff before the wind. They would be able to offer no

resistance to this wind. They would be helpless before the great wind of God's wrath.

David also asks God to make the path of his enemies dark and slippery as they were pursued by the angel of God's judgement (verse 6). This is a terrifying thought. They would not be able to escape from the angel of the Lord who came to judge them. Though they ran from him, they would not escape his wrath.

David's enemies had set a trap for him and pursued him without cause. He asked God that ruin would overtake his enemies by surprise. He wanted to see them entangled in the net they had set for him.

David promised God that when He rescued him from the hands of his enemies, he would rejoice in Him and delight in his salvation. His whole being would exclaim: "Who is like you, O Lord" (verse 10). David worshipped the Lord because He rescued the poor from enemies who were too strong for them. He praised the Lord because He rescued the needy from those who robbed them.

Before continuing to examine the rest of this psalm, we need to realize two important facts. First, David does not hesitate to come to God asking for deliverance. He sees himself as a child of God. Any father will care for his children. David sees God in this light. There have been times in my life when I did not feel worthy of God's deliverance. I had a wrong view of God. David knows that he is a sinner but he still comes to God with expectation. What kind of heavenly Father do you have? Is He a father who delights in caring for His children? David comes to God with confidence. He sees Him as a loving and caring heavenly father

who delighted in His children and would come to their aid. He approached God with great assurance of his relationship.

The second thing we need to understand here is that even though his enemy was stronger than him, David is confident that nothing was too big for God. His heavenly father was able to deliver the needy from enemies who were too big for them. It didn't matter how powerful the enemy was, God was bigger still. David knew that he was safe and secure in the Lord his God.

David's enemies were ruthless. False witnesses came forward to accuse him. They would not hesitate to lie to destroy his reputation. They accused him of things he knew nothing about. Though he had been good to them, they repaid him with evil. This grieved David. When they were ill, he put on sackcloth and fasted for their deliverance. When God did not answer those prayers, David would mourn for them as he would for a close friend or brother. He grieved for them as he would grieve over his own mother.

Despite his compassion for them, when David stumbled, these individuals gathered together to rejoice. They slandered and mocked David without ceasing. They gnashed their teeth at him in rage. They hated David without cause. His enemies attacked him like hungry lions. David was confident however, that God would not abandon him. He knew that the day would come when he would give God thanks in the assembly of His people. He would have cause to rejoice in the Lord. Notice in verse 18 that David rejoiced publicly. His victories gave him cause to share the goodness of God with other believers. He doesn't keep

these victories to himself. He shared what God had done with those who gathered in the house of the Lord.

In verse 19, David asked God to keep his enemies from gloating over him and hating him without cause. They were devising all kinds of evil schemes and accusations against him and others who live quietly in the land. They looked at David in his distress and said: "Aha! Aha!" These were words of contempt.

David knew that the Lord saw what his enemies were doing to him. He pleaded with Him, in verse 22, not to be silent when this injustice took place. He pleaded with God to draw near to him in this time. "Awake and rise to my defence! Contend for me, my God and Lord," said David in verse 23.

He asked God to vindicate him by rewarding these evil people with judgement. He wanted God to stop the evil in his midst. His enemies wanted to swallow him up. He asked God to bring them distress, shame and confusion. He longed to see those who longed for justice shouting with gladness and exalting in the Lord who delighted in the well-being of His servants (verse 27).

David concludes by telling the Lord that he was confident that he would speak of His righteousness and sing His praises. He had every reason to believe that the Lord would bring justice and give him cause to rejoice.

It is true that David had his share of pain and trouble in life. He was confident however, that his God would deliver him. His God was a loving father who cared for His children. He was not blind to the mocking insults of his enemy. David

cried out for justice with assurance that God would do what was right and bring victory for His people.

For Consideration:

- Do those who love God suffer? Why does the world hate those who belong to the Lord?
- What kind of relationship did David have with God? What confidence does he have in coming to God in prayer?
- How does our view of God affect how we approach him?
- Do you have a relationship with God that would allow you to come confidently to Him in your hour of need?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord God that He loves you as His child.
- Ask God to reveal Himself to you as a loving father in a greater way.
- Ask God to bring justice to this world that is filled with injustice and suffering.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for a particular deliverance He has given you.

36

SINFUL PEOPLE AND THE LOVE OF GOD

Read Psalm 36:1-12

David compares the sinful person to the God of Israel in this psalm. He begins in the opening verses by describing the sinful person.

THE SINFUL PERSON

No Fear of God

David tells us that there is no fear of God in the heart of the sinful person. The fear of God is that quality that causes us to reverence and respect the Lord God. The sinful person does not care about the purposes of God for their life. They fail to honour Him in their lives and actions. They live as though there was no God to whom they were accountable.

Boastful and Proud

David gives us a second characteristic of the sinful person in verse 2. Here he tells us that the sinful person flatters himself too much to detect or even hate his sin. In other words, the sinful person is blind to the evil he or she practices. They excuse what they do. They do not compare themselves to the standard of the Word of God. They do not even see what they do to be sinful. They may even boast of what they have accomplished by questionable means. We don't have to look very far to see that this is true. Success in business is often obtained by "bending the truth." This is seen to be quite normal. These people are so confident in their judgements that they see themselves as being better judges of what is right or wrong than God himself. They justify their sin and believe that God Himself would have no right to condemn them.

Deceitful

The words of the sinful person are wicked and deceitful. They cannot be trusted in what they say. In fact, many of these individuals no longer even understand the difference between right and wrong. Their standard of living and judging good and evil has been so distorted that it no longer resembles God's standard. David goes as far as to say that these plot evil on their beds at night. They carefully plan how they can deceive or cheat their neighbour. They see this as being acceptable.

David paints a picture for us of a person who has been caught up in evil. This individual no longer lives with any reverence for God and His ways. They believe that they are capable of determining what is good and evil themselves. They set their own standard and mock those who live according to the standard of God. They practise

whatever will advance their cause. They deceive or mistreat each other to obtain what they want. They have little fear of God or respect for their fellow human being.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Love

In sharp contrast to these individuals is the love of God that reaches up to the heavens. In other words, His love is so great that the earth cannot contain it.

Faithful

God's faithfulness is, according to the Psalmist as high as the sky. This is in sharp contrast to the relationships among sinful people. Contracts are quickly and easily broken. Marriage vows are cast aside when they are no longer convenient. God's faithfulness for His people is unbreakable. Even when we break our commitment to Him, he remains faithful. His faithfulness is unshakeable.

Righteous

His righteousness is like the mighty mountains. It is as high as the mountains and as unchangeable. It resists the storms of life and we can always count on Him always to do good and act in a righteous way. This will never change in God. Unlike our fellow human being, we can trust God to always do good.

Just

We can equally count on God's justice. This, says David, is like the "great deep." In other words, it is as deep and as vast as the ocean. God's justice is infinite and cannot be weighed. Even as the ocean cannot be dried up by the sun, neither will God's justice ever fail.

God's faithfulness, righteousness and justice can be seen in how He preserves both man and beast. He cares for us and the animals of the forest. They live and thrive only because of His care. God cares for men and women of high and low standing in society. He treats them all with justice and unfailing love. All can find refuge in the shadow of His wing. What a comfort this is for us. Evil men and women may reject us or turn us away, but God will always be there for us. Men and women of all social status feast on the abundance of God's wonderful provision. They drink from His river of delight.

Fountain of Life

God is described in verse 9 as being a fountain of life. He is the source of all life. Not just life in general but abundant life. His life is like a fountain that wells up and satisfies our soul. David tells us that in God's light we can see light. In other words, it is only by the light He provides that we can live.

David pleaded with God to continue to show His love to those who knew Him. He also asked God to reveal His righteousness to those who were upright in heart. He is asking that God would reveal Himself and His purposes to those who sought Him.

Protector

In conclusion, David asked God to protect him from the foot of the proud and the hand of the wicked. Sinful people sought David's life. God was his Protector and Lord. As he compared sinful men to a holy God, his heart is overwhelmed. His fellow human beings sought his life. The holy God of this universe loved him with an unfailing love.

His fellow citizens would cheat him and say all manner of evil about him. God, his creator, however, gave him life and light and hope. David has every reason to believe, based on what he knew about God; that He would defend him and cast the evil doer down.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to fear God?
- Compare how God treats us with how our fellow human being treats us? What is the difference?
- What evidence is there of God's faithfulness and love in your life?
- How does a study of God's character give us hope in times of need? Can you trust in what you know about God to get you through your struggle today?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to teach you more of what it means to fear and reverence Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His unfailing love and faithfulness to you.
- Thank the Lord that he is a just and righteous God and as such truth and right will prevail.
- Thank the Lord that you can trust Him in your time of struggle.

37

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

Read Psalm 37:1-40

We have seen in the book of Psalms that David often suffered at the hands of wicked people. We also understand that these wicked men and women seemed to prosper for a time. This can be perplexing for the person who tries to live a godly life. In this psalm David compares the righteous with the wicked. We have the impression that he is trying to answer the question of why the wicked seemed to prosper. Let's take a moment to see what David had to say about this problem.

David begins by challenging his readers not to fret because of evil people in the land. They were not to be envious of those who did wrong. There are times when evil people prosper. They have large homes with servants and don't seem to have as much trouble as those who seek to live in the will of God. God does not promise a trouble free life for the righteous. Even the Lord Jesus suffered at the

hands of evil doers. David reminds us, however, that the prosperity of the wicked was like the grass or green plants that withered. Their material blessings would not last forever.

The wicked do prosper in this world but what we need to understand is that the life of an average person is quite short. What are seventy or eighty years compared to eternity? The wicked may prosper in this life but that prosperity is only temporary. The day will come when they will stare eternity in the face and realize their foolishness. For a moment of pleasure they gave up an eternity.

David challenges his readers to trust in the Lord and do good. They were to live in the land the Lord had given them and be content in His protection. The wicked would rise up against them but God would keep those who were His.

Furthermore, David challenged his readers to learn to delight in the Lord. The wicked delighted in the things of this world. They lived for passing earthly possessions. David tells us that those who delight in God would find all their heart desires. When we learn to delight in the things of the Lord, we find that these things are more satisfying than anything the world has to offer. God will satisfy us with Himself and provide all that our hearts need. How many people have sought after the things of this world only to be disappointed? God promises full satisfaction and contentment to all who will seek Him.

David encourages his readers in verse 5, to commit their way to the Lord. The wicked trusted in their strength and wisdom. This would only lead to judgement. Those who

committed their way to the Lord, however, would experience His blessing.

In verse 6, David tells us that those who commit their way to the Lord and trust Him will see their righteousness shine like the dawn and their justice like the noon day sun. They would become more like God. He would delight in them and draw them closer to Himself. They would be His people and take on His character. What a blessing it would be to live in a community of those who commit their way to the Lord and trust Him. That community is a blessed community. Righteousness flourishes. Justice is found for every person. God will honour those who commit themselves to Him and trust His purposes.

David calls those who suffer at the hand of the wicked to be still and wait patiently for the Lord (verse 7). Evil people surrounded them and sought their lives. They were not to fret however. They were to wait patiently and confidently on the Lord and His timing. Justice would prevail. Though the wicked may prosper for a time, their end is coming.

Notice that we are called to wait on the Lord in times of trial and difficulty at the hands of the wicked. It is not for us to seek revenge. David tells his readers in verse 8, that they were to refrain from anger and wrath. They were not to fret and worry. These things would only lead them to evil. How easy it is to get angry in these times. When we are unjustly treated or when wicked people speak evil of us, our temptation is to get angry and to want to lash out at them in revenge. David tells us instead to wait on the Lord and resist this temptation. We are not to fight evil with evil. Instead we are to commit the injustice to the Lord who will deal with it in His time.

Evil people will be cut off (verse 9). God will not let evil prevail. The righteous will inherit the land. The day is coming when the wicked will be destroyed. God will judge them and they will perish. The meek (humble who commit themselves to God) will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

The wicked will always plot against the righteous. Like wild animals they will gnash their teeth at them in fierce anger and hatred. The Lord laughs at this. He laughs because of the foolishness of their ways. He knows that the Day of Judgement is coming. He knows that they cannot harm His people.

The wicked draw their sword and bend their bow to bring down the poor and needy. They take advantage of those who are in need. They slay those who love the Lord and seek to live in His ways. God sees the ways of the wicked. He will turn their swords against them so they pierce their own hearts.

David challenges his readers to learn to be content with what God gave. It is better to be content with the little we do have than to have all the wealth of the wicked. All the wealth and power of the wicked will be broken but the Lord will defend the righteous. The inheritance of the righteous will endure forever.

In the time of disaster, the righteous will not wither away. God will provide for them in the day of famine. The wicked, however, would perish and, like the beauty of the fields, they would perish and be no more. They will vanish like smoke.

David told his readers, in verse 21, that the wicked borrowed but did not repay. The righteous person however, gave generously.

God would determine the destiny of the wicked. Those He blessed would inherit the land but those He cursed would be cut off forever. When God delights in a person's way, He makes that person's steps firm. In other words, God kept those who loved and followed His ways from falling. He went before them to keep them in the path He had laid out for them. There is rich blessing in following the Lord. While we may stumble, the Lord will keep us from falling. He will hold us with His strong hand and make our way successful.

David reminded his readers in verse 25 that in all his life he had never seen the Lord abandon the righteous. Nor did he ever see the children of the righteous begging for bread. God cares for His own as a loving father cares for his children.

The righteous person is generous (verse 26). They freely give but they still have no need. As they give, their blessing is multiplied. The Lord blessed them with all they needed.

David challenges his readers in verse 27 to turn from evil and to do good. If they did, they would dwell in the land that Lord had given them forever. Notice the connection between obedience and the blessing. There is blessing in obedience. God will not forsake those who are faithful to Him. He will protect them forever. The wicked, however would be cut off.

David reminds us in verse 30 that the righteous person speaks what is wise and just. Their relationship with God affects even how they speak. Those who love the Lord keep His law from their heart. In doing so, they are kept from slipping on the pathway of life. The wicked lie in wait for the righteous and seek their lives. The Word of God, however, would protect the righteous person and keep them from falling into the trap of the wicked. God's Word is a guide for us on the path of life. By being careful to follow it, we will be preserved from great evil and comforted in our time of need.

In times of trial the righteous person is to wait on the Lord. The righteous do not need to take matters into their own hands. Instead, they must persevere on the path God has laid out for them. In doing this, God will exalt the righteous and cut off the wicked.

Wicked people may prosper for a time and find great success in worldly things but their end is certain. For this reason David challenges his readers to consider the blameless and upright. There was a future for those who sought peace and faithfulness to God. God will save the righteous. He will keep them in their hour of need. He will be a stronghold for them in their trouble. God will deliver them from the wicked and save all who take refuge in him. Sinners, however, would be cut off and destroyed.

For Consideration:

- Do wicked people prosper in this life?

- What does it mean to wait on the Lord? What is our natural tendency when we have to suffer? How do we respond naturally to suffering?
- How does having a view of eternity help us in our time of need?
- What does this passage teach us about the destiny of the wicked?
- Have you ever fretted over evil in the land? Why do we not need to fret?
- What does the Psalmist tell us to do when evil surrounds us and causes us distress?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He promises to care for those who belong to Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control and will not allow evil to prosper in the end.
- Thank the Lord for His justice and sovereignty over evil.
- Ask the Lord to teach you how to wait on Him in difficult times.
- Thank the Lord for a personal example of His care for you in the last week.

38

SINFUL FOLLIES

Read Psalm 38:1-22

In Psalm 38, David expresses the pain of his heart. We are not told in this psalm what the circumstances were that brought this depth of pain and agony.

David begins by asking the Lord not to rebuke him in His anger or discipline him in His wrath. David knows the power and wrath of the Lord his God. He knew he had fallen into sin (see verses 3, 4). He knew that he deserved to be punished but he pleads with God to be merciful to him in His discipline.

David felt the arrows of the Lord's discipline. God's hand was heavy on him. Because of the wrath of God, David told his readers that there was no health in his body or soundness in his bones. Notice in verse 3 that this was because of David's sin.

Notice that David did fall into sin from time to time. We too will have moments when we give in to temptation. What is

important in this psalm is to see how David responded in these times.

We have seen in verse 3 that David seemed to be wasting away because of his sin. He was literally sick and could feel the pain in his bones. His guilt overwhelmed him and the burden of that sin was too heavy for him to bear. His sin left him wounded. Those wounds seemed to fester and grow worse. The weight and burden of this sin caused him to bow down (verse 6). He went all day long mourning and grieving over his sinful foolishness. David tells us in verse 7 that he was bent over (possibly with shame) and his back hurt. He felt his rebellion in his whole body. In verse 7, he tells us that "there is no health in my body." He was crushed and groaned deep in his heart with anguish.

From verse 9 we see that David knew God saw his longings and knew his sighing. David's heart pounded and his strength failed him. Those looking at him could see that the light of joy and contentment had gone from his eyes.

As long as David remained in his sin, his friends and his companions avoided him. His neighbours stayed away from him. In these times of conviction and rebellion, we can easily become bitter, angered and impatient with all who are around us.

There seemed to be no end to David's grief and pain. His enemies set traps for him and those who wanted to harm him talked of how they could ruin him. All day long they plotted ways to hurt him.

David describes himself in verse 13 as deaf mute. He could neither hear nor speak. He may simply be describing

the depth of his depression. He could no longer hear the encouragement of his friends nor did he have the emotional strength to express his pain.

Before we move on to the conclusion of this psalm, we need to underline the importance of these first few verses. David is describing to us what it felt like to fall into sin. This ultimately ought to be what we all feel. As believers in the name of the Lord Jesus, we cannot be comfortable in our sin. If you can walk in your sinful folly without feeling something of the shame and agony David felt, then you really need to ask yourself if you are a child of God. The child of God will fall into sin from time to time and may even walk in rebellion for a time but soon his or her heart begins to trouble him. Soon they long to be back in their heavenly Father's presence. Like the prodigal son Jesus described in the gospels, there is an irresistible urge to return. There can be no comfort in sin for the child of God. They will ache until they are back in fellowship with the Father.

This is what David longed for at this point in his life. In verse 15, he told the Lord that he waited for Him to answer. He pleaded with God to come to his side. His enemies gloated over him in his defeat and delighted in his fall. In his agony, David comes to the Lord (verse 17). He confesses his sin. This sin had been the source of his trouble. Now it was time for him to confess it and cast it far from him. He longed to be restored to fellowship.

At this time in his life, David had many enemies. They hated him without legitimate reason. They repaid his good actions toward them with evil and slandered him when he tried to do good. David also felt that God was far from him. In verse 21, he pleaded with God not to forsake him at this

time in his life. He pleaded with Him to draw near and not hold Himself at a distance. He asked Him to come quickly to his aid. Obviously, he could not bear the sense of God's distance.

As long as David was in his sin, he could not be content or happy. God seemed to be distant and his heart grieved over the break in intimacy with his Lord. Is this our response to sin and separation from the Lord because of sin? No child of God can be content to remain in sin and separation from their Heavenly Father.

For Consideration:

- Has there ever been a time in your life when God seemed far away? How did you feel at that time?
- How do you feel when you are not walking with the Lord as you should? Can you identify with David in this psalm?
- What does David teach us in this psalm about how we should see sin in our lives?
- Where does David turn when he has fallen? What was his hope?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to let you see sin and rebellion as He sees it.
- Take a moment to ask the Lord to reveal any particular sin in your life. Confess that sin. Ask God to help you to be restored into fellowship with Him.

- Do you have a brother or sister in the Lord who is struggling with sin? Ask the Lord to draw close to them at this time to convict them and restore them to Himself.

39

SILENT IN SUFFERING

Read Psalm 39:1-13

As in Psalm 38, David seems to be struggling with a particular issue in his life. He appears to be under the discipline of the Lord at this moment. This discipline seems to weigh heavy on his soul and David feels overwhelmed.

It is important that we note that this psalm was intended for the director of music and in particular for a man by the name of Jeduthun. We read about this man in 1 Chronicles 16:41:

With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the LORD, "for his love endures forever.

Jeduthun had been appointed to give thanks to the Lord.

What is also important for us to see is that this confession of David's and his struggle in a difficult time was committed

to music and used in the corporate worship of God. This shows us that there is a place for honesty and the sharing of our struggles and failures in worship. David commits this psalm to the director of music who would use it in the worship of the Lord. It was obviously his intention that the psalm cause others to learn from his failures. We can only appreciate the honesty and openness of David here. Not everyone is willing to admit their failures as David was.

David began the psalm by sharing with his readers a commitment he had made to watch his ways and to keep his tongue from sin. In particular, David told his readers that he would put a muzzle on his mouth as long as the wicked were in his presence. He does not tell us why he chose to guard his words in the presence of the wicked. We can assume that the reason was to keep himself from saying things that would blaspheme the name of the Lord or to sin by his words. These wicked people were likely making life very difficult for the psalmist. How easy it is when we are being unjustly treated to speak things we regret later. How easy it is to allow our evil nature to lash out at those who mistreat us.

The problem was that as David sat in silence, not saying anything good or bad, his anguish grew. His heart burned inside him, waiting to explode. So intense was this longing to speak that David could no longer hold the words back. His words came out like a river behind a broken dam. It is unclear what David said at that time. It could be that he spoke against the wicked and their ways. Maybe he exploded in words of grief and agony over his situation. Whatever it was that David spoke that day, we need to see it in connection with what he says in verse 4:

Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life."

The breaking of his silence caused David to reflect on the shortness of life. It may be that David found himself questioning why the wicked prospered and were allowed to oppress the righteous. David knew, however, that no matter how much these wicked prospered, they were mere humans whose lifespan was limited. Their lifespan was as a mere breath to the Lord God. This shows us how small we are. We are here today and gone tomorrow. David asked God to help him to see how short this life is compared to eternity.

As David reflected on the life of the men and women of this earth, he saw them rushing to and fro, accumulating wealth and possessions; not knowing what would happen to their life's work when they faced death after a few short years (verse 6). Could it be that David found himself frustrated by the wicked people of his day; who heaped up wealth and pleasures unconcerned about eternity before them?

As David reflected on the vain pursuits of the ungodly, he was forced to ask himself what he was looking for in life. "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you," he said in verse 7. His reason for living was found in God, not in material possessions or worldly pursuits.

I can imagine David looking around him in his grief at the laughter and prosperity of the wicked. They seemed to be without a care in the world. They had friends and loved ones beside them. They rejoiced in the good things of life. As he reflected on this and the fact that these individuals

had no concern for God or His purposes, David came to realize that their rejoicing was only for a time. The day would come when they would stand before God and face His judgement. As he thought about these things, David came to the conclusion that he was in a better position than those who rejoiced. Though he suffered for a time, he was in a right relationship with his God and no amount of worldly pleasure or possessions could equal such a privilege.

In verse 8, David cried out to God to save him from sin and keep him from the scorn of fools. He committed himself to being silent and to trusting what God was doing. David was struggling with his enemies at that time. He was feeling overwhelmed and could not understand the purpose of God. As he reflected on what was happening, he realised that what was happening in his life was in the purpose and plan of a sovereign God (verse 9). God had permitted these things to happen to him and all David's complaining and grumbling would only show that he did not trust Him. Instead, David turned his attention to the Lord God. He asked God to remove his affliction from him so that he would not be overcome by the blow of his hands.

There are three things we need to understand when we are facing trials in our lives. First, we need to understand that no matter what happens to us, everything is allowed by a sovereign God. If God wanted to, He could remove our problems but He doesn't always do that. Second, whatever trial we face, God is able to strengthen us and give us all we need to go through that trial. Third, God will use whatever He allows to accomplish His greater purpose in us. Even the evil intentions of our worst enemies can be used by God to draw us closer to Him.

David accepted his trial as coming from the Lord. He realised that God did rebuke men and women because of their sin. He also consumed their wealth like a moth consumes clothes. God would deal with his enemies in His way and in His time. Their accumulated wealth would fail them. God would judge the evil of the land.

David cried out to God to hear his prayer and to come to his aid. Notice in his prayer in verse 12, he calls himself a stranger. He was a stranger on this earth. His hope was not in what he had here below but in the promise of God for all eternity. His ways were not the ways of this earth. He was governed by the purpose of God. Setting his eyes on the Lord, David asked Him to look away from him so he could rejoice again. The idea is that God would lift His hand of discipline so David could again experience joy in walking with Him again.

At this point in his life, David found that he was tempted to grumble and complain about the discipline of the Lord on his life. He looked around him and saw the ease of the wicked as they lived in prosperity and laughter. He realised, however, that these individuals would one day face the judgement of a holy God. David's confidence was in the Lord. Though he did not always understand His discipline, he sought to be silent in his trouble and to let the Lord accomplish His purpose. He knew God would draw Him closer and accomplish His purposes in his life. As for the wicked, they would not prevail. Their end was coming. With these thoughts in mind, David continued to wait and trust in the Lord for victory.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever grumbled because of things the Lord has allowed you to face in life?
- What does this passage teach us about God and the trials that come our way?
- What is God using in your life right now to shape and train you?
- What does it mean to be silent in our time of trouble? What are we tempted to do instead.

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is able to use all your trials to draw you closer to Him.
- Thank the Lord that He will use whatever you go through to accomplish His glory in your life.
- Ask God to help you to trust Him when things do not seem to be going the way you want them to go.
- Commit yourself right now to trust what God is doing in your life.
- Ask God to keep you from grumbling or complaining because of His discipline in your life.

40

A LESSON LEARNED

Read Psalm 40:1-17

Psalm 40 is a psalm of David. In this psalm, David seems to look to the times in his life when the Lord delivered him from trouble. He takes courage in this as he faces his present difficulties. Past victories remind us that victory is possible in the future.

David goes back in time to a period of his life when he was in the midst of a particular struggle. At that time, he waited patiently for the Lord and the Lord heard his cry.

At that time, the Lord lifted him out of a slimy pit. God released him from the mud and mire and set his feet on a rock. David felt, at that time, that there was no hope except in the Lord God. His problems were too big for him to handle. Only God could save him. That is exactly what God did. He reached down to David and delivered him.

God delivered David and set his feet on solid ground. Notice also that He put a new song in his mouth. David

rejoiced in the salvation of the Lord. He found a hymn of praise rising up in his heart. He wanted to express his gratitude to the Lord in song and worship.

What God did for him would be an encouragement to many in similar trials. Many would see how God delivered David and put their trust in Him for their own deliverance.

David reminds us of the blessing of the one who puts their trust in the Lord. That person would see the deliverance of the Lord. That blessing awaited the one who would turn aside from the proud and from false gods to trust in the Lord alone.

David reminds us that the Lord God of Israel was a God of wonders. The blessings and wondrous works of the Lord God were too great to be counted. He had proven Himself over and over again in the lives of His people. What He did in the past, He is able to do in the present. He is still fully able to deliver His people.

What does God expect in return for His wonderful blessings? David reminded his readers in verse 6, that the Lord was *not* looking for sacrifices and offerings. He already owned everything. There is nothing that we can give to Him that did not already belong to Him.

If God's desire is not for offering, then what was He looking for? David reminded his readers in verse 6, that God had pierced his ear. To understand what David is telling us here, we need to return to the Old Testament Law. In the book of Exodus when the time for a servant to be released came, if he loved his master, he could choose to stay forever with him. To seal this agreement, the master was

required to take his servant to a door post and pierce his ear with an awl. We read of this in Exodus 21:5-6:

But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

When David tells us that God had pierced his ears, he is telling us that he had given himself to God for life. He had sealed this agreement with the piercing of the ear. David was under the Lord God as his Master and as such benefited from His protection and guidance. What does God require from us? He requires that we freely offer ourselves to Him. He wants us. God was not looking for burnt offerings of sin offerings in return for His blessing. He was looking for men and women who would surrender wholly to Him. He was looking for servants who would sacrifice all they had to Him and His service.

David committed himself to serve the Lord. "Here I am, I have come... I desire to do your will O my God. Your law is within my heart," he said in verses 7-8. In response to the wonderful salvation of the Lord, David commits himself entirely to the Lord and His purposes. He commits himself to live in obedience to the Lord. This is what God expects from all those He saves. He expects their devotion and obedience.

Notice in verse 9 that David could not keep this wonderful salvation to himself. When God delivered him from his troubles, David declared what God had done in the great

assembly (verse 9). He could not keep silent about the deliverance of the Lord. David could not hide the wonderful things God had done for him. He told everyone of the great faithfulness and salvation of the Lord. He publicly praised the Lord for His love and truth.

David pleaded with the Lord not to hold back His mercy (verse 11). He asked that God's love and truth always protect him as it had in the past. David reminded God that troubles without number surrounded him. His sins were overtaking him. Those troubles were more numerous than the hairs of his head. His heart was failing him. David experienced many trials. God delivered him in the past from those trials. David trusted God to deliver him again. He asked God to save him again from his pain. He asked Him to come quickly to his aid. He asked God to confuse his enemies and put them to shame.

Notice that David does not pray for himself alone. He realised that there were others who sought the Lord who found themselves in a similar situation. He prays that the Lord bring His salvation and deliverance to all who sought him in verse 16.

May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation always say:
"The LORD be exalted!"

The prayer of David is not that all problems be removed but for a salvation that drew people to praise and worship the sovereign God of Israel. His desire in suffering was that the Lord be glorified.

There are several things we should learn from this psalm. First, we need to understand that Christians will suffer in this life. Second, we need to understand that God will not allow us to go through a trial that He cannot deliver us from. His strength and grace are available to us as we face whatever He allows. Third, notice the confidence of David as he comes to God yet again for aid. He is confident of his relationship with God. We can come to the Lord with this confidence if we are His children. Notice fourth, the desire of David in this psalm. His heart is to see the Lord glorified and praised. Before his salvation came, David waited with confidence and patience. When that deliverance came, he exalted the Lord and declared His salvation to the assembly of His people. What encouraged David in his times of need was to remember what God had done in the past. He reflected on the wonderful deliverance of God and took courage. The God of the past has not changed. His power has not diminished. He who delivered His people in the past will deliver them in the present.

For Consideration:

- Does God always keep His children from suffering and trials?
- What had David learned from his past experiences with the Lord and his deliverance in times of trouble?
- Make a list of some of the ways the Lord has helped you in your trials.
- Do you have any reason to doubt that God is able and willing to deliver you from your trials today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that His strength and wisdom are at our disposal as we face trials and tribulations in this life.
- Thank the Lord for a particular way He delivered you or guided you recently.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be more like David in proclaiming the wonderful deliverance of God to others.

41

A LIFTED UP HEAL

Read Psalm 41:1-13

In this psalm, David expresses his confidence in the Lord God to face his enemy's attacks. He begins in verse 1 with a statement about the concern of the Lord for the weak.

David tells us in verse 1, that the person who has regard for the weak is blessed of God. During his life, David demonstrated that care and compassion for the weak. It was his confidence that God would bless and deliver him now that he had found his lot among the weak.

In his time of trial, David reflects on his belief in God and on the relationship he had with Him. He believed that God would protect him and preserve his life. He knew that God would not surrender him to the wishes of his enemies. He has a child-like confidence in his Heavenly Father. How often in our lives is that confidence shaken? How many times have we questioned the care and concern of our Heavenly Father toward us? What a blessing it is in our trials to know that God will never abandon us. He will

surround us and protect us. His love surpasses that of any earthly father. We have no cause to doubt His protection.

This is not to say that God will not allow his children to suffer. God does permit suffering in His children's lives. While He may permit suffering, God will also sustain us in that suffering. David tells us in verse 3 that God will sustain His child on his sickbed and when He has accomplished His purpose, restore him or her to health again. Even in sickness God accomplishes His purpose.

We have the sense in this psalm, that the Lord was disciplining and refining David through some trials in his life. In verse 4, David confesses that he had sinned against the Lord. Now he asked the Lord to heal him. There are times in the lives of God's people when He will permit suffering to get our attention and purge us of unfruitful attitudes and actions. This seems to be what is happening to David at this point in his life.

David's enemies spoke evil against him in his sickness. They wished that he would die and have his name perish from memory. David's enemies hated him and what he stood for. They whispered together against him. They imagined or wished the worse for him. They did this out of jealousy. They did the same to the Lord Jesus. The religious leaders of the day sought to do everything they could to blaspheme his name and have the crowds think evil of Him.

It is of particular interest that David mentioned that even his close friend in whom he trusted had turned his back on him (see verse 9). In the case of David, it may be that he wasn't thinking about any particular incident in his life.

What is of importance here is that the Lord Jesus would quote from this verse in John 13:18. Jesus used this verse to show his disciples what Judas would do to him. Jesus would share bread with Judas who would betray him. David seems to illustrate, by his life, what would happen to the Lord Jesus.

God had mercy on David and raised him up again just like he raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. Notice in verse 10 that He rose him up so that He could repay or judge his enemies. This is what the Lord Jesus did. He has risen from the grave and will one day come to judge those who have rejected Him and His work on the cross.

For David, the evidence of the Lord's pleasure in him was in the fact that God did not let his enemies triumph over him. This same principle applied to the life of the Lord Jesus. Jesus went to the grave for us. He faced Satan and hell but neither hell nor the grave could keep Him. He rose triumphant over all His enemies. The proof of the Father's pleasure in the Lord Jesus and His work was that God refused to allow Christ's enemies to triumph over Him. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the grave is proof of the Father's approval of Christ's work. What a blessing it is to know that death and the grave could not hold Christ. He triumphed over His enemies so that we could have confidence in Him and His work.

David in a similar way was upheld by God. He was raised from his agony and set before the presence of God forever (see verse 12). This is what happened to the Lord Jesus. He rose from the grave and is now seated in the presence of His Father forever.

David speaks here about a particular event in his life. Likely unknown to himself, he wrote prophetically of what would happen to the Messiah who would come as a descendant from David's line. David saw how even though his enemies spoke against him and even his closest friend betrayed him; God raised him up from his trial to be in His glorious presence. This incident in David's life is a wonderful picture of what the Lord Jesus would do for us.

God will keep those who belong to Him. Even death cannot defeat the true believer for it leads them to the presence of God where they will dwell forever. David concludes with a word of praise to the Lord God of Israel who was an eternal God who lived forever and ever.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about how God uses trials in the life of the believer?
- Compare what David speaks about here with what happened to Christ. What are the similarities?
- What does this passage teach us about the relationship and confidence David had in his God? Do you have this sort of relationship with God?
- What personal trials has God used in your life to teach you and bring you to greater maturity?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for how He promises to sustain you in your trials.

- Thank the Lord for the lessons He has taught you through the trials in your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have failed to trust Him and what He was doing in your life.
- Thank the Lord Jesus that He willingly endured the insults of His enemies to rescue you from sin.
- Thank the Lord for the hope that because the Lord Jesus conquered our enemies, we have a hope of eternity in His presence forever.

WHERE IS GOD?

Read Psalm 42:1-43:5

A footnote in the NIV translation of the Bible tells us that Psalm 42 and 43 are one Psalm in many Hebrew manuscripts. For this reason, we will examine them both in this chapter. The Psalms are for the director of music likely sung by the sons of Korah the Levites.

It is important to note that Korah was the man who led a revolt against Moses in Numbers 16. At that time, the Lord judged this family by opening up the earth and swallowing them alive. We are told in Numbers 26:11, however, that the line of Korah was not completely wiped out. In 1 Chronicles 6:33, we meet them in the temple as musicians. It is not clear who wrote this psalm. The heading indicates that it was a *maskil* of the Sons of Korah. The term *maskil* is obviously a musical term. This would indicate that either they wrote the psalm or it was intended for them to sing it in the temple worship.

Psalm 42 begins with a comparison of a child of God with a deer panting for streams of water. I like to picture the deer on a hot day in the summer searching all over for water. When he finds this water, he drinks deeply to quench his thirst. This is how the psalmist felt when he wrote this psalm. His heart cried out and thirsted for God with all the intensity of a deer coming to a life giving stream.

Notice that the Lord seemed distant for the psalmist. "When can I go and meet with God?" is the cry of the psalmist's heart in Psalm 42:2. There are times when the Lord does seem distant. Sometimes, the trials and suffering of life can hide His presence from us. Sometimes our sins can drive us away from Him.

There is probably nothing so difficult for the believer as the sense that God has withdrawn His presence. When we know the presence of God, we are able to face anything in life. That presence kept many martyrs tied to the stake. Many have willingly and even joyfully laid down their lives, knowing the presence of God. When God seems distant however, it is easy to lose courage. The psalmist cries with tears day and night; longing for the comforting presence of the Lord God. What made matters worse was the fact that people were asking: "Where is your God?" (42:3). Obviously they too, sensed that God's blessing was no longer evident in the life of this child.

In response to this question, the psalmist went back in his mind to happier times. He remembered how things had been in days gone by. In particular, he remembered how he would go with the multitude, leading a procession to the house of God. As they went to the house of God, they shouted with joy and thanksgiving. Those were good days

when God seemed to be close and he delighted in His presence.

At the time of writing, things were very different. The psalmist is downcast. He feels depressed and far from God. He cannot understand why he is so depressed. "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (42:5).

The answer returns: "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him" (42:5). The words were simple, the practice difficult.

In his trial, the psalmist turned his attention to God. He remembered His presence from the land of Jordan and the heights of the great Mount Herman to the smallness of Mount Mizar ("mizar" means "little mountain"). The psalmist remembers both the great and mighty deeds of God as well as the small and almost unnoticeable things. In times when God seems distant, it is helpful to review in our mind the things God has done. By remembering how God has blessed and kept us in the past we find strength to face the future.

The psalmist felt overwhelmed. There seemed to be no end to the pain. Trials like waves and breakers swept over him. It is not that the psalmist doubted God's goodness. In Psalm 42:8, he tells us that by day the Lord directed His love and by night a song of thanksgiving was in him for victory in the day. While the hand of the Lord was evident, each day seemed to bring more problems and trials.

Why all this pain and suffering? Where was God in these difficulties? He wondered why he had to go about

mourning and oppressed by the enemy (42:9). His enemies were powerful and his bones suffered mortal agony. All day long, he looked for the presence of God to come to his aid but He was not seeing it. His pain continued. He was downcast and disturbed because of what he was going through. God seemed so far away from him. Despite this, however, the psalmist is confident of the Lord's love and protection. He still believed that God would take him through. He felt sure that if he waited patiently on his God, he would again know the joy of His presence.

Notice how he called God his Rock in verse 9. While God was his Rock, it felt that He had forgotten him. The fact that he calls God his Rock is an indication that he still trusted him even though at the time he was not experiencing the fullness of that truth.

In Psalm 43:1, he cried out to God to vindicate and rescue him. He was being attacked by deceitful and wicked men who seemed to rule over him.

God had always been a stronghold for the psalmist but now he felt that the enemy was winning. He went from place to place mourning and oppressed. Why wasn't God showing him victory?

The Psalmist does not give up. He pleads with God to send His light and truth. He doesn't know how long it will be before he is given victory, but as he faces the oppression of the enemy he asks that God's light and truth would be his guide. He needs direction and wisdom as he faces this oppression.

The Psalmist trusted that God would see him through these difficult times. He believed that the day would come when he would stand before the altar of God; singing praise to His name with joy and delight (43:5).

Notice in Psalm 43:5 that the psalmist asks his soul why it was downcast. He challenges his soul to put its hope and trust in God. There is an important principle here for us to note. The psalmist feels overwhelmed. His emotions are downcast. He doesn't feel joy in his heart right now. While his emotions were presently incapable of joyful worship, by an act of his will he orders his soul to trust. There will be times in our lives when emotions will fail us. We may not feel joy or peace but in those times we can still trust and wait on our God. This is what the psalmist is calling us to do.

These two psalms express the confusion of the psalmist. He wrestles with the trials and pain he is experiencing. He hears what others are saying about his God being distant and removed. He asked that God would guide him through these struggles with His light and truth. In a time when God seemed distant and joy far removed, the psalmist stands firm on his commitment to trust what God was doing.

It was the thirst of the psalmist for God that kept him in this time of oppression. His thirst for God could not be quenched by temporary trials and tribulation. If anything, the barrenness he felt only made him thirst for God even more. He sought God like a thirsty deer searched for water. He would not give up searching for Him until his soul's thirst was quenched. Is this how you respond to trials in your life?

For Consideration:

- Have you ever had a time in your life when God seemed very far away? What was that time like?
- How does your thirst for God compare with the Psalmist's thirst?
- How does the psalmist deal with God seeming to be so far away?
- What is the commitment of the psalmist when his emotions failed him?
- How did the trials of the psalmist increase his desire and thirst for God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to increase your thirst for Him and His presence.
- Thank the Lord for the way He has taken you through trials and suffering in your life.
- Do you have a brother or sister in Christ who struggles? Take a moment to pray for them.
- Ask God to give you grace when your emotions fail you to trust in Him like the psalmist did in these psalms.

43

FOR YOUR NAME SAKE

Psalm 44:1-26

We have seen that the believer is not spared from suffering and trials in this life. There are times when the reason for the suffering is known only to God. In those times, all we have is our faith in a God who always does what is right. Psalm 44 is a cry for God to stretch out His hand to His people in their suffering.

The psalm begins in verse 1 with the statement:

We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers
have told us what you did in their days, in days long
ago.

The psalmist looked back at the history of the nation of Israel. Their history was a glorious one. God had demonstrated His power in a wonderful way through His people. As the psalmist looked at the present situation in the land, he could only wonder why they were not experiencing this same awesome power in their day as well. God had

planted Israel in a wonderful land. He crushed the people who lived in that land and gave it to Israel. There in that land they flourished under His care and provision.

The psalmist makes it quite clear that it was not by their own sword that this people had prospered. Victory did not come because of their strength. It was the right arm of God that had given them victory. The light of God's face shone on them. They prospered because God loved and blessed them.

The Lord God was the strength of Israel. Through Him they were able to push back their enemies. Through His name they trampled their foes. In verse 6, the psalmist reminds us that the sword did not bring victory. Victory comes only through the Lord. It is the Lord who gives victory over our enemies and puts our adversaries to shame. How often we fail to recognise the source of our strength as believers today. We trust our education and experience. We rely on our programmes and methods. We must all come to realize, however, what the psalmist realised that day. The Lord alone is our victory. Only in His strength can we defeat our foe.

What a wonderful comfort it is to know that the Lord God will fight for us. In Him, we can overcome. We have nothing to boast of in ourselves. All our boasting must be in God and what He has done.

While the truth of God's work in the lives of His people was very comforting, the psalmist knew that this was not the present experience of the people of God. As he wrote this psalm, he realised that God seemed to have rejected and humbled his people (verse 9). It appeared that the Lord

was no longer going out with Israel's armies (verse 9). Israel was not experiencing the victories their ancestors had experienced. Instead they were forced to retreat before their enemies. They were being plundered. It seemed that God had given them up to be devoured and scattered among the nations (verse 11). It seemed that God had sold his people to the enemies and received nothing in return for them (verse 12). God's people were being mocked and ridiculed by the pagan nations (verse 13). People shook their heads in disbelief at what had happened to God's people (verse 14). It seemed that their God had rejected them.

The psalmist felt disgraced and ashamed (verse 15). The once glorious people now were powerless against their enemies. The nations taunted and reviled them (verse 16). Their enemies now sought revenge and it seemed likely that they would get it.

The picture painted here is quite shocking and yet it is a picture that is all too familiar to us. We are the children of God. As His children we have access to His power and wisdom. How often, however, have we lived in defeat?

Notice in verse 17 that all this was happening to the people of God even though they had not forgotten God or been unfaithful to their covenant with Him. Their hearts had not turned from God nor had their feet strayed from His path (verse 18). Despite their obedience to God and their love for Him, they were being crushed and covered with deep darkness (verse 19).

Suffering would have been understandable if Israel had had forgotten the name of the Lord. If Israel had chosen to

walk after other gods, it would have been clear why God was allowing them to be oppressed by their enemies. This did not seem to be the case. Why was God allowing His people to suffer, if they were not guilty before Him?

In verse 22, the psalmist tells us that it was for the sake of the Lord God that they had to face death all day long. It was because of His name that they were being considered as sheep to be slaughtered. There are times when we will have to suffer because of the name of the Lord. Sometimes it is our obedience that is the reason for our trials. Satan will lash out at those who belong to the Lord God. He will do his utmost to distract us in our walk with Him. As believers we must be ready to face such opposition for the sake of our Lord.

In verse 23, the psalmist asked the Lord to awake from His sleep. He pleaded with the Lord not to reject Him forever. We need to understand that God neither sleeps nor rejects his people. This is the psalmist's perception of what was happening. The psalmist felt like God had hidden His face from him in his misery and oppression.

God's people were being brought down to the dust (verse 25). They were being trampled on by their enemies who had no respect for them. The psalmist cried out to God to help them in their distress. He prayed that God would redeem them from the enemy because of His unfailing love. Notice the psalmist trusts in the unfailing love of the Lord for His people. Though he was not presently seeing that love, he trusts in it.

Here in this psalm, we come face to face with the reality of suffering. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Suffering for Christ is in reality the highest form of fellowship. God, at times, will draw us to Himself through suffering. He will shape us and mould us into His image through times of suffering. Paul expressed his desire in Philippians 3:10 to share in the fellowship of Christ's suffering:

That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.

Suffering is never easy. In these times, we wonder where God is and what He is doing. We should never fear to suffer for Him. Instead, we need to learn how to wait on Him. Through our suffering God will refine and purify us. He will draw us closer to Himself.

The psalmist found himself crying out to God in a new way through his pain. His faith and confidence is stretched. He would not be the same when God brought him out on the other side. Refined and strengthened, he would enjoy a new and deeper intimacy with his Lord.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between suffering because of our sin and suffering because of Christ?

- Have you ever had to suffer because of your relationship with God? What encouragement do you receive from this psalm?
- Why does God sometimes allow us to suffer as His children?
- The psalmist paints a picture of God's people helpless before the enemy. Do we see elements of this in our day?
- In what way is suffering for Christ the highest form of fellowship?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is our strength in suffering.
- If you or someone you know is suffering today, ask the Lord to give you strength to face that trial for His glory.
- Ask the Lord to make you willing to suffer for Him.
- Ask the Lord to help you to trust Him when you don't seem to understand what He is doing in your life.

A WEDDING PSALM

Read Psalm 45:1-17

The introductory statement of this psalm tells us that it is a wedding psalm intended to be sung by the Sons of Korah. More than a wedding psalm, however, this psalm is considered by many to be a song of praise to the Messiah who was to come.

The psalm begins with the writer expressing his joy and delight in reciting his verses for the King. The verses spoken of here may be the verses of this psalm. The psalmist feels that it is an honour to be able to write such a psalm to the glory of the King. The heart of the psalmist is stirred as he speaks out the verses of this psalm. He compares his tongue to the pen of a skilful writer

In verse 2, the psalmist expresses his delight in the King. We should understand this psalm to be a parable. That is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Though the psalmist speaks of an earthly king, we could see this to speak of the Lord Jesus the Messiah as well. The psalm

describes a wedding. The king is the bridegroom. The psalmist reflects on the beauty of the groom in the opening section of the psalm. Let's consider what the psalmist tells us about the groom.

HE IS THE MOST EXCELLENT OF MEN

The bridegroom (the king) was the most excellent of men. From the earthly perspective the king was distinguished above all other people in the land. He was the most excellent of men. Consider how this applied to the Lord Jesus. He too was the most excellent of men. He was perfect in all His ways.

HIS LIPS WERE ANOINTED WITH GRACE

The lips of the king were anointed with grace. It is interesting that the apostle John, speaking of the Lord Jesus said in John 1:14:

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Notice that John's speaks of the Lord Jesus, as the Word who was full of grace. The bride groom the Psalmist describes was a gracious person who words were full of compassion and mercy.

GOD HAD BLESSED HIM FOREVER

The third characteristic of the king was that He was blessed forever by God. After finishing His work here on this earth the Lord Jesus went to be with His father. He now has a place of honour in the presence of the Father forever more (see Mark 16:19).

HE IS MIGHTY

The psalmist calls on the King to put on His sword. Notice that the psalmist called Him the "mighty one" in verse 3. There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus is the mighty one. All the power of the Father was in Him. He calmed the wind and healed the sick. The demons of hell fled from His words. All power has been given to Him.

HE IS CLOTHED WITH SPLENDOUR AND MAJESTY

Seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven the Lord Jesus has been glorified. He is clothed with splendour and majesty. Majesty is that characteristic that causes a person to bow down in wonder and awe.

HE RIDES IN VICTORY

In verse 4, the King rides in majesty to victory. What is particularly interesting is that this king rode forth to victory on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness. These words describe perfectly the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He ministered among us in truth, humility and righteousness. He preached truth, humility and righteousness.

He demands truth, humility and righteousness from all who follow Him.

HIS RIGHT HAND DISPLAYED AWESOME DEEDS

There is no question that the ministry of the Lord Jesus was one that demonstrated awesome deeds. From His healing of the sick to His commanding the winds to cease and raising the dead, the Lord Jesus demonstrated the awesome power of the Father through His life and ministry.

NATIONS WILL FALL BENEATH HIS FEET

Quoting David, Luke tells us that the Lord would make His enemies his footstool (see Luke 20:42-43). The Lord Jesus rose victorious over His enemies. As verse 5 tells us, the Lord Jesus pierced his enemies and conquered them. All nations will one day be subject to Him and bow at His feet declaring Him to be Lord (Philippians 2:10).

HIS THRONE WOULD LAST FOREVER

Ultimately there is only one throne that will last forever. No one can take the throne from the Lord Jesus. His reign will be for all eternity.

HIS SCEPTRE IS A SCEPTRE OF JUSTICE

There have been many kings who reigned with injustice. The Lord Jesus reigned and will reign forever with justice (Luke 18:7). Sin and evil will be punished. Truth and righteousness will conquer.

HE LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATES WICKEDNESS

The Messiah was one who loved righteousness and hated wickedness. There was no one who loved righteousness more than the Lord Jesus. He came to minister in absolute righteousness. No sin could ever be found in Him. He lives and reigns in perfection and righteousness.

HE HAS BEEN ANOINTED WITH THE OIL OF JOY

The term "Christ" means "anointed one." The Lord was anointed by the Father to restore men and women to God. His was a difficult ministry but one that brings joy and peace to all who accept it. Luke tells us that there is great rejoicing and joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). The ministry of the Lord Jesus has reconciled men and women to God. Countless souls have been rescued from Satan and eternal damnation. The anointing of Jesus was an anointing of joyous victory.

THE MUSIC OF STRINGS MAKES HIM GLAD

The Lord Jesus delights in the praise of His people. He is worthy of our praise and honour. There is no God like Him in awesome deed and character. The book of Psalms is a book of praise and adoration to the Lord God. The king of this psalm delighted in the praise of His people.

Having lifted up the king, attention now turns to the bride. Notice that daughters of kings are among the honoured women who stood before the king. The royal bride is dressed in gold. While we don't want to read too much into this verse it may be helpful to be reminded that the purpose of the Lord Jesus was to purify for himself a bride

who was worthy of Him (Titus 2:14). Like gold is refined and purified so this bride is dressed in gold as a symbol of her value and purity.

In verse 10, the call went out to the bride. She is called to forget her people and her father's house because the king was enthralled by her beauty. I don't think we will ever understand why the Lord Jesus loves us so much that He would willingly die for us. We, as the bride of Christ, are called to leave our fathers and mothers and be joined to Him. We are called to a new relationship. To enter this relationship however, we must willingly leave all to follow Him. We are to turn from everyone else to follow Him as our Lord.

The bride is beautiful. Others see her beauty as well. In verse 12, the Daughter of Tyre brings a gift to honour the bride. Great men also sought her favour. There is a difference between those who belong to the Lord Jesus and those who are of this world. As the people of God, we need to let the beauty of Christ be seen in us.

In verse 14, the bride is dressed in embroidered garments and led to her groom with her friends and companions following her. The procession makes its way to the palace of the king. They are filled with joy and gladness as they come to Him.

The final section of the psalm is in a prophetic blessing on the couple. The psalmist prophesies that the sons of this union would become princes. The memory of this couple would be for generations. Nations would honour them forever.

The psalmist speaks in this psalm of the relationship between the king and his bride. He also speaks of a relationship between the Messiah and His people. What is striking is the imagery of marriage. There is no closer human relationship. God wants to enter a deep, personal and intimate relationship with His people. As His bride, His people are called to turn from everything else and seek her husband only. God delights in blessing His people forever.

For Consideration:

- The psalmist begins this psalm with words of praise to the King. What characteristic of Christ do you particularly appreciate?
- Have you caught sight of the beauty of Christ? What keeps us from seeing Him in all His beauty?
- How does the Lord Jesus, as the groom, see you as His bride? What does He feel about you?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to praise the Lord for His beauty.
- Thank the Lord that He loves you and calls you to be His bride.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to anything that would keep you from Him alone.
- Ask the Lord to enable you to live in the joy of knowing Him.

GOD OUR REFUGE

Read Psalm 46:1-11

The psalmist begins this psalm by reminding his readers that they had no cause for fear because the Lord God was on their side. He describes for them who their God was and their relationship with Him.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE

The psalmist begins by reminding us that the Lord God is our refuge. A refuge is a shelter. In times of storm, the Lord God is a shelter for us. He protects us from the danger that comes against us. As believers, we will pass through difficulties in this life. As we pass through these difficulties, we can rejoice in the fact that the Lord God will shelter and protect us in our time of need.

GOD IS OUR STRENGTH

Not only does God shelter us in the trials and storms of life but He also strengthens those who come to Him. There are times when God will shelter us from the troubles of life. Other times, He will ask us to go through those trials. If we are called to go through them, we can be assured that the strength God provides will be equal to the struggle we face.

GOD IS AN EVER-PRESENT HELP

It is wonderful to know that God is also an ever-present help. Wherever we are, God is there to help us. As an ever-present help He never leaves us.

What should be our response to this understanding? The psalmist tells us in verse 2 that because God is a refuge, strength and ever-present help, then he had no cause to fear. Even if the earth gave way what do we have to fear? The God who created the earth is our shelter and strength.

If the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, God will be there beside us as our ever-present help. He will not forsake us in our moment of need. If the waters roar and foam and the mountains quake, we have nothing to fear for God is at our side.

The psalmist applies this truth to the city of Jerusalem in his day. He reminds us in verse 4 of the river that flowed through the city of Jerusalem. The river in Scripture is often used to symbolise the blessing of God. Jerusalem was abundantly blessed. It was here that the presence of God rested. From this city, the plans and purposes of the Lord

God would be unfolded for the whole world. In verse 5 the psalmist reminded his readers that the presence of the Lord God was in the city of Jerusalem. As long as the presence of God was in the city of Jerusalem, it could not fall? What army was big enough to stand against God who defended Jerusalem?

The psalmist goes on to remind his readers in verse 5 that God would help Jerusalem at break of day. The break of day was very early in the day. The psalmist is telling us that the Lord would come quickly to the aid of His people in Jerusalem. At the sound of His voice, the nations would be in an uproar, kingdoms would fall and the earth would melt. It is this powerful God who defended Israel. He was their fortress. What did they need to fear?

The psalmist invited his people to come to see the works of the Lord God (verse 8). We are invited to see the desolations He had brought on the earth. He is a God who brings wars to an end by breaking the bow, shattering the spear and burning the shields with fire. No nation can stand against His purposes. The call goes out to the end of the earth to be still and know that He is God. His name would be exalted among the nations. He would be exalted in all the earth.

The call for us is to be still. This is not the easiest thing to do when we are troubled and the enemy is pushing in against us. The stillness that the psalmist speaks of here is a stillness of trust and confidence in God. We cannot defeat the enemy in our own strength. Our God promises to defend us. We have no cause for fear. We can wait patiently on our God. We are absolutely secure in Him.

What response could there be from our lips but to exalt the name of this awesome God who comes to the aid of His people. God is our fortress. We are safe and secure in Him. We can be still in our hearts and minds. He will not fail us.

For Consideration:

- What struggle are you facing today? What does this psalm say to that struggle?
- God promises to be an ever-present help for us. What confidence does this give you to stand firm in the struggles you face today?
- What does it mean to be still? Can you say you are still in your present circumstances?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be still and confident in Him in your struggle.
- Thank the Lord that He will always bless and keep you in your trials.
- Bring your specific problems to the Lord today. Commit them to the Lord God and ask Him to make your heart still.

46

THE KING OF ALL THE EARTH

Read Psalm 47:1-9

Psalm 47 is a song of praise to the Lord God of Israel as the king of the whole earth. What we need to understand is that while God had chosen Israel to be His special people, He was not just God of Israel but of the whole earth. This psalm calls on all the nations of the earth to praise and adore the God of Israel.

Psalm 47 begins by calling the nations to clap their hands and shout to God with cries of joy. When we clap our hands, we do so to express our appreciation. It is a means of honouring the person for whom the clapping is intended. The Psalmist calls the nations of the earth to clap their hands in honour of the God of Israel. It would have been hard for the Israelites to imagine the pagan nations around them expressing this type of thanksgiving to the Lord their God. Notice how the nations are also called to shout with joy to the God of Israel.

The expressions of praise were to be lively. The reason for this praise is because the God of Israel was the Most High God. There was no god like the God of Israel. He was awesome in deed and character. He was the great King over all the earth. He was worthy of praise.

The psalmist gives us some practical examples of the awesome deeds of the Lord God. In verse 3, he reminds us how He subdued the nations under Israel. His blessing in the lives of His people was such that it made them the most powerful people on the earth. They conquered nations in His strength. God's people were feared by other nations because of their strength and blessing.

God gave Israel an inheritance. He did this because He loved Jacob and His descendants. God delights in blessing His people. He moves in power through them to defend. He breaks the power of the enemy. No one can stand in opposition to Him and His loving purposes.

The Psalmist tells us that the Lord ascends amid shouts of joy and sounding of trumpets (verse 5). Some commentators see a reference to the ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven after His victory over the cross.³ If this is indeed a reference to the ascension of the Lord Jesus it is quite

³ Geneva Bible Translation Notes, Sword Project, Converted by Alistair Baty and formatted for Palm Bible Plus 3.03
Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible, Formatted for Palm Bible Plus 3.03

John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible. Public Domain, Extracted from freegrace.net Formatted for Palm Bible Plus 3.03

incredible that the psalmist would speak prophetically of this many years prior to its happening.

From an earthly perspective the psalmist sees God as a king triumphantly returning from battle. As He ascends to the city of Jerusalem, he is met with shouts of triumph from the lips of its grateful citizens. Again, the psalmist cries out for praise to rise to the God of Israel for His wonderful deeds and for the great victory He offers His people.

The Lord God reigned over all nations. The Psalmist tells us in verse 9 that all the kings of the earth belong to the Lord. That is to say, they are accountable to Him as their Lord.

The Lord is God of all. His purposes are fulfilled in the earth. He moves kings and great leaders to accomplish His purposes for the earth. Nothing will foil those plans. He works out all things for His glory and our good. How thankful we need to be that God is in control of everything that happens. How important it is in times such as we live today to know that our God is still in control. What comfort this should bring us today. How worthy He is of our praise and honour.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this psalm about the purpose of God for the entire world? What does this say about His heart for missions today?
- What wonders has the Lord done in our days?

- What does this passage teach us about the sovereignty of God over the decisions made on this earth?
- What practical encouragement do you find in this psalm to face your own particular struggle?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is sovereign over the affairs of this world.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord for the promise of victory for His people.
- Take a moment to commit your life and the problems you are facing today to the Lord. Praise Him that He is bigger than that problem.

47

MOUNT ZION

Read Psalm 48:1-14

Do the people you work with see the Lord God in you? Does your life reflect the God you serve? Psalm 47 is a reflection on the city of Jerusalem and the presence of God in her that made her great.

The psalmist begins with a word of praise to the God of Israel. He reminds his readers that the Lord God was a great God who was worthy of praise. This great and wonderful God made His presence known in the city of Jerusalem, His holy mountain.

The city of Jerusalem, where God made His presence known, was a beautiful city on a hill. It was a great city because God was in the midst of her. The psalmist went as far as to say that Jerusalem was the joy of the whole earth.

From the city of Jerusalem, God's plan for the world would unfold. The Messiah would walk on her streets. Here, He

would be condemned and crucified, unfolding God's wonderful plan of salvation. From these streets, the apostles would go to the ends of the earth with the message of salvation. Countless men and women would come to the God who revealed Himself in Jerusalem. God still has a plan to unfold for His people. Scripture seems to indicate that as the days of the end approach, Jerusalem will again play a vital part in the unfolding of the wonderful and joyous purposes of God.

In verse 2, the NIV translation of the Bible compares the city of Jerusalem to heights of Zaphon (a region to the north of Jerusalem). The King James Version translates the word Zaphon with the word "north." The Hebrew word "tsaphown" pronounced Zaphon literally means "north." In this case, the psalmist may simply be saying that Mount Zion was particularly beautiful to the north at its highest point?

The presence of God was evident in Jerusalem's citadels. God was her fortress. In other words, there was ample evidence of the presence of God to defend the city. God was her defence. When kings from other nations advanced against the city of Jerusalem, they stopped in their tracks when they saw her. They realised that this city was defended by the Lord God. Instead of attacking they turned their backs and fled (verses 4-5). The nations recognised that God was in the midst of the city of Jerusalem. They trembled and were seized with pain and terror at the evident power of God. God destroyed the enemies of His people. They sunk like ships of Tarshish. Tarshish was a trading post. Many ships entered her port each year. These nations were like ships heading to Tarshish, loaded with treasures but they sank into the depths of the sea

never to be seen again. This is how the Lord God treated those who dared to stand against the city of Jerusalem. God defended the city. Nations were powerless against her.

There in the city of Jerusalem, inside the temple of God, his people meditated on His unfailing love. What has the Lord done for you? Is His presence evident in your life? Do you know the reality of His strength in your problems and difficulties? Then you too need to be in this attitude of praise for His wonderful support and presence.

Not only was the Lord God being praised in His temple but His name was also being lifted up to the ends of the earth. Throughout the whole earth, men and women saw the power and righteous deeds of the Lord and praised His name. Just as the city of Jerusalem demonstrated the power and holiness of this awesome God; so our lives ought to demonstrate that same power, righteousness and love. Wherever we go, we should demonstrate the reality of our awesome God through our attitudes, actions and words.

Notice in verse 11 that Mount Zion rejoiced not only because God defended her walls but also because of His judgements. God judged His people with justice and righteousness. God showed no favouritism. His people were assured of justice and fair treatment. He considered the small as well as the great. All were granted justice.

The psalmist challenged his readers to walk around Zion. They were invited to count her defensive towers. They were to examine her ramparts and citadels. They were to do this and tell future generations of the glory and strength

of the city where God revealed His presence. He was the God of Jerusalem forever. He was their guide to the end.

It is impossible to read this psalm without asking ourselves if we reflect the glory of the Lord in our lives like this city. Could we ask the unbeliever to examine our churches and our lives and tell the future generations what they saw in us? Would we be ashamed of what they would see? Does the world see evidence of the power, love and righteousness of the Lord God in our churches and in our personal lives today?

For Consideration:

- How has the Lord God been your defence? Give some specific examples of how the Lord has kept you.
- What evidence is there of the glory of God in your life?
- What will future generations say of us and our relationship with the Lord God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to make His presence more evident in you?
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have not always demonstrated His glory.
- Take a moment now to thank the Lord for the way he has been your defence and strength.

- Thank the Lord that He wants to reveal Himself through you to the world.

A COMMON END

Read Psalm 49:1-20

In Psalm 49, the psalmist addresses the issue of wealth and success. The psalm is addressed to all people everywhere in the world. It was for those who had a high position in life as well as for the ones who had a low position. It was written for both the rich and the poor. Everyone is called to listen to the psalmist because his words were filled with wisdom and insight.

Notice in verse 4 that the means by which wisdom was communicated was through proverbs and riddles put to music. Music is a powerful way to communicate truth. The psalmist understood this and chose to reveal his wisdom and insight not by preaching or teaching but through music.

In verses 5-6, the Psalmist asked a question:

Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me— those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches?

The question is a legitimate one. There have been many, down through the ages, who have experienced evil at the hand of those who trusted in wealth and riches. Those in authority have sometimes mistreated those who have little. Sometimes the rich become rich at the expense of the poor. Injustice abounds in the world. The question by the psalmist is really this: why should we fear or get upset when we are oppressed by those who use their great resources against us?

In answer to this question the psalmist reminds us in verse 7 that no man can redeem the life of another or give God a ransom for his life. In other words, when God comes to judge and these men and women are called to answer for their evil actions, what use will their money and riches be? God is not tempted by wealth. All the wealth of the world is His. He will not be corrupted or turn a blind eye to those who have oppressed the poor just because they are people of wealth and influence. No amount of money will ever spare the rich from death and decay. The day is coming when their wealth and riches will be of no use to them. They cannot buy their way out of the grave.

The wise man dies just like the rich. They die just like the foolish and senseless people they mocked and oppressed. Rich and poor alike must all face death. No amount of wisdom will spare a man or woman from death. All the wealth of the rich is left for another when they leave this world. The rich cannot take their money with them to the grave. When death strikes, the wealthy will remain in their tombs.

They will never escape. For generations to come they will rest, remaining locked in their graves, unable to escape. Their money, influence and power will be of no use to them in the grave. The end of the rich and the poor is a common end.

Verse 13 reminds us that this is the fate of those who trust in themselves. The grave will feast on the dead bodies of the wicked, rich and famous. Their bodies will lie decaying in the grave far away from their mansions and wealth.

We have seen that those who trusted in their riches and wealth will one day lie decaying in the grave. No amount of money will spare them in the hour of death. On the other hand, however, what a difference it was for the person who trusts the Lord. The psalmist reminds us in verse 15, that the Lord would redeem his life from the grave and take him to Himself. What a wonderful hope the psalmist gives us here. He knows that this life is not all there is. God would rescue his soul from the grave. We may suffer here on this earth for a time but there is a wonderful promise of life in the presence of the Lord God where no evil can ever harm us.

The Psalmist challenges us to see things from an eternal perspective.

Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendour of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him (verse 17).

Though in this life these individuals may consider themselves blessed, the day is coming when they will join those

who went before them in the grave. There, the light of life will be stripped from them. To have riches without understanding is to live like a beast (verse 20). The beast has no future in the life to come. It lives for a time and perishes. It lives as if this life is all there is.

The wise man and woman will prepare for eternity. Their focus is not on this earth and its wealth. These things mean little to them. Their joy and delight is to be with their Lord. The rich and poor have a common end. All must face death and eternity. The question is whether we will allow the riches of this earth to keep us from an eternity of blessing in the presence of our God.

For Consideration:

- Why should we not look with envy on those who accumulate wealth and possessions on this earth?
- Of what use is our wealth when we face death and eternity?
- Who can ransom our souls from death?
- How much do earthly possessions mean to you? Do they keep you from a deeper relationship with God?

For Prayer:

- Do you know someone who lives with no concern for eternity? Take a moment to ask God to open their eyes.

- Ask God to help you to see this world from the perspective of eternity. Ask Him to help you not to become overly focused on the wealth of this life.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful hope He has given you of eternity. Thank Him that this hope is worth more than all the riches of this life.

THANK OFFERINGS

Read Psalm 50:1-23

Asaph, the writer of this psalm, challenges his people in regards to their relationship with the Lord God of Israel. As he begins the psalm, Asaph pictures the Lord as a mighty God calling to the earth from east (where the sun rises) to west (where the sun sets). He calls them to stand before Him and listen to His words. From east to west, the whole earth is called to listen to God.

As the world listens, God reveals His glory from Zion (Jerusalem). Asaph describes Zion as being perfect in beauty. It is beautiful because the presence of the Lord God shines from it (verse 2).

Notice in verse 3 how God comes to speak to His people. He comes as a devouring fire and a raging tempest. He comes as a God of judgement who will rise up against His people to testify against them. This is a serious meeting. God has a judgement against His people.

God does not rebuke His people for their sacrifices and burnt offerings (verse 8). God told His people that this type of sacrifice was always before Him. Israel had been quite faithful in bringing their burnt offerings and sacrifices to the Lord.

The problem was not in the sacrifices themselves. God really did not need their bulls and goats (verse 9). God reminded them in verse 9-12 that all the animals of the forest, field and mountain were already His. God knew every bird in the mountain and every creature of the field. If He were hungry, He did not need to ask anyone for meat because all the meat belonged to Him (verse 12).

God also reminded His people in verse 13, that He did not eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats. God had no need of sacrifice for Himself. These offerings and sacrifices were for God's people because of their sin. God was not calling for sacrifices and burnt offerings to cease. Those sacrifices would continue until the death of the Lord Jesus. In fact God calls His people to continue bringing their sacrifices and offerings to Him in verse 14. He promised that if His people continued to sacrifice to Him and fulfil their vows, He would answer them when they called on Him (verse 15). Notice the connection between bringing their sacrifices and fulfilling their vows.

The charge God had against His people is that His people, though outwardly religious, hated His laws. They were making their sacrifices but they were not fulfilling their covenant vows to the Lord. Listen to what God tells them in verses 16-17:

What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you.

God's people were religious but they were not holy. They fulfilled their religious obligation but they did not do so with a pure heart. They quoted God's Word but then threw it to the ground as they would a piece of garbage (verse 17).

In verse 18, God accused them of joining thieves and adulterers in their evil deeds. They used their mouth for evil and their tongue to speak deceit (verse 19). They spoke against their brothers and sisters. They were willing to slander their mother's son, showing no respect for family or parents (verse 20).

In His grace and mercy, God kept silent for a time. Instead of striking them, He showed patience and tolerance. He gave them opportunity to repent. They interpreted this to mean that God had no problem with their evil. God reminded them in verse 21, however, that the day was coming when He would rebuke them to their face. He was not blind to their deeds.

The Lord makes His point clear in verse 22.

Consider this, you, who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue.

You can't get much clearer than this. God was angry, not because His people were not sacrificing but because though they were sacrificing, they disregarded His Law and did what they wanted.

The Psalmist concludes in verse 23 with these words:

He who sacrifices thank offerings honours me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.

The Lord is telling His people here that if they would offer thanksgiving offerings, they would prepare the way for the Lord to reach out and deliver them. Obviously, according to the context, these offerings were to come from sincere hearts seeking God. God is calling for repentance here. He is asking that His people turn to Him and delight in Him and His ways again. He is calling for a people who will express their gratitude to God by both their lives and their sacrifices.

The Psalm calls us to examine our relationship with God. Does it consist of external religious activities only? Is the faith we profess sincere? Do we delight in God and offer Him our thanksgiving with praise and gratitude? God is calling for a faith that goes deeper than the external religious activities. He is looking for a faith that comes from the heart and delights in Him. This is the kind of faith He delights to bless.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the importance of the attitude of our hearts?
- How does hypocrisy hinder our worship?

- What is the role of thanksgiving and praise in our relationship with God?
- What is the difference between outward religious activity and true gratitude and love for God from the heart?

For Prayer:

- What do you have to be thankful for today? Take a moment to give thanks for these things.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater heart of praise and thankfulness.
- Ask the Lord to give you a faith that is deeper than external activities, one which grows in a heart of love and delight in God and His ways.

CLEANSE ME

Read Psalm 51:1-19

This psalm was written by David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Nathan the prophet came to David to express the displeasure of the Lord at David's sin. Psalm 51 is a psalm of repentance. The psalm gives us a glimpse at the humanness of David but also his heart for intimacy with God.

David begins the psalm by asking God for mercy. He had sinned terribly. Not only had he committed adultery with Bathsheba but he had also murdered her husband to cover it up. We read this story in 2 Samuel 11. Notice how David seeks God's mercy here. The only way David could come to the Lord his God was on the basis of mercy. David knew that even though he was guilty, God's love was an unfailing love. He would not ignore his sin but neither would He cast him aside. How thankful we need to be that the Lord our God is merciful and compassionate.

Notice in verses 1 and 2 that there are three words used for sin. In verse 1, David asked the Lord to blot out his transgression. To transgress is to trespass into forbidden territory. This is what David had done. He had taken the wife of another man. She was forbidden territory but this did not stop David from taking her. To blot out is to wipe away, exterminate, or strike from the memory. David believed God could wipe out this transgression from his record.

In verse 2, David used the word "iniquity." The word iniquity describes something that is crooked, twisted, perverted or distorted. David was not only guilty of trespassing into forbidden territory but he was also guilty of wandering from the straight path the Lord had called him to walk. He twisted the truth by killing Bathsheba's husband in an attempt to hide his own sin. David asked God to wash his iniquity. To wash is to remove the filth and dirt. When a person washed a dirty garment in those days they would soak it in water and squeeze or step on it until the dirt was removed. As he looked into his heart, David saw the distorted and twisted lies he had spoken. He asked God to wash those lies from his heart by squeezing and treading until the filth was removed. This would not be an easy process but it was a necessary one.

Finally in verse 2, David asked the Lord to cleanse him of his sin. The word used for sin has the sense of missing the mark. Like an archer aiming for a target misses the target, David had fallen short of the standard God had set for him. Here, David asked the Lord to cleanse him of this sin. The word cleanse has the sense of purifying and purging. David needed to be purified because he was guilty of falling short of God's standard of righteousness.

David reminded his readers in verse 3 that his transgression and sins were always before him. In other words, he lived in the reality of his guilt day by day. What he had done clung to him. He lived with the guilt. There was a battle raging in his heart. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. God was not allowing him any peace of heart. David could not change what had happened, but he would have no peace until he confessed and dealt with this matter before God. His sin was against God. What God had spoken to him through the prophet Nathan was true. He had offended a holy God and disobeyed His commandments. God was right to judge him for his sin.

In verse 5, David recognised that his sin with Bathsheba was the result of something much deeper than the lust of the moment. He had been sinful from his mother's womb; from the very beginning of his life. David was plagued by sin. His sinfulness did not begin with Bathsheba; David was a sinner by birth. His sin with Bathsheba reminded him of the even greater problem of a sinful nature. The sin David confesses in this chapter was only a symptom of an even greater problem in his life.

Having confessed his sin, David moved on to seeking God about restoration. David realised in verse 6 that God wanted truth from the heart. It was God who taught him the way he should walk. God was not interested in an outward confession if that confession did not come from David's heart. For this reason, David asked God to cleanse him with hyssop. Hyssop was a plant used in the service of the temple for purifying. It was dipped in blood and used to sprinkle the object needing to be cleansed.

David believed that God could purify him so that he would be as white as snow. To be white as snow is to be clean and undefiled. David believed that it was possible for him to be completely clean and guiltless before God. He trusted that God would cleanse him and forgive him of his sin; to the point where there was no guilt left and that he would be completely innocent again. This is the power of God's cleansing. He removes every stain of sin so that we are no longer guilty before Him. The power of the cross of the Lord Jesus will do this for each person who comes to Him.

David's sin had had a profound effect on his life. From verse 8, we understand that his joy left him. He asked God to restore that joy. The weight of this sin was so heavy that David felt like his bones were crushed inside him. He asked God to make those bones rejoice again.

David knew that God could not look on his sin. He asked Him in verse 9 to cover his face and blot out his iniquity. David wanted God not only to remove the ugly sin from him but he also asked God to create a new heart in him and renew his spirit. David is not just asking God to remove his sin but also to cleanse his heart so that he would never again yield to the temptation. He asked God for a steadfast spirit. That is, a heart that would remain faithful and true to Him alone in the face of any future temptation that might come across his path.

David's sin had stripped him of any real sense of the presence of God in his life. He asked that God would restore that presence. He pleaded with God not to cast him away from His presence.

Joy in our relationship with God is important. David cried out to God to restore the joy he once knew. Notice in verse 12 that David prayed to God for a willing spirit. He knew that, as a sinner, it was quite natural for him to wander. David wanted God to give him a mind and heart that willingly sought Him. How often have we wrestled with the attitudes of our hearts? David felt the need of a complete change of heart and character.

Notice also here that David commits himself to teach transgressors their ways. He committed himself to warning others about sin and turning away from God. David had experienced how sin had caused a separation from God. David didn't want others to fall into the same trap he did so he made it his commitment to warn them about the dangers of sin. This psalm may be part of that commitment to God. In this psalm, David publicly confesses his sin and shares the grief that his sin had caused him. It serves as a warning to all who would surrender to sin.

Notice also how David pleaded with God to save him from the blood that was on his hands. He committed himself in return to singing praises to the God who set him free.

In verse 16, David recognised that God did not delight in sacrifices. He had no need of animals. He already owned all the animals of the mountain, field and forest. The sacrifice God delighted in was the sacrifice of a broken spirit and a contrite heart. True repentance comes from the heart.

David concludes by asking God to restore prosperity to the land of Zion so that righteous sacrifices and burnt offerings could be again offered by those who took great delight in

the Lord their God. This shows us that the sin of David stripped the land of some of its prosperity. Sin blocks the blessing of God. It affects not only us but those around us. David understood that for that blessing to be restored, he needed to confess his sin and be cleansed. All this was possible because God was a merciful and compassionate God who delighted in restoring all who would come with a sincere heart before him.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about sin by the various words used to describe it in this psalm?
- What does sin do in the life of the believer? How did it affect David?
- Is it possible to confess our sin and still want to commit those sins? What is the difference between confessing our sin and having our hearts cleansed of those sins?
- What do we learn in this psalm about the mercy of God?
- How important is sincerity of heart when it comes to repentance?
- What are the particular temptations in your life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a merciful God willing to forgive our sin.
- Ask God to reveal any sin that hinders deeper intimacy with Him.

- Ask the Lord for a new heart. Ask Him to remove the desire for sin.

51

DOEG THE EDMITE

Read Psalm 52:1-9

Psalm 52 takes place in the context of David's flight from Saul. The background to this psalm can be found in the book of 1 Samuel. The introduction tells us that it was written when Doeg the Edomite told Saul that David had gone to see Ahimelech. Let's take a moment to examine this story.

David was fleeing from Saul who wanted to kill him. Saul was jealous and believed David posed a threat to the reign of his family in the land. In his flight from Saul, David went to see Ahimelech the priest. This event is recorded in 1 Samuel 21-22. Ahimelech gave David some provisions for his journey as well as the sword of Goliath. Doeg the Edomite was present when David spoke to Ahimelech. He saw what the priest had done for David and reported to Saul what he had seen (1 Samuel 22:9).

The fact that the priests had aided David made Saul angry. Saul ordered his men to kill Ahimelech and the priests. The

soldiers of Saul's army, fearing the judgement of God, refused to obey his orders. Saul then turned to Doeg and asked him to slay the priests. That day Doeg, the Edomite slew 85 of God's servants. When David heard about this, his heart was very troubled. In this psalm David tells us how he felt about what Saul and Doeg had done that day.

Notice in the first section of the psalm how David describes the evil of Saul and Doeg. "Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man?" David asked (verse 1). Saul and his servant Doeg did not feel the shame of what they did. Instead they boasted of their murderous plot. They had slain 85 men of God and lived to tell the story. David was not impressed with the boasts of these evil men. They were a disgrace in the eyes of God.

Men like Doeg and Saul thought much of themselves. With their tongues, they plotted evil and destruction. They spoke words that made others fear. Their boastful and proud words were like sharpened razors cutting and instilling fear in the hearts of those who heard them (verse 2).

These men practised deceit (verse 3). They loved evil and hated good. They were men whose words could not be trusted.

In this context, we can feel the frustration of David. Eighty-five men of God had just been slain. Saul was now coming after David to take his life as well. Why did God allow these evil men to kill His priests? What was going through the mind of David at this time? If God would allow Saul to kill His priests, would he allow him to kill David as well? David's faith would no doubt have been stretched at this time in his life.

While David's faith was stretched, it was not broken. In verse 5, David reminds himself of the justice and holiness of the God he served. In verse 5 David clung to the truth of God's holiness. He knew that injustice and evil could not prevail. Saul had killed the priests, but God would bring him down in His time. While evil may prevail for a while, God, as a holy God, would one day bring them down to everlasting ruin. The day was coming when the Lord God would tear up the tents of the wicked and uproot them from the land of the living. When a plant is uprooted it will never grow again. In his time of testing, David clung to the truth he knew about God. God was a holy and sovereign God. Evil would one day be destroyed.

In our day, we see evil all around us. We hear of terrible tragedies in life. Natural disasters, wars and crime abound. What should be our response? David grieved over what he saw but kept the truth always before him. In his time of stretching, he set his eyes on God. God would not fail. While evil did abound, it would not prevail. God would reveal His holy presence and bring justice in the end.

In the final section of this psalm David focuses on the victory of the Lord. He shows us in these next few verses what the response of the righteous person should be in time of trouble.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SEE AND FEAR (VERSE 6)

David tells us that on seeing evil around them, the righteous will fear. The fear that David speaks of here is not the fear we feel when we are afraid of something. The fear spoken of here is the fear of the Lord. When evil abounds, the righteous will set their eyes on God. They will trust him

and reverence His name. They will not let the evil around them take their eyes from the Lord. They will continue to honour and reverence His name by walking in truth and trusting His purpose.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LAUGH (VERSE 6)

David tells us secondly that the righteous person will see what is happening around him and laugh. There is nothing funny about evil and rebellion against God. We should not see this laughter as the type of laughter we experience when something strikes us as being funny. The laughter David speaks about here has to do with the foolishness of evil men and women who think that they can rebel against the holy God of this universe and not be judged. The righteous person knows the foolishness of the evil. The righteous person knows that the Day of Judgement is coming. The righteous laughs because they know that victory always goes to the Lord.

Notice what the righteous say in their laughter in verse 7:

Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!

It is the height of folly to assume that the plans of mere human beings could ever overcome the sovereign purpose of an almighty God.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL BE LIKE AN OLIVE TREE (VERSE 8)

In verse 8, David tells us that the righteous person will be like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God. Evil may abound around us. God's people can prosper even in the midst of tremendous opposition. God's people are protected in His presence. The safest place to be is in the will of God. This does not mean that evil people cannot harm us. They harmed the Lord Jesus and some of us will be called on to lay down our lives for Him. There is no place so safe, no matter what happens to us, as being in the will and purpose of God. Notice in verse 8 that the olive tree flourishes in the presence of the Lord God. This is a description of the righteous in a time of trouble. Their eyes are fixed on the Lord. They remain in His presence and they flourish like the olive tree.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL TRUST IN GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

At this moment in David's life, he was fleeing from Saul. Eighty-five men of God had just been slaughtered. What was David to do in this situation? David tells us that in these moments, we are to trust in the unfailing love of the Lord God. He loves His people. He has their interests at heart no matter what happens around them. His love will protect and keep them. Notice that the love David speaks of here is an unfailing love. We can face the difficulties and confusion of this world because we know that God's love for us will never change. We can rest in that love even when nothing else makes sense.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL PRAISE (VERSE 9)

In verse 9, David tells us that in moments of difficulty the righteous person will praise the Lord for what He has done. How could David praise the Lord in light of the murder of

these eighty-five men of God? David does not praise the Lord for this unjust and evil crime of Saul. He does praise the Lord, however, that His purposes cannot be frustrated by the evil of human beings. He can praise the Lord because he knows that victory will come in His time. In times of confusion, keep your eyes on the Lord God and the victory He will bring. There is reason to praise Him even when things seem to be falling apart.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL HOPE IN GOD'S NAME (VERSE 9)

David continues in verse 9 by reminding his readers that in times of difficulty, the righteous will continue to hope in the Lord God. The name of the Lord is good. All the Lord does is good. We can have absolute confidence in Him; Good will triumph over evil. We have this as a promise from the Lord. Those who hope in God will never be disappointed.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SEEK OUT THE PRESENCE OF OTHER RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE

Notice finally that the righteous person will praise the Lord in the presence of the saints. In other words, the righteous person will gather with others of like mind and together they will praise and honour His name. We were never intended to live in isolation from one another. There is strength in numbers. In times when things don't seem to make any sense to you, seek out other believers of like mind. Be strengthened in fellowship with them. Lift up His name together. Let your strength be renewed in fellowship with the righteous.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever been in a situation where evil seemed to prevail? Where was God at that time?
- Think about a time when you felt overwhelmed by evil. How did you deal with this?
- What do we learn about God in this psalm?
- What counsel does David give the righteous when they find themselves surrounded by evil?
- What role does the body of Christ play in our victory over evil?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His unfailing love.
- Are you facing a difficult trial right now? Ask the Lord to help you to keep your eyes on Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is sovereign over evil.
- Do you have a friend or loved one who is facing a difficult trial right now? Take a moment to examine what David says in this psalm. Pray about these things for your friend.

SALVATION FOR ISRAEL

Read Psalm 53:1-6

In the last Psalm, David instructed his people to keep their eyes on the Lord in the midst of their trials. He continues in this psalm, to remind his people of the dangers and difficulties that will come their way at the hands of the unbeliever.

David begins by focusing our attention on the person he calls a fool.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (verse 1).

David speaks here about an unbeliever. The individual David speaks about does not know the Lord God nor has he or she experienced His ways. These individuals do not believe that God exists. They look around them at the problems in life and doubt the existence of a holy God. We meet men and women like this in our day as well.

David calls these individuals "fools". They are fools because they are blind to the obvious facts. Even the simplest child can understand that this world did not come into being by itself. The creation testifies to the reality of a Creator God. The Scriptures also testify to the person of this God. Countless lives have been changed by the words of Scripture. Because of it, men and women all over this world have seen the truth and come to know the Lord God of Israel. The Holy Spirit speaks to the heart and conscience of men and women pointing them to the reality of a wonderful Saviour. The individuals David speaks of here do not understand these things. They have not seen evidence of God in creation. They have failed to see Him in the Word of Scripture. They have blocked their ears to the whisper of the Holy Spirit. They are fools because they have not seen the obvious. They are fools because they have turned their back on the only hope they have.

Because these individuals do not believe in God, they do not feel compelled to follow His ways. They do what they want. They are, according to David, a corrupt people. Their lifestyle is vile and evil. They do whatever comes natural to them. We should not see from this that the unbeliever is incapable of doing honourable things in this life. We have all met "good living" unbelievers. What we need to understand in this psalm is that these individuals are living their lives apart from God. Their sin has never been addressed.

God looked down from heaven on these "sons of men." Notice that they are called "sons of men." They are not sons and daughters of God. As God looks down on these unbelievers, He finds none who understand and seek Him. They run after their own way. They live for the things of this life. Their hearts have not been stirred to seek after

and love the Lord their God. Every one of them has turned from the Lord God. Their ways were corrupt and evil. They were content to please their own lusts. Not one of them sought God and His ways.

Notice particularly in verse 4 what these evil doers were doing. They were devouring the people of God. They attacked the people of God and devoured them like a hungry warrior eating bread. God saw what was happening to His people. God was not blind to what His children suffered.

These unbelieving nations are pictured as being brave warriors who were experienced in battle. They had conquered many nations but now they stood before a holy and all powerful God they could not conquer. They angered the God of Israel because they had attacked His children. Notice how the Lord God responds toward these unbelieving nations.

God gave His enemies reason to fear. They were overcome with dread. God put them to shame. God defeated His enemies. Their bones were scattered throughout the land.

David concludes by saying in verse 6:

Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!

This is the prayer of David for his people. He cried out to the Lord God to come to the aid of His people. He speaks here of a salvation that would come from Zion. This prayer was perfectly answered in the person of the Lord Jesus who was born as a descendant of David and ministered in Zion.

David knew that the day was coming when God would restore the fortunes of His people. While this may not have had an immediate fulfilment in David's day; the ultimate fulfilment would come in the person of the Messiah (the Lord Jesus). He would restore to His people the fortunes that had been lost by their sin and rebellion.

We can expect to see times of trial and struggle in our walk with the Lord. The wonderful promise here is that God does not forget His people. He will come to our aid. He will scatter our enemies and restore our fortune. With this wonderful promise in our heart, we can step out with great boldness and confidence in our service of our Lord and Saviour.

For Consideration:

- Why does David speak of the unbeliever here as a fool?
- How has the Lord God revealed Himself today? How did He reveal Himself to you personally?
- *What is the promise of the Lord to those who suffer in this psalm?
- While the unbeliever may seem to prosper for a time, what does the psalmist say is their final end?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has opened your eyes to His presence.

- Thank Him for the way He has promised to keep you in your trials.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who does not yet know the Lord and His salvation. Ask God to reveal Himself to them.
- Thank the Lord that He is a great warrior who will conquer evil and bring justice and righteousness.

53

THE TRIUMPH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Read Psalm 54:1-55:23

The context of Psalm 54 has to do with a time in the life of David when he was fleeing from Saul. Hearing that Saul was seeking his life, David fled to the region of Ziph where he hid in the mountains (see 1 Samuel 23:14). The Ziphites told Saul where David was hiding (1 Samuel 23:19). Saul prepared his army to pursue David. As he was closing in on him, the Lord sent a messenger to Saul telling him that the Philistines were raiding his land. Saul abandoned his pursuit of David to fight off the Philistines. God had obviously protected His servant David.

David wrote Psalm 54 in this time of flight from Saul. He began by asking the Lord to save him by His might. David knew that if it were up to him, he could not continue fleeing from Saul. Saul's army was bigger than his and it was only a matter of time before Saul would find his hiding place.

David did not rely on his own strength and wisdom; he called out to the Lord for his salvation.

Notice in Psalm 54:2 how David pleaded with God to hear his prayer for help. He reminded God that strangers were attacking him (54:3). This could be a reference to the Ziphites who had joined forces with Saul in pursuit of David. Though they did not know him personally, they were ready to hand him over to Saul. They had no regard for the Lord God and His ways. They were heartless people who pursued David in his innocence.

From verse 4 we see that David places his confidence in the Lord. The Lord was his help and the one who would keep him in this trial.

David pleads with the Lord to let the slander that was directed to him recoil on those who were speaking it (54:5). These evil words were like a snake coiled up and ready to attack. David prays that what was intended for him might instead strike back at his enemies instead.

Notice that David brought a free will offering to God. God would look after David. David could focus on praising and worshipping the Lord.

As we have already seen in the opening paragraph, God did deliver David by sending a messenger to Saul telling him that the Philistines had attacked. David knew that this series of events was not a coincidence. God was behind the attack of the Philistines. Everything was perfectly orchestrated so that David and his men would be safe. David's only legitimate response was to praise the Lord for the victory.

Psalm 55 continues with much the same theme as Psalm 54 though not necessarily the same background. David again asks the Lord to hear his prayer. Notice in Psalm 55:2 that his thoughts troubled him. His enemies were waiting like a lion to pounce on him. David trusted the Lord but these things still troubled his heart.

Notice that his heart was in anguish because of the terror of death that surrounded him (55:4). David did not know if he was going to live or die. He was distressed by these thoughts. Even the Lord Jesus, prior to His death wept with great tears. He too felt what it was like to be oppressed by his enemies.

In this time of anguish, David wished he had the wings of a dove to fly away from all his problems (55:6). He told his readers that he would fly to the desert far away from every living person and there he would stay. David cries out for relief from the constant stress and turmoil he found himself in. He wished he could simply run away from all these problems and find a place of shelter where he could be quiet and rest.

As David considered what was happening around him, he asked the Lord to confuse the wicked and confound their speech (55:9). He is asking God to thwart the plans of these wicked people who seemed bent on causing trouble for the righteous. Everywhere he looked in the city, he saw violence and strife. These evil men and women prowled about the city walls day and night. Malice and abuse filled the city (55:10). Destructive forces were at work. Threats and lies filled the streets (55:11). David is distressed by what he saw in his city. He was distressed also at the personal attacks he felt from the wicked.

More than all the above-mentioned problems, what particularly grieved David was the fact that the insults and hostility was not coming from an enemy but from one who had been a companion and close friend. It was one with whom he had enjoyed sweet fellowship who had turned against him (55:13-14). There is something very terrible about the sting of rejection from a close companion. Notice David felt this break in fellowship.

David pleaded with God to take his enemies away. His bitterness can be seen when he asked God that death would take them by surprise and that they go down to the grave alive (55:15).

David was weighted down and oppressed by the evil that surrounded him. In his distress, he called to the Lord and the Lord came to his aid. Notice in Psalm 55:17 that he cried out evening, morning and noon, in his distress. Though he never seemed to get relief from his pain, he did not give up hope in God.

In time, David experienced this relief. David testifies here that the Lord ransomed him unharmed from the battle that was waged against him (55:18). Even though he was opposed by many, he was ransomed "unharmed." God had protected Him in the midst of these difficulties.

When that victory came, David was confirmed in his understanding that God was seated on His throne as a sovereign and holy ruler. Though these individuals had no fear of God in their hearts and refused to change their ways, the day was coming when God would call them to give an account of their actions. Victory belonged to the Lord God.

It broke the heart of David to see how friend was turning against friend; breaking their covenant of friendship (55:20). He saw how sin had shattered relationships. People would speak words as smooth as butter to each other but their hearts were at war. Outwardly, they spoke words as soothing as oil but under the surface they drew their deadly sword ready to betray those who were closest to them.

David was not going to allow this betrayal to defeat him. He turned his eyes once again to the Lord God. He cast his worries and concerns on Him and knew the comfort of His sustaining hand. He promises his readers that the Lord, unlike their unfaithful friends, will never let those who love Him fall. He will always keep them.

David felt the sting of the enemy's sword. God's strength was his comfort in those times. David challenges us all to cast our worries and concerns on the Lord. He assures us that the Lord God will bring the wicked down to the pit. Bloodthirsty and deceitful men would not live out half their days; they would die before their time.

Notice in these two psalms that David is betrayed by those who are close to him. In Psalm 54, his father-in-law sought to kill him. When he took refuge in Ziph, the Ziphites betrayed him and informed Saul of his presence. David speaks in Psalm 55 of the betrayal of a companion who worshipped with him in the temple. In some ways, this psalm is a picture of what would happen to the Lord Jesus. He would be betrayed by one of His disciples and handed over to be killed. Have you ever experienced the betrayal of a close friend? David understood what this was like. More importantly, however, the Lord Jesus knows what it

is like to be betrayed by one who was close to Him. In your hour of grief, cry out to God and let Him strengthen and comfort you. He too experienced what you experience.

For Consideration:

- Notice how David feels betrayed by those who were close to him. How does this passage speak prophetically about the Lord Jesus and what would happen to Him?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that both David and the Lord Jesus understand what it means to be betrayed by those close to them?
- Can we be troubled and sorrowful and still be victorious? Does living in victory mean we never feel the pain of betrayal?
- What was the secret of David's victory in these psalms?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is fully able to give us victory.
- Thank the Lord for a particular time when you experienced His victory.
- Ask the Lord to guard the relationships in your church so that the enemy does not cause division.
- Ask the Lord to help you in your time of trouble to keep your eyes on Him. Thank Him that He understands what you are going through.

WHEN I AM AFRAID

Psalm 56:1-13

The exact circumstances of this Psalm are somewhat difficult to pinpoint. We do understand, however, what was happening to David at the time he wrote the psalm. The introduction tells us that David had been seized by the Philistines when he was in Gath. Likely he was running from Saul at this time as well.

David was no stranger to problems and difficulties. Here in the context of this Psalm, he cried out to God to be merciful to him. David did not look to himself and his own strength in his time of trouble. He proved to be a powerful military leader but the secret of his strength was in the fact that he relied on God in all things. Here again we see David calling out to the Lord in his problems.

Notice in verse 1 that David was being pursued by his enemies. He reminded the Lord that these men pursued him all day long. David had no relief. His enemies were constantly at his heels.

Slanderers also pursued him all day long (verse 2). They attacked him in their pride. The work of the slanderer is to destroy the reputation of a person with words. These individuals told lies and falsehoods about David to destroy his reputation and discourage him.

Notice what David did when the enemy pressed in on him? He tells us in verse 3 that when he was afraid, he put his trust in the Lord. There are some important details we need to see here. First, notice that David was afraid. Fear is a natural instinct in each of us. David felt fear even though he was a man of God. Notice, however, what fear produced in David. He tells us that when he experienced fear in his life, he turned to the Lord and put his trust in Him.

Fear does not always lead men and women to trust more in the Lord God. Sometimes fear causes us to run from Him. The reality of the matter is that there is nowhere better to go than to the Lord when we are afraid.

Notice also that when David was afraid, he looked to the Word of God (verse 4). In that Word, he discovered the promises of the Lord God for him. He loved the Word of God. Notice that he praised the Word. David praised the Word of God because it was an extension of God Himself. The promises of that Word were God's promises to him. The strength that Word gave him was from God.

In verse 4, David reminded his readers that mere men were helpless before him when he was trusting in the Lord God. In order to get to David, these men would have to go through the Lord God first. David hid himself behind the Lord his God. He did not have to worry because the Lord

would be his rock of refuge and his shield. Because men could not defeat God, neither would they be able to defeat him.

This was not to say that man could not make David's life difficult. In verses 5-6, David reminded his readers that his enemies were twisting his words. They plotted against him. They watched his every step; eager to take his life. David did not have it easy. Even though he trusted the Lord, David still experienced the insults of his enemies. God did not take problems from him but He did help him through those problems.

Notice that David asks God to keep the enemy from escaping (verse 7). He asked the Lord to bring down the nations. This is an incredible request on the part of the psalmist. David's heart is that evil would be destroyed. He sees the fruit of evil all around him and grieves deeply over it. He longs to see all evil destroyed. He longs to see the purposes of God being fulfilled on the earth. There is a real sense of frustration and anger over sin and its consequences.

Notice in verse 8 that David asked the Lord to record his lament and list every tear in his scroll. There have been times in my life when I have wept wondering if God really knew what I was feeling. This verse is a comfort to those of us who weep. God knows the cause of every tear that forms in our eyes. Not a single tear will go unnoticed. God remembers the tears we shed.

David has full confidence that when he called out, the Lord would hear him. He is confident that his enemies would turn back when God came to his aid. In fact, David told his

readers in verse 9 that he would know that God was for him when his enemies turned back.

David trusted the Lord God. He trusted his Word. The evil people of his day could do nothing to him except what a loving and compassionate God allowed.

In verse 12, David reminded his readers that he was under vows to God. It is difficult to say what these vows were. On a very basic level, David had committed himself to live for the Lord and to offer Him thank offerings. Nothing would keep him from fulfilling that vow to the Lord.

David demonstrates his confidence in God. He reminded his readers that the day would come when he would bring a thank offering to the Lord God because God would deliver him from death and keep his feet from stumbling. God would do this so that David could continue to walk before Him in the light of His life.

As believers there will be times of fear in our lives. That fear ought to cause us to run to the Lord for assurance and support. In His arms we can be safe and secure. No matter what happens to us, we can be confident that the Lord is able to deliver us. This is the confidence of the psalmist. This can also be our confidence as well.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about fear in this psalm? Can believers feel afraid at times? What did fear produce in the psalmist?
- Have you ever been afraid? What did the fear produce in you?
- What is the promise of this psalm for those who face struggles in life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is bigger than anything the enemy can throw at us.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater confidence in Him when trials come your way.
- Thank the Lord that when we are afraid we can come to Him for strength.

I CRIED OUT TO GOD

Read Psalm 57:1-11

Psalm 57 is yet another Psalm written in David's flight from Saul. Some of the greatest pieces of Christian literature have come out of suffering. It is in these times that our hearts are more focused on God our Saviour. This particular Psalm was written when David was hiding in a cave from Saul who sought his life. David seemed to take advantage of these occasions of solitude to write and express himself to God.

David begins in verse 1 by asking the Lord to have mercy on him. Although David was hidden in a cave away from Saul, his real refuge was not the cave but the Lord. He hid himself in the shadow of God's wings until the danger had passed. The picture is of a mother bird sheltering her young ones under her wing. The mother would sacrifice herself for the little ones under her wings. She would brave the cold and wet and with her own body shelter her young ones. This is the picture that David paints for us here. His enemies would have to overcome God if they were going

to get to him. There is something wonderful about this sort of relationship and confidence in God.

David had the assurance that the Lord God would fulfil His purpose in his life (verse 2). David had assurance that the purpose of God was good and perfect. He knew that the enemy could not overcome him as long as he was protected and sheltered by the Lord. God would accomplish His purposes for David.

Notice in verse 3 that God sent help from heaven to save David by rebuking those who had pursued him. The God of this universe reached all the way down from heaven in answer to the prayers of David. He reached out and rebuked those who sought his life.

Notice the word "selah" in this verse. The word seems to be a musical term calling for a pause. Some see it as a call to the reader to pause to consider what has just been said. In this case, it is the thought that God will reach down from heaven to come to the aid of His children.

Notice what the Lord sends down from heaven to save His people. He sends His love and faithfulness. In our deepest grief and agony, God's love is our assurance that He cares deeply for us. His faithfulness is our assurance that He will not abandon us in our trial.

In verse 4, David speaks to us about his enemies. He compares them to lions and ravenous beasts whose teeth were like sharp spears and arrows. Their tongues were as sharp as swords. They were ready to devour him.

The desire of the Psalmist is that the Lord God be exalted above the heavens and that His glory be over all the earth. These evil enemies were not glorifying the name of the Lord. By pursuing David, they were standing against the purpose and plan of God. By crying out that God be glorified, David is in reality asking that those things that did not bring Him glory would be defeated.

David's enemies had spread out a net for his feet. Notice in verse 6 that David was bowed down in distress. The weight he had to carry because of his enemies was heavy to bear. God had not abandoned him, however. David's enemies had dug a pit for him but the Lord caused them to fall in the pit they dug for David.

David's heart would be steadfast (verse 7). That is to say, he did not waver in his faith and commitment to the Lord in this time of difficulty. He remained firm in his devotion to God. He set his eyes on the Lord in his pain and refused to lose sight of Him.

Notice also that not only did David keep his eyes on the Lord in his time of trial but he also praised the Lord through music. In verse 8, he calls his soul to awake. He calls his harp and lyre to awaken the dawn. It is sometimes difficult to praise the Lord in the midst of trouble and difficulty in our lives. David is hidden away in a cave with Saul seeking to kill him. Somehow he finds it in his heart to pick up his harp and sing praises to His name. This is only possible because he had kept his eyes on the Lord and the victory he knew by faith would be his.

David told his readers that he would praise the Lord among the nations (verse 9). David's heart was that the whole

world would know the glory and goodness of his God. He wanted the world to experience the love of God who reached down from heaven to him in his time of need. He wanted them to know the faithfulness of the Lord God to him. There in that cave, David experienced the peace of God. God seems to meet him there. In the darkness of his hiding place, David picks up his harp to worship and praise the Lord his God for His wonderful love and faithfulness.

In your pain and suffering today, can you lift up your eyes to God? Can you find it in your heart to trust Him in the dark cave of suffering today? David promises that even in our moment of sorrow and grief, the Lord's love and faithfulness will be our strength and confidence.

For Consideration:

- What does David teach us about the importance of looking to the Lord in the midst of our trials and difficulties?
- How is praise possible in trials and tribulation?
- What is your personal response to trials and testing? What challenge does this passage bring you?
- Take a moment to make a list of ways that God has demonstrated His love and faithfulness to you.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to keep your eyes on Him in your trials.

- Thank the Lord that David was able to sing praises to the Lord even in the dark cave where he was hiding from his enemies. Ask God to help you in your pain and suffering to have a heart of praise and thanksgiving.
- Take a moment to pray for a brother or sister who is facing a difficult time. Ask God to reveal His love and faithfulness to them at this time.

56

A PRAYER FOR JUSTICE

Read Psalm 58:1-11

Psalm 58 is a prayer for justice on the earth. In particular, the Psalmist prays against the evil rulers of his day. The Psalm can be divided into three sections. Verses 1-5 speak of the evil of the rulers in the land. Verses 6-9 are a prayer against these rulers. Verses 10-11 show the result of that prayer.

THE RULERS OF THE LAND

David begins with a statement about the rulers of the land. Notice what he tells us about them. David begins by asking a question:

Do you rulers indeed speak justly? Do you judge uprightly among men? (verse 1)

Obviously, David saw it as the ruler's obligation to rule with justice. They were to provide fair and just treatment for

everyone who was under their administration. They were to be upright in their judgement. David asks the rulers if they were judging uprightly in verse 1. He answers his own question in verse 2.

David reminded the leaders that their hearts were not just and upright. Instead, they devised injustice and with their hands they dealt out violence on the earth. The rulers that David speaks of here were unjust and cruel. They cared nothing about the people under them nor did they respect the law of God.

In verse 3, David speaks generally of the wicked. He reminded his reader that the wicked went astray from birth and from the womb; they were wayward and spoke lies. In saying this, David is telling us that we were sinful from birth. While evil is something we learn, it is also something we are born with. The individuals David speaks of here were born evil. They spoke lies from their mother's womb. Evil came quite naturally.

David portrayed these wicked people as snakes. He makes two points here. First, their venom was like that of a snake. When a poisonous snake bites, it releases venom into its prey. That venom will eventually kill the prey if it is not dealt with immediately. This venom is a picture of sin and its effects. Sin will destroy us. These evil rulers are described as venomous snakes, intent on releasing their deadly poison into the lives of those under them. Like snakes, they devoured their prey. Instead of being shepherds to the sheep they poisoned them with their lies and sinful ways.

Second, these rulers were like a cobra that refused to listen to the charmer. The picture here is of a cobra dancing to the music of the charmer. These rulers, however, would not listen to the Lord God. Notice that no matter how skilful the music was played, this cobra refused to listen. God had sent prophets to speak to the people of David's day but the rulers refused to listen. They blocked their ears to anything righteous and good. They lived only for themselves.

PRAYER AGAINST THE RULERS

Having described the rulers of his day, David now prayed against them. His prayer is very intense. He speaks harshly about these evil rulers. We have seen that the rulers of his day were like snakes biting and spreading their venom. David pleads with God in verse 6, to break the teeth of these venomous serpents so they would no longer be able to spread their sin and evil. He also compares them to lions devouring God's people. David prays that God would rip out the fangs of the lions so they would no longer devour His people.

In verse 7, David went on to pray that the evil rulers would vanish like water flowing away. He wanted God to remove these individuals before they could continue to spread their evil.

David also paints a picture of the rulers drawing their bows to shoot those under their authority. The Psalmist prayed to God that the arrows shot from their bows would be blunt so that God's people would not be harmed.

In verse 8, David compares the rulers of his day to slugs. Many of us have seen slugs on a hot day. As they move

they seem to leave a trail of slime behind them giving the impression that the slug is slowly melting away in the sun. David prays that these evil people would melt away like the slug so that they would no longer threaten the people of God.

In the final section of verse 8, David asked that God would remove evil from the land so that, like a stillborn child, these rulers would no longer see the sun and live to spread their evil.

There is urgency to the prayer of David in verse 9. David prayed that before the pots could feel the heat from the thorns, the wicked would be swept away. The illustration is of a pot set to boil under a fire made from thorns. Thorns burn very quickly. What David is praying is that the Lord would exercise His judgment quickly against the evil leaders of the land. He prophesies that this judgement would be swift.

THE RESULT OF THE PRAYER

In the final two verses of this psalm, David tells us what the result of the judgement of God would be in the land. First in verse 10, he told his readers that when the Lord judged the wicked, the righteous would be glad and bathe their feet in their blood. What David is telling us is that the judgement of the Lord would destroy the wicked. Their blood would flow in the land. The righteous would walk in that blood as it flowed in the streets of the land bathing their feet. This is a picture of absolute victory for the righteous.

The second thing that would be accomplished by the judgement of the Lord God was that men and women would say: "Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth" (verse 11). The whole earth will see that God does reward those who love Him and that He does judge the earth. For the wicked rulers, it was too late, but for those who listen, it was a wakeup call.

David is praying for justice. The righteous will suffer unjustly at the hands of the wicked. He prays with confidence that righteousness will triumph over evil. This too is our hope as we look around us at a world filled with injustice and evil.

For Consideration:

- What pictures does the Psalmist use in this psalm to describe the wicked people of his day?
- What evil do you see in your society today?
- Should we be praying against evil in our land today? Explain.
- What is the promise of this psalm for the believer?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray that God would remove injustice and corruption from your land.
- Thank the Lord that He promises victory for all who will trust in Him.

- Pray for those in leadership in our country and region. Ask God to touch their hearts and minds and enable them to rule with justice and righteousness.

57

SNARLING DOGS AND MELODIOUS MUSIC

Read Psalm 59:1-17

Knowing the context of each Psalm helps us to more fully appreciate its message. The context for this particular Psalm can be found in 1 Samuel 19:11-12. Here we read how Saul, in his jealousy, sent men to David's home with the intention of killing him. Michal, David's wife, discovered the plot and warned David in time. David escaped through a window and fled to safety.

The Psalm is, in reality, a prayer of David for protection against his enemy. He begins in verse one by asking God to deliver him from his enemies and those who rose up against him. He described his enemies as evildoers and bloodthirsty men. They were fierce men who laid in wait for him and conspired against him even though he had done nothing wrong.

In verse 4 David pleads with the Lord to come to his aid. He pleads with Him to bring justice and to punish these traitors. He goes as far as to ask God to show no mercy to them.

David compares his enemies to dogs. They came to him in the evening. They prowled about the city snarling at those they met. They were a wicked and unclean people. They spewed out swords from their lips. These swords were evil and hurtful words. They were words intent on harming those who were struck by them. Those who spoke these words lived with a false sense of security. They felt they could speak whatever evil they wanted and God would not hear them nor call them to account.

As powerful and as frightening as these individuals seemed to be, they were no match for the Lord God of heaven. He saw their actions and heard their words. God laughed at their audacity and pride. David reminds himself of God's character in this time of difficulty.

God was David's strength. He waited for the Lord to come to his aid. He did not trust in his own abilities but in the power and strength of the Lord his God. David was a powerful man. He was a wise man and had many important and influential individuals under him. His strength was not in these things, however, but in the Lord his God. According to verse 9, God was David's fortress. As a fortress, God surrounded and protected him on all sides. The enemy would have to deal with God to get at David.

Notice also in verse 10 that David described God as his loving God. He knew that the Lord God saw him and knew his situation. What is more important, however, was the

fact that David knew that his God loved him very much and would not stand by and let the enemy destroy him. Because of His power, God was able to save David but it was His love for David that motivated Him to do so. Out of love for David, God went before him to deal with the enemy. He would not let his enemies gloat over David and slander his name.

Verse 11 is an interesting verse. Here David asked God not to kill his enemies. Dead lips bring no praise to God. David's desire is not that his enemies perish, but that they come to the knowledge of God. David wanted God to punish his enemies. He wanted Him to make them wander as those who had no home. He wanted God to strip them of their power and bring them down. Their words had been evil and blasphemous. They uttered curses and lies from their lips. David asked God to consume his enemies (without killing them) so that the ends of the earth would see the result of wandering from the Lord and disregarding His commands. It was David's heart that both his enemies and the whole world see the wonder and beauty of his God. Ultimately he wanted his enemies to fall down in praise of the great God of Israel.

Notice the comparison between David's enemies and David in the closing verses of this Psalm. His enemies were like dogs prowling in the evening searching for someone to devour. They howled because there was no food to be found.

While the howling of these evil dogs could be heard in the city, in sharp contrast was the melodious sound of David singing the praises of his Lord's strength. He rose in the

morning to sing the praises of His great and mighty love. This God was his fortress and refuge in time of trouble.

The contrast here is striking. These evil dogs were hungry and cold as they roamed the city streets at night in search of food. They howled and snarled pouring out hateful and hurtful words. Quietly and confidently sitting in the warmth of his home David praises and sings songs of thanksgiving. His heart is confident in God and he is assured of His loving care.

As I reflect on this passage I am challenged in my own relationship with the Lord God. What is my response to trials and struggles around me? Can I quietly and calmly face the enemy because I know God delights in me? May God give us a confident and thankful heart like David in our time of need.

For Consideration:

- What is David's confidence in the trial he experienced at this time in his life?
- What is the difference between power and love? What encouragement do you find in the fact that God is both powerful and loving?
- What is your response to trials in life?
- Compare David with the picture he paints of his enemy. What is their confidence? What is their attitude in life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of power and love.
- Ask the Lord to give you the confidence of David as you face your trials today.
- Do you know people whose lives can be compared to the "howling dogs" of this psalm? Take a moment to pray that God would reveal Himself to them in a wonderful way.
- Ask God to give you a heart of praise and thanksgiving in your moment of difficulty.

58

RESTORE US

Read Psalm 60:1-12

The context of this psalm is somewhat unclear. Scripture does not seem to tell the story mentioned here in the introduction. We read that the psalm was written when David fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah. It was also during that time that Joab, David's military commander struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

The psalm begins on a negative note: "You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us" (verse 1). Obviously, there was a clear reason why God had become angry with His people and took His presence from them. Our sin may cause God to remove His blessings. Jonah the prophet felt the discipline of the Lord when he rebelled against His will and refused to go to Nineveh. Joshua knew the withdrawal of the Lord's blessing when one of his soldiers took loot from Jericho against the wishes of God. Because of these sins the blessing of God was removed from His people. When they confessed their sin, however, they went on to great victory.

In verse 1, the psalmist cries out to God to restore them as a nation. God had been angry with His people but there was still hope for them. Maybe you have felt this sense of God's withdrawal from you because of your sin. David gives us hope. He believed that God would return to His people.

Notice what happened when God withdrew His hand of blessing from His people. In verse 2, we are told that the land was shaken and ripped open. The psalmist pleads with God to mend the wounds the land had received. God's people were going through desperate times.

According to verse 4, it was those who feared the Lord who would be victorious. God unfurled a banner against the enemy's bow. The banner was a flag or some other sort of symbol carried into battle representing the nation. In this case, the banner was the Lord's banner indicating that the Lord would fight for His people against their enemies. Notice, however, that only those who feared the Lord could stand beneath this banner and experience His victory.

The psalmist cried out to the Lord to save him and his people. Notice in verse 5 that while God's people were experiencing desperate times, the psalmist knows that they are still loved. There are times when the Lord must discipline and withdraw His presence even from those he loves. In His moment of agony on the cross, the Lord cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Even in these times, God's love remains.

In verse 6, God seems to respond to the psalmist's cry. God spoke from His sanctuary. He declared triumph for His people. Shechem would be parcelled out. In other

words, the Lord would expand Judah's territory. They would again be victorious.

God declared his ownership of Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim and Judah (verse 7). God is proud to call these regions His. While at present, His anger was being unleashed, the day would come when the wrath of God would turn away. Notice that Ephraim was God's helmet and Judah his sceptre. The helmet and the sceptre indicated might and power. Judah and Ephraim would be used in a mighty way. God would again give them His authority.

As for the enemies of God's people, their future was very different. Moab would be God's washbasin. A washbasin was where an individual would wash the filth off of their hands and feet. Moab would be judged and know the wrath of God.

Edom's fate was no better. God would toss His sandal on her. This was a great insult. The Edomites would be defeated. Philistia too would be defeated. God would shout in triumph over her.

The Lord God would give victory to His people. They would triumph over the fortified cities of their enemies. Their only hope, according to the psalmist, was in the Lord whom they had rejected as a nation. The psalmist called out to God to give them aid. He recognised that there was no hope in human strength. In God, however, they would trample their enemies.

God was angry and had withdrawn His presence because of His people's sin. He was willing to return to them and restore their blessing if they would return to Him and fear

His name. This required that God's people confess their sin and recognise that He alone was their only hope.

God is gracious and willing to forgive us of our sin and rebellion. Apart from Him, we have no hope. Though at times He withdraws His presence, He will return in power when we surrender to Him. The sad reality of the matter is that all too many people have not recognised that God has withdrawn His presence. They believe that their defeats and failures are normal. They have never discovered the victory that can be theirs in Him.

For Consideration:

- Are all victories of God? Can we be victorious in a certain matter and still not be in the will of God?
- Is there evidence in your life that the Lord God is present? Have you ever gone through a time when God seemed to withdraw His presence?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God is willing to return to us when we call on Him?
- How can we recognise the absence of the presence of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for how He is so willing to restore us when we come to Him.
- Ask the Lord to move in power through you and your church. Ask Him to break any confidence in human strength.

- Ask the Lord to bring a deep awareness of sin and what keeps us from God.

59

A KING'S REQUEST

Read Psalm 61:1-8

Psalm 61 is a prayer of David. In it, he makes several important requests of the Lord. He begins by asking the Lord to hear his cry and listen to his requests. There is a tone of confidence in this request. David knows that he can come to God and He will listen to him. He boldly asked God to hear what he had to say. He knows that though the Lord God was so much greater than him, he still could come to Him with his requests.

We are not told what the circumstances surrounding this prayer are. Notice, however, in verse 2 that David calls out to God from the ends of the earth. We are not sure where David was located at this time but we could possibly assume that he was on a journey far from his home. He is confident that though he was far away, God was ever present and would hear his request.

Notice also in verse 2 that David's heart grows faint. We are not told why he was weary. In his weariness, he asked

the Lord to lead him to a rock that was higher than himself. David is in need of rest. The rock spoken of here would provide him with shelter from the trouble he was experiencing. Ultimately that rock was the Lord God. In Him, David would have rest from his strain. In Him, he would be protected from his enemy's arrows. What is important to realize here is that David recognised the Lord as a Rock that was higher than he was. He recognised that this Rock was a rock of refuge in trouble and a strong tower in the midst of the battle.

It should be noted here that this prayer is not just the desperate prayer of a wounded and weary man. It is the prayer of a man who delighted in the Lord God. Notice in verse 4 that David longed to dwell in the tent of God and take refuge in the shelter of His wings. The imagery is quite intimate. It is the longing of the heart of David to enter the dwelling place of God. He wanted to know and experience the wonderful presence of the Lord God. He wanted to fellowship with Him. Note also the reference in verse 4 to the wing of the Lord. David paints a picture of God like a mother bird protecting and sheltering her little ones under her wing. This is the type of relationship David had with the Lord his God.

In verse 5, David recognised that God had heard his vows and given him the heritage of those who feared his name. In part, that heritage relates to the relationship David enjoyed with the Lord. The heritage that David had was an intimate and very personal relationship with the living God. He was assured of His blessing and protection. He was assured of fellowship with God in His presence forever.

Could it be that the vows David speaks of here related to his promise to love and serve the Lord his God and Him alone? God takes the commitments we make to Him seriously. David knew that he had an obligation to God. His desire was to those vows.

David enjoyed a very special relationship with the Lord God. This relationship was a relationship of intimacy and deep fellowship. David longed to be with God and know His protection and blessing. David was the leader of his nation. Imagine what our nations would be like if their leaders had this same heart for God.

In verses 6 and 7, David has three requests of the Lord God. We will examine each of these requests individually.

INCREASE THE DAYS OF THE KING'S LIFE

In verse 6, David asked the Lord to increase the days of his life and his years for many generations. What is behind such a request?

David may simply be asking the Lord God to protect him from his enemies so he did not fall into their hands. He seems to be asking the Lord to extend his life so that he could continue to serve and honour Him.

Notice that David's request is that the Lord would increase his life for many generations. On the one hand, David wants to live a long life and see his children's children. There may be more to this request than David's personal desire to live a long life, however. Could it be that David is asking God that generations to come would be blessed because of his faithfulness and obedience? We pass on to

our children a godly heritage by our example. The influence of a godly father or mother will be felt for generations to come. David wanted the blessing of the Lord to fall on generations to come.

Beyond these interpretations is one of even greater significance. Some see a reference in this verse to the Lord Jesus who would be born in David's line. As a descendant of David, the Lord Jesus would be a king forever. Generations to come would be blessed and drawn to God through the work of this important descendant of David.

David's first request is that God would extend his life by giving him victory over his enemies and opening up opportunities for him to continue to impact the generations to come for God's glory. What heritage will you and I pass on to the next generations?

ENTHRONED IN GOD'S PRESENCE

The second request of David is that he would be enthroned in God's presence forever. David is not just speaking about his earthly reign here. He is asking that he would be given the eternal privilege to sit with God. There in His presence David would find fellowship and joy. Forever he would sit with God and know joy and intimacy with Him. David's heart is for God. He wants to be with God forever. He wants to commune with Him throughout eternity. He wants to receive the reward for faithful service on this earth. He wants to receive a crown of glory and dwell forever in the presence of the Lord.

APPOINT YOUR LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS TO PROTECT

The third request of David is that God would appoint His love and faithfulness to protect him. David's confidence was in the love and faithfulness of God to His promises. In times of flight, when David ran for his life, he found great comfort in the fact that he was loved by the Lord God whose promises would never fail. David did not ask the Lord to remove his problems. Instead, he asked Him to show unfailing love and faithfulness in these times. Trials and difficulties are times for us to experience the wonderful love and faithfulness of God in a deeper way.

David concluded his prayer with a commitment to the Lord his God to sing praise to His name and to be faithful and obedient all his days (verse 8).

For Consideration:

- What assurance do we have that God will hear our prayers?
- How can God be compared to a Rock?
- What evidence is there in this psalm that David desired a very intimate relationship with the Lord his God. Could you describe your life as being a pursuit of that same intimacy?
- Why did David ask God to increase his days? How does this apply to you personally?
- How is love and faithfulness our protection?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He does hear our prayers?

- Thank the Lord that He is a rock for you. Thank Him that He delights in sheltering you under His wing.
- Ask the Lord to extend your influence for God in this world.
- Thank the Lord that those who are faithful to Him will enjoy an eternity enthroned with Him in heaven.

A STRONG AND LOVING GOD

Read Psalm 62:1-12

When David was faced with problems, he set his eyes on the Lord and found great comfort in Him. David begins this psalm by reminding his reader that his soul found rest in God alone. There were many things that could have taken David's attention. There was no shortage of pleasures and luxuries in his life. David discovered however, that none of these earthly things satisfied his soul. Only God could fill the void he experienced.

David knew that his salvation came from God alone. David had a powerful army but there was no salvation for him in his army. He was surrounded by wealth and prosperity but there was no hope in this either. David's salvation came from the Lord God.

David reminds us that the Lord God was his rock and salvation (verse 2). As a rock, God could not be destroyed. He was an impenetrable shelter for David in time of attack.

David also speaks of the Lord God as a fortress. As long as David remained in that fortress, he would never be shaken. No one could overcome him. In that fortress, David was secure and confident. God was his protector. David places no confidence in himself or his mighty army. God alone was a sure foundation and refuge.

Speaking to his enemies, David asked: "How long will you assault a man?" David believed his enemies wanted to destroy him. Human beings, at their best, are weak. David compared them to a leaning wall and a tottering fence. They are fragile and ready to fall. We have glorious views of our potential and ability as human beings. In reality, however, we could be gone tomorrow. In an instant, our lives could be taken from us. We dare not place our confidence in people. David did not have any exaggerated ideas of his strength and power as a mere human. He knew he could fall in an instant were it not for the protection of the Lord God.

David's enemies were clear in their intent. They fully intended to topple him. They wanted to bring him down from his lofty place.

Notice the source of the confidence of David's enemies. They took delight in lies and deceit. This is the tactic of Satan. Satan has no power over God. He is the father of lies and deceit. He lied in the Garden of Eden and he continues to lie. By deceit and trickery, he misleads people from the path of truth. David's enemies believed the lies of the enemy. They believed that they were strong and could do whatever they wanted. They believed that God Himself would not stand against them.

In the midst of all this confusion and chaos, David reminds himself in verse 5, to find rest in God alone. In Him alone there was hope. Notice again that David describes God as a rock of salvation and an unshakeable fortress (verse 6). There is security and comfort in these illustrations for David.

In verse 7, David reminded his readers that his salvation and his honour depended on God who was his rock and refuge. Again the emphasis is on the Lord God and not on human strength. Everything depended on the Lord God and His strength. David gives himself no credit. His confidence and trust is in God alone.

David challenges all people to put their trust in God at all times. He challenges them in their time of need to pour out their hearts to Him. He challenges them to put God to the test. He is absolutely convinced that God was able to help all who came to Him.

In verse 9, David tells us that lowborn men were but a breath and highborn were but a lie. What is David trying to say here? The context speaks of trusting in the Lord God instead of in human strength. When it comes to trusting in humans, lowborn or poor men were merely a breath. Imagine that you are facing your enemy and all you could do to defend yourself was to blow on them with your breath. What hope would you have? You would be absolutely useless against the swords and spears of the army approaching you.

In regards to highborn individuals, putting one's confidence in them was like trusting a lie. These highborn individuals had an appearance of power and strength but it

would prove to be a lie. When it came down to the battle, they were as useless as the lowborn men despite their outer appearance. David told his readers that if these high-born men were weighed in the balance they would come out with nothing. They too were only a breath.

David's challenge to his readers was not to trust in human strength. He also challenged them not to trust in earthly riches. He speaks, in verse 10, of riches gained by extortion and theft. It could be that he is speaking about the rich and powerful leaders of his day that gained wealth and riches by this means. These individuals believed that their wealth would give them power. They believed that money would give them victory. David admits that there were many who gained large quantities of wealth by this means but he reminds them that these riches would not purchase their deliverance nor be of any help to them when the Lord came to judge. Salvation was in God alone.

Instead of trusting in human strength and riches David placed his confidence in what he had learned about the Lord his God. David had learned two important things about God. The first was that God was strong. God's strength was vastly superior to that of human beings. God was all powerful and even the greatest powers of this age will one day bow to Him in defeat. David has absolute confidence in the Lord and His strength.

The second thing that David had learned about God was that He was loving (verse 12). Strength without love would be terrifying. If God did not love us, what good would His strength be to us? Instead of coming to our rescue God would come to judge us. That would mean our defeat. Because God loves us, however, we have hope. His strength

is made available to us in times of need. In love, He notices our condition and comes to our aid. Because God is both strong and loving, we have hope, salvation and wonderful fellowship.

As powerful as David was, his confidence was not in himself and his riches but in the Lord God alone. May our confidence be in Him, too.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself trusting in human strength to get through a trial or difficulty? What does David tell us about human strength in this psalm?
- What illustrations does David use to describe God? What illustrations does he use to describe man?
- In what do humans put their hope and trust?
- Why is it important that we believe not only in the strength of the Lord God but also in His love? How do these two characteristics work together?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord for forgive you for the times you have not put your trust in Him alone?
- Thank the Lord that He is a rock of salvation and a fortress for you.
- Do you know someone who is going through a difficult time right now? Take a moment to ask the Lord to be their strength.

- Thank the Lord that He is not only a God of tremendous strength but also of great and overflowing love.

61

SATISFIED

Read Psalm 63:1-11

David wrote this psalm remembering a time when he was in the desert of Judah. David is in a very dreary place. Maybe you can identify with David in the situation you find yourself in today. In this Psalm, David shares with us his most intimate feelings toward the Lord his God. At this time in the desert his eyes are not on his circumstances but on the Lord. We need to have this same focus.

David begins in verse 1 by calling out to the Lord God. Notice that he tells us that God was his God. There is a connection between David and his God. He was proud to call Him God and to honour Him in his life. By claiming the Lord God as his God, he denies all other gods. He has only one God.

Notice also that David tells us that he earnestly sought the Lord his God. The King James Version translates this word "earnestly" with the word "early." In other words, David

woke up in the morning with God on his mind and heart. He sought Him with zeal and diligence.

David illustrates this earnestness and diligence, in verse 1, by comparing it to thirst. There in the desert, David knew what it was like to thirst. His soul and spirit sought God like a thirsty traveller in the desert sought water. His whole body longed for God like a weary traveller walking through a land where there was no water. To the weary and thirsty traveller, there is nothing more important than water. Such a traveller will willingly give anything for water. Water becomes an all-consuming passion. This is what David felt about the Lord his God. God was a consuming passion. Nothing else mattered if he could not find God.

In verse 2, David told God that he had seen Him in the sanctuary and beheld His power and glory. David experienced something of the power and the glory of the Lord. For David, the Lord was very real. David does not cling to a set of doctrines only but to the Lord God as a very real and intimate person.

Not only did David experience the power and the glory of the Lord but also His love. Notice in verse 3 how he describes this love. He told his readers that the love of God he had experienced was better than life itself. David was so captivated by the love of the Lord his God that he would willingly give up his very life for that love. He valued the experience of God's love more than he valued his own life. Forever he would glorify the Lord for that love. As long as he lived, he would lift up his hands in praise to this wonderful and loving God.

David's soul was satisfied with the living God (verse 5). He compares his satisfaction to the satisfaction an individual would experience by eating the richest and most delicious of foods. His soul was filled and satisfied completely. The Lord God took all hunger for lesser things from him. The deepest longing of his soul was satisfied in the Lord God. There are many people in this world whose souls are starving. They move from one thing to another in an attempt to fill that hunger but nothing seems to fill the empty void of their hearts. David experienced in the Lord his God, a complete satisfaction of the deepest desire and longing of his soul. For this reason, David sang praises to the Lord God with his lips.

In verse 6, David tells us that he remembered God on his bed at night. We have seen that David sought God early (KJV). Now we see that he also sought Him late at night when he went to bed. Throughout the night, David thought of God. His heart was filled with delight to know Him and to experience His presence as he slept. No doubt, part of this was thanksgiving to God for the blessings of the day. He rested well, even though he was in the desert, because he knew God was his help. David knew that God would watch over him and keep him. He rested in the shadow of the Lord's wing and was able to sing even in the desolation and heat of the desert. As he rested, he placed all his cares on the Lord and committed himself to Him.

David tells us in verse 8 that his soul clung to God. The King James Version translates "cling" by "follow hard." The idea here is that David made every effort to follow God and abide in Him. He knew that there was no security outside of God. He devoted his efforts to abiding in God and remaining true to his Lord in everything. As he did, the right

hand of God held onto him. God held onto David so that he did not fall.

David could face his enemies with great confidence. Those who sought his life would be destroyed and go down to the depths of the earth. They would be given over to the sword and become food for the wild jackals. David, however, would rejoice in the Lord his God. He promised that all who swear by the name of the Lord will praise Him. That is to say, none who trust in the Lord will be put to shame. They will experience His wonderful strength and love. They would be given cause to praise His name.

We too can experience and know this God as David knew Him. While the mouths of those who did not serve God would be stopped, those who loved Him would shout His praises forever as they experienced one victory after another in the desert places of their lives.

For Consideration:

- Under what circumstances does David write this psalm? Do you find yourself in similar circumstances? Explain.
- What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God personally?
- Have you experienced the hunger and thirst of David for God? Describe your own personal relationship with the Lord God and your longing for Him?
- Is your soul completely satisfied with God? Explain.

- Are there things that stand between the Lord God and yourself? What are they?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to reach out to you in the desert experiences of your life.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater hunger and thirst for Him. Ask Him to forgive you for your lack of desire for him.
- Ask God to enable you to "follow hard" after Him.
- Ask the Lord to remove anything in your life that keeps you from trusting Him more fully.

62

A COMPLAINT AND A PROMISE

Read Psalm 64:1-65:13

Psalms 64 and 65 are both psalms of David. We will examine both of them in this chapter. In Psalm 64, David brings a complaint to the Lord. In Psalm 65, he shares with us the great blessings that await those who serve the Lord.

David began in Psalm 64 by voicing a complaint to the Lord God. While in verse 1 David speaks of his words as a complaint, in reality, they are a prayer for guidance and protection in light of the terrible things that are happening around him.

He begins by asking the Lord to protect him from the threat of his enemies. David had many enemies. His confidence, however, was not in his military strength or his great wisdom and skill, but in the Lord God. His prayer is very

simple here: "Protect me from the threats of my enemies" (64:1).

His enemies conspired against him (64:2). David describes these individuals as wicked and noisy evildoers. They did not hide their evil plans. They sharpened their tongues like swords so that their words would be more cutting and harmful. They used their tongues as a weapon against David. They spoke evil of him and sought to destroy his reputation. Their words were like deadly arrows cutting and hurting all they struck.

For these evildoers, it really did not matter who they spoke against. They would speak evil of the innocent or hide in ambush and shoot at them suddenly. They had no fear of God in their hearts. In fact, they would encourage each other in their wicked plans (64:5). They boasted of the snares they had secretly hid to trap the innocent passer-by. Psalm 64:6 tells us that these wicked people would plot injustice and pat themselves on the back for devising such a perfect (but evil) plan. They boasted of the cunning of the evil heart of man. They lived for deceit. They thought it was a game. Like trapping an animal, these evildoers set snares for people and enjoyed it when they fell into their traps. Such were the enemies of the Psalmist. David shares openly with God how he feels about them and their evil words.

David had confidence that the Lord God would not allow these wicked people to prosper. In Psalm 64:7, he expressed his confidence in the Lord God. He told his readers that God had His arrows too. He would shoot those arrows at the wicked. They would be struck down in an instant. God would turn their evil tongues against them and

bring them to absolute ruin. Their ruin would be so great that those who saw them would shake their heads in amazement at their fall.

The judgement of these evildoers would give the inhabitants of the earth reason to think. When they considered what He had done to the power of the evildoers, they would fear Him. God would use the judgement of the wicked to warn others.

As for the righteous, their lot was very different. David reminded his readers in Psalm 64:10 that the righteous would rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in Him. God would be a shelter for His people against the plots of the wicked.

In Psalm 65, David tells the Lord that praise awaited him in Zion (65:1). Zion represents the city of Jerusalem where God's people lived. In many ways, it represents all those who love the Lord. There was praise and thanksgiving awaiting the Lord from His people. Obviously, this was because of who He was and what He had done for His people. In Psalm 64, we saw how the Lord would deliver His people from the hands of the evildoer. This was cause for praise and thanksgiving.

There were many reasons why God deserved the praises of His people. David reminded his readers that the Lord would hear their prayers (65:2). When they were overwhelmed by sin, they could come to the Lord God and find forgiveness in His name (65:3). God had chosen some among them to be His servants. These individuals were priests and temple servants. As His special workers they were wonderfully blessed in His house (65:4). God

answered the prayers of His servants by great and wonderful deeds of righteousness. He was the hope of the ends of the earth and the farthest sea. He formed the mountains by His power and strength (65:6). He stilled the rolling seas and the roaring of the waves. He could also calm the turmoil of the nations (65:7).

Those living far away feared the Lord when they heard of His wonders. These wonders were reason to sing forth songs of joy and praise to the Lord (65:8). By great wonders, the Lord cared for and enriched the land abundantly (65:9). God provided His people with streams of water and grain (65:9). The blessing of God is pictured as drenching the furrows of the land. The high ridges were levelled out for them and softened with showers from heaven so that their crops would be richly blessed (65:10). God blessed each year for the righteous and crowned each year with bounty. The carts of His people overflowed with the evidence of this abundance (65:11).

The grasslands of the desert regions overflowed. That is to say that even the desert began to bring forth life. The hills were clothed with gladness and the meadows with numerous flocks (65:12-13). The valleys were covered with grain and shouted for joy in praise of the Lord who brought them abundance (65:13).

As we examine these two Psalms together we see that God's people were a richly blessed people. Psalm 64 reminds us that God comes to the defence of His children when they face the difficulties of life. Psalm 65 reminds us of the wonderful privileges we have of serving such an awesome God. Blessings abound for those who love the

Lord. All who truly know Him have reason to praise Him, even in the midst of trials and tribulations.

For Consideration:

- What is David's complaint in Psalm 64? Describe the evildoers of Psalm 64. How does God come to the aid of His people in this psalm?
- Have you ever had people speak evil of you? What was your response? What does Psalm 64 teach us about what our response should be?
- Make a list of some of the blessings God promises to the righteous in Psalm 65.
- What personal blessings have you received from the Lord God?
- What reason do you have to give thanks to the Lord today?

For Prayer:

- What are your particular struggles? Take a moment to bring them to the Lord.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for some of the blessings He has given you.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God who hears prayers and blesses those who honour Him.
- Ask the Lord to help you to see your blessings even when you are facing difficulties in life. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you allowed your trials to hide His blessings.

63

MAY THE PEOPLE PRAISE YOU

Psalm 66:1-67:7

Psalms 66 and 67 are Psalms of praise to the Lord God. Here in these psalms, the people of the earth are called to offer their praises to the Lord God of Israel. Psalm 66 challenges people to come with various expressions of worship. Let's consider these different expressions of worship.

SHOUT WITH JOY

The Psalmist begins with a cry to the earth to "shout with joy to God." The idea is to make a loud noise so that others can hear. There is a time for quiet reflection in worship and there is also a time for sincere shouts of joy and thanksgiving. This is the cry of the thankful and unashamed. It is a public declaration of the goodness of God. Notice that the whole earth is to cry out. There is not a single person

on this earth who does not have something to praise the Lord for.

SING THE GLORY

In Psalm 66:2, the Psalmist tells us to "sing the glory of His name" and to "make His praise glorious." The word "glorious" should be understood in the sense of "reverence," "richness," or "splendour." In other words, the worship we are to offer to the Lord is to be a rich and reverent worship. We are to make His praise rich with songs that honour His name. We are to declare His worthiness in song. Our worship services ought never to be shallow. They are to be rich, thoughtful and creative.

SAY TO GOD

The next expression of worship the Psalmist describes in seen in Psalm 66:3. Here the Psalmist challenges us to say to God that His deeds are awesome and that His power is great. He calls those who come to worship to speak to God about His worth.

The question may be asked: "Why do we need to tell God what He already knows?" Clearly the Lord knows that He is great and awesome. God already knows these things but still delights in hearing it from His children. As husbands and wives, we can understand this. What husband or wife does not like to hear those words: "I love you." You may already know that your partner loves you, but it still means something when you hear it again from their lips. God delights in His people telling him how worthy He is. The Psalmist tells us that when we come to worship the Lord God we are to speak to Him about His worthiness.

COME AND SEE

In Psalm 66:5, the Psalmist tells us that worship also consists of seeing. "Come and see what God has done," the Psalmist tells us. He challenges us to take a fresh look at the awesome deeds our God has done. He gives his readers an example of this. He reminds them of how the Lord turned the sea into dry land so that the Israelite nation could cross over on dry land.

If we are to worship, as the Psalmist calls us to, our worship needs to consist of looking at the wonderful things God has done on our behalf. This type of worship takes time. This may mean reflecting on what has happened over the past week. We are to consider the times where God has worked on our behalf. We are to tell each other what God has done. As we are reminded of what God has done in our lives and we see what He is doing in the lives of our friends and loved ones, our hearts ought to be lifted up in thanksgiving and praise.

COME, LET US REJOICE IN HIM

As we see what the Lord has done on our behalf we are to rejoice in Him (verse 6). To rejoice is to celebrate. The word speaks of joy and happiness. God delights when His people are happy and joyful in Him. He is pleased when they celebrate what He has done for them. The worship of God ought to be a joyous and happy time.

There are many reasons why we are called to rejoice in God. The Psalmist reminded his readers in Psalm 66:7 that their god ruled forever with His power. He also reminded them that His eyes watched over the nations and

their deeds. All these things were reason to celebrate with rejoicing before God.

LET THE SOUND OF HIS PRAISE BE HEARD

Again in Psalm 66:8, the Psalmist reminded his people that they were not to be timid in their praise. He told them to let the sound of God's praise be heard. This is an invitation to public worship. God does delight in our personal worship but He calls us not to keep our worship to ourselves. We are to let His praise be heard. We are to be pleased to share with others the goodness of our God.

God had preserved His people's lives and kept their feet from sliding. He tested and refined them so that they were precious in His sight. Through great difficulties, the Lord set His people free. They were in prisons; weighted down with heavy burdens. People were riding over them. They travelled through fire and water but the Lord brought them to a place of abundance (66:12). This is not something to keep to themselves. They were to declare His worth and let his praise be heard. They were to let the world know how their God had set them free.

I WILL COME TO YOUR TEMPLE WITH BURNT OFFERINGS

In Psalm 66:13, the Psalmist shows us yet another expression of worship. He told his readers that he would come to the temple of the Lord with burnt offerings. The burnt offering was offered to the Lord as an offering for sin. Those who came with a burnt offering came humbly recognising that they had fallen short of the standard God had set for them. They came to make things right with God.

We cannot worship until we have known the forgiveness of God. The Psalmist tells us that part of worship involved confession of sin and restoration of relationships. If you have things that need to be made right with God, you must take these matters seriously. Come in humility and confess those matters to God. Let no barrier stand between you and God as you come before Him.

I WILL FULFILL MY VOWS

In Psalm 66:13-14, the Psalmist presents us with yet another expression of worship. He tells us that when he came to the house of the Lord to worship, he came with a commitment to fulfil his vows. In particular, he speaks of the things he had promised to God when he was in trouble (66:14). This calls for sincerity in worship. The hypocrite comes to worship God in the temple with unfulfilled vows. There are many different kinds of vows. There are vows of faithfulness and consecration where we offer ourselves to the Lord God to be faithful and true to him. There are vows of generosity and blessing where we offer our possessions and worldly goods to the Lord. There are also vows of commitment and service where we offer our time and effort to Him. We have all made commitments to the Lord of self, possessions or effort. God expects that as we come to him, we will be faithful to those commitments. Worship will only be hindered if we are not being faithful to our commitments to God. God expects honesty and sincerity in worship.

I WILL SACRIFICE

The Psalmist told his readers that when he went to the temple to worship, he went with a sacrifice for the Lord. A

sacrifice is something of ourselves that we bring as a gift. There are many sacrifices we can make for the Lord. Our sacrifice is an expression of God's worthiness. It is an offering that expresses to God how worthy He is to us. The word sacrifice implies a certain hardship. You don't sacrifice when you give what you don't need. Sacrifice requires that we lose something of value to ourselves. We willingly part with it, however, because we value God more than what we sacrifice to Him.

COME AND LISTEN

Finally in Psalm 66, the Psalmist reminds us of yet another expression of praise to God. Here he called his people to come and listen. In the immediate context, the Psalmist is asking people to come and listen to him as he recounted the goodness of God (66:16). He gives some examples of this in the remaining verses. He told his listeners that when he cried out to God, the Lord heard him and answered his prayer. He reminded them that if he had cherished sin in his heart, then God would not have listened but because he had dealt with his sin God had heard his prayer. He expressed to those who would listen that God had been good to him and had not withheld His love.

According to the Psalmist, worship also implies listening. It requires listening to the testimonies of God's goodness to each other but also listening to the Lord Himself. You cannot worship if you have not listened. We come to worship with a desire to hear. We leave a worship service having been challenged in our relationship with God and our understanding of who He is.

I want to conclude this meditation with a few comments on Psalm 67. In this psalm, the Psalmist expresses his heart-felt desire for God to be praised.

In Psalm 67:1, the cry of the psalmist's heart is that God would be gracious to him and bless His people by making His face to shine in their midst. In other words, the desire of the Psalmist was that the Lord God would give His people reason to praise Him. He wants God's ways and His salvation to be known to the whole earth. He is saying something like this: "Lord, give us more and more reason to praise your name. May you surround us with blessings so that the whole world sees how compassionate and loving you are." Notice that the blessings are not for selfish reasons but rather that God's name would be lifted high.

The second desire of the psalmist is that God's people would respond to God and praise His name (67:3). It is one thing for God to pour out His blessings on us and another for us to respond to those blessings. God's people are not always thankful for what He has given. They are not always a people who delight in worshipping and thanking Him for His wonderful deeds. The psalmist seems to be asking God to give His people the ability to worship His name. He is asking that God would pour out a spirit of worship on His people.

Thirdly, the Psalmist asks that every nation on the earth be able to sing for joy and gladness (67:4). He wanted the praise of God to rise up from the four corners of the earth. God's rule is over all the earth. Even foreign nations that did not know Him had much to praise Him for. The psalmist would not be content until the praise of God was heard in every corner of the earth. He wanted God's name to be

lifted up in every tongue, tribe and nation. His heart is a missionary heart.

What would be the result of this praise to God? The Psalmist tells us that the land would yield its harvest, God would bless His people and the ends of the earth would fear Him. There is power in praise. When the people of God open their eyes to the wonders of God and learn to praise Him in the way He has ordained, the world itself is changed and the nations turn to God in fear and awe.

For Consideration:

- What does the Psalmist tell us about declaring the glory of God publicly?
- What role does sacrifice have in worship?
- What are some ways we can "look and see" the goodness of God in our worship of Him today?
- What does the Psalmist have to say in these psalms about sincerity and honesty in worship?
- What does Psalm 67 tell us that praise accomplishes in our land?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the things God has done for you in the last while. Thank Him for the evidence of His presence.
- What does God mean to you personally? Take a moment to tell Him what He means to you.

- What sacrifices have you made personally for the Lord God? Ask Him to show you the sacrifices He wants you to make.

ARISE, O GOD

Read Psalm 68:1-35

Psalm 68 is a battle cry. What is unique about this battle cry is that it is not a cry to awaken a human army, but a call to God to come in defence of His people. The Psalmist David begins by calling on God to arise and scatter His enemies. We are not given the identity of these enemies. The Psalmist knows how easy it would be for the Lord God to scatter His enemies. He compares the enemy to smoke that is blown away by the wind or wax that is melted by the fire. The enemies of God's people have no chance of surviving. If the Lord God rose up against them, they would most certainly perish.

While their enemies would be destroyed, God's people would rejoice in their God. The God who scattered the enemies of His people would be the object of His people's song. In the verses that follow, the Psalmist gives us many reasons why God's people were to praise Him.

In verse 4, the Psalmist challenges his people to praise God because He rode on the clouds of heaven. The picture is of the Lord coming on a cloud as a military commander would ride his horse. He comes for the purpose of judging and defeating His enemies.

This great warrior God was a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows. He saw their needs and those needs touched His heart. Notice in verse 6 that God set the lonely in families. In other words, He provided fellowship and support for those who were without families. Those who were prisoners, God led with singing. God comes to their aid and leads them like He led the people of Israel out of bondage in the land of Egypt. These prisoners sing out of love and devotion to the Lord their Deliverer.

As for the rebellious, they would live in a sun-scorched land. They would be burnt by those scorching rays of the sun. Their water would dry up and their crops shrivel in the heat. This is a picture of desperation and despair. This is what waited for those who turned their backs on God.

In verse 7, we have yet another picture of the Lord riding out against his enemies. As He marched through the wasteland, the earth shook at His presence. The heavens poured down rain. God's awesome holiness shakes the earth before Him; causing all His enemies to fear. As He moves through the desert, He pours out abundant streams of water on the thirsty ground. The picture is of the children of Israel moving through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. God went before them in holiness driving away their enemies and providing for their every need.

God's people settled in the land He gave them. God's blessing was on them in that land. He provided for the poor among them and gave them His Word. This Word was given to Moses and proclaimed by the prophets who lived in the land God had given them (verse 11).

This wonderful blessing of God rested on His people. Kings and armies fled from them as they marched behind the Lord their God. Camps were divided and plunder taken. God enriched His people.

Verse 13 paints a picture of the people of God asleep beside a campfire. As a loving father, God speaks of them as being His dove. This appears to be a term of endearment. As God looks at Israel His dove, He sees her wings sheathed with silver and her feathers shining like gold. Israel is so secure that she sleeps comfortably by the campfire. Her wings and feathers are shining with gold and silver, a picture of prosperity because of God's blessing.

In contrast to the beautiful dove of Israel, are the enemy kings of the surrounding nations. God has scattered them like snow falling in the high places. There is a real contrast between Israel the dove resting in the warmth of the campfire and the enemies of God who are blown about like cold snow in a storm.

The Psalmist makes yet another comparison between the mountains of Bashan and the mountains where God reigned. In verse 15, the Psalmist spoke of the mountains of Bashan being majestic and rugged mountains. As majestic and rugged as those mountains were, however, they are pictured as gazing in envy at the mountains where the Lord God reigned. All the beauty and wealth of the nations

cannot be compared to what God's people were experiencing in their God. Nations longed to know this relationship and experience God in this way.

Verse 17 describes the Lord descending from Mount Sinai with His chariots and thousands and thousands of warriors. On His return in verse 18, He leads His captives behind Him. As He parades His captives through the streets, men and women honour Him with their gifts. He is a conquering leader returning from battle. Notice in verse 18 that even the rebellious come and offer the Lord God gifts in recognition of His sovereignty and power.

The Psalmist praises this glorious Military Commander. Notice in verse 19 that this great and awesome God who defeated His enemies cares personally for His children. The Psalmist told his reader in verse 19, that this God cared about the daily burdens of His loved ones. He bore their daily burdens for them. What an awesome God we serve. He is bigger than our greatest enemy yet His love reaches down to our smallest need.

The Psalmist has great confidence in the Lord God. This is a God who saves His people. He is a Sovereign Lord. Through the work of His hands, God's people escape death. While He kept His people and watched over them, the Lord crushed the heads of their enemies. He brought them down from their height and cast them into the depths of the seas. God's people would plunge their feet in the blood of their enemies while the dogs of Israel licked up what remained (verse 23).

Verse 24 describes a great victory parade marching into the sanctuary of God. As God marched on in triumph,

before Him were the singers and musicians. The young girls played the tambourines. Praise arose from the congregation of God's people to the Lord God. In this great victory parade were also the tribes of Israel, from the little tribe of Benjamin to the great throng of princes from Judah, Zebulun and Naphtali. They too praised the Lord for His victory.

A call went out in verse 28 for God to summon His power and show His strength. God's people call out to the Lord to be their strength. The nations are humbled by His power. Kings of the various nations come with their gifts to the temple of God in Jerusalem.

The psalmist asks the Lord to rebuke the beast among the reeds and the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations (verse 30). We should see this as a reference to the powerful leaders of the day. Some see the beast among the reeds as referring to a crocodile and possibly to the Pharaoh of Egypt. The bulls among the calves of the nations were other powerful leaders of that day. These bulls among the calves were likely proud and oppressive. These great world leaders would be rebuked by the Lord God of Israel and humbled before Him. The Psalmist asked that the great and powerful leaders of the world would recognise the God of Israel as the true God. He asked the Lord that these leaders would bow the knee to Him and bring Him an offering.

Envoys would come from Egypt and Cush in submission to the Lord God of Israel. The kingdoms of the earth are called on to sing to the Lord God in praise of His name. In that day, God would scatter those who delighted in war. The Psalmist speaks here of a time in the future when

nations would surrender to the Lord God and bring honour to His name. In some ways, we are seeing a spiritual fulfilment of this in the missionary effort of the church of our day. People from every tribe, tongue and nation are coming to the knowledge of the Lord God of Israel. We may yet see an even greater fulfilment of this prophecy in days to come.

The Psalmist concludes in a word of praise to the one who rode the ancient skies and thundered with His mighty voice. He challenges the earth to proclaim the power of the God of Israel whose majesty was over Israel and whose power was in the sky. This God, awesome in deed and power, gave strength to His people.

The psalmist feels free to cry out to the Lord God. God responds to that cry and like a mighty warrior comes to the aid of His people. Enemies are scattered. God's blessing is restored and His name is lifted high by those who love Him.

For Consideration:

- Where is David's confidence in this Psalm?
- David described the Lord as a great conquering hero. He also described Him as very gentle and caring. What illustrations do we have in this Psalm that shows us that God is a gentle and caring God?
- What does David show us is the destiny of the rebellious?

- This psalm speaks of a great humbling and a move of God throughout the nations. What does this teach us about the power of God? What comfort does this give us as we see what is happening around us in the world today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that we can put our full confidence in Him. Thank Him that He is willing to come to our aid.
- Take a moment to consider how the Lord is a gentle and caring God. Thank Him that though He is great and awesome, He still is concerned for the struggles we face daily.
- Ask the Lord to move among the nations of our world and bring them to a greater understanding of His person.
- Pray for your nation asking God to humble it and bring it into submission to His will.

65

SAVE ME

Read Psalm 69:1-36

Psalm 69 is a psalm of David in a time of trouble in his life. In this psalm, David cries out to God for deliverance from his enemies.

David begins by asking the Lord God to save him. He describes his situation in the first few verses. In verse 1, he compares himself to a man who was about to drown. The waters had come up to his neck. Soon his life would be snuffed out. He would soon sink to the muddy depths of the sea where his life would end. Even now the flood waters had engulfed him (verse 2). He was becoming weary of calling for help. His throat was parched from calling so much. He had been looking for God but now his eyes were beginning to fail him. Where was God in his time of need? Why had God not come to his rescue?

He spoke in verse 4 about those who hated him without reason. They were more numerous than the hairs of his head. Though they had no reason to seek his harm, they

wanted to see him destroyed. His enemies were dishonest people who forced him to restore what he had not stolen.

David comes to the Lord with humility. He knows he cannot hide anything from Him. He realised that he was not perfect. There were times when David had acted foolishly. God knew about his foolishness (verse 5). David's guilt was not hidden from the Lord. While David knew that he was not perfect, he also knew that those who trusted in the Lord would never be disgraced. God was a forgiving God and would forgive those who came to Him in humility.

Notice in verse 6 how the psalmist prays that those who sought God would never be put to shame because of him. David had a high position in his society. There were many people who looked up to him as a man of God. David knew that his sins did not affect himself alone but those around him as well. Sin brought a curse on the land and all who lived in the land experienced that curse. David's prayer is that his actions would not cause others to stumble or be put to shame.

From verse 7, we understand that David suffered not because he had personal sin in his life. His suffering was because of his relationship with his God. There are times when taking a stand to please God will bring us conflict. David willingly took a stand for God and as such he had to endure the scorn of sinners. This personal stand for the Lord meant that he became a stranger to his brothers and an alien in his own home. There are times when our commitment to the Lord Jesus will mean that we will have to separate even from our own family or suffer their scorn. David was willing to make this commitment to the Lord. Jesus, too, had to endure the scoffing of his own family

and loved ones who did not understand what His purpose was on this .earth.

David's heart is obvious in verse 9 when he wrote:

Zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults
of those who insult you fall on me.

David took his relationship with the Lord seriously. He was very passionate about the house of the Lord and the work of His kingdom. When an Israelite or a foreigner insulted or mocked the things of God, David felt those insults deeply.

In John 2, we read that when Jesus came into Jerusalem for the Passover, He met the money changers and those who were doing business in the temple. Furious at what He saw, Jesus overturned their tables and chased them out of the temple. John 2:17 tells us that when the disciples saw what the Lord did, they remembered what David said in this psalm: "the zeal for your house consumes me." David shared this same zeal for the house of God.

David also endured scorn when he wept, fasted and put on sackcloth. We are not told why David wept and fasted here but we can be sure that it was related either to the relationship of his people with God or his own personal relationship with Him. Those around him simply did not understand this zeal. They could not identify with how his heart was broken because the Word of God was ignored and the temple was being disrespected.

David, as a man of God, stood alone in his walk. He went against the current of his day to do what was pleasing to

the Lord God. Those who sat with him at the gate mocked him. Because he took a stand, David became the song of drunkards as they mocked God and those who followed Him.

These things only served to draw David closer to the Lord God. In verse 13, he pleaded with the Lord to be his sure salvation. He trusted in the great love of the Lord. Though he was mocked and insulted by the rest of society, David found comfort in the Lord and His great love.

David did not take any secret pleasure in being the subject of the drunkard's songs and the insult of his community. In verse 14, he compared himself to a man stuck in the mud. He was sinking down deeply into that mud, unsure of how he would ever get out again. He also compared himself to a man drowning in the water. He pleads with the Lord not to let the floodwaters overwhelm him and swallow him up.

David felt the pain of rejection. There were times when he felt emotionally overwhelmed, possibly even discouraged. He does not let this pain take him away from God. Instead, his pain drew him ever closer to the Lord God as his strength and salvation.

In verse 16, David pleaded with the Lord God to answer him out of love. He brings this plea on the basis of God's great mercy. Mercy is kindness shown to the undeserving. David does not believe God should answer his prayer because of all his personal spiritual zeal. David pleads with God on the basis of His compassion and mercy to those who don't deserve it. He asked God not to hide His face from him but to come quickly to him in his trouble (verse 17).

David understands that his hope is in the Lord alone. He asked Him to come to rescue him from his trouble. He pleads with God to redeem him from the enemies who seemed to be having their way with him. He knew that God was not blind to his suffering. God saw how he was being disgraced and put to shame because of His name. God understood how the scorn of the nation had broken his heart and left him helpless (verse 20). David had no one to turn to for sympathy in this time of need. There was no one to comfort him.

We need to see that David, while personally experiencing this rejection is actually speaking prophetically about the Lord and what He would have to endure on the cross for us. We get this from verse 21, where David told his readers that his enemies had given him gall for food and vinegar for his thirst. This is what happened to the Lord Jesus. Matthew 27:34 tells us:

There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

It is not without reason that David uses the same language here. He was experiencing prophetically something of the suffering that Jesus would go through for us.

David does not want evil to triumph. He paints a picture, in verse 22, of his enemies sitting down to a great feast obtained likely through unjust means. David prayed that this table would be a snare for them. In other words, that God would look down on that table filled with the unjust gains of the wicked and judge them. He prayed in verse 23 that the eyes of the wicked would be darkened and their backs bent. David prayed that God would come to judge these

evildoers. He wanted their place at that table to be deserted. He wanted God to strike them so that there would be no one to live in their tent. These were evil individuals who mocked the Lord and His ways. It broke David's heart that these individuals should be allowed to remain in this world to make the life of the righteous miserable.

In verse 26, David reminded the Lord that these wicked individuals persecuted those that God wounded and talked about the pain of those He hurt. There are times that God must discipline His own people. Sometimes God must allow pain to cause His people to grow. The pain that God inflicts is for the good of those who love Him and will always draw them closer to Him. The people David spoke about here took advantage of those God was training in righteousness. They persecuted them and spoke evil of them in their trials. For this, David asked the Lord to charge them with crime after crime. He asked God to curse them so that they would not be able to share in His salvation. He wanted to see the names of these individuals being blotted out of the book of life and not listed with the righteous. They were enemies to the Lord and His purposes. David is asking the Lord to give the righteous victory over evil and wicked individuals.

These words may seem harsh, but in reality they are just and fair. What would happen if evil and wickedness was not punished. What kind of God would not demand evil people to give an account of their actions? We should take great comfort in the fact that God will conquer evil and wickedness. Evil will not prevail. It will be dealt with once and for all and righteousness will triumph.

David was in pain and distress because of the evil he saw around him. He pleaded with God to protect him and save him from the hands of evildoers. In faith that God would do this, David promised God that he would praise Him with songs and glorify him with thanksgiving (verse 30). David knows God well enough to know that this praising and thankful heart would be worth far more than any ox or bull he could sacrifice. God takes pleasure not so much in all our sacrifices but the attitude of our hearts.

David believed that God would triumph over evil. The poor would see that salvation of the Lord and be glad (verse 32). The hearts of those who sought the Lord would live. God would hear the cry of the needy and would not despise the cry of the captives who called out to Him. David called heaven, earth and the seas to praise the Lord. God would move to save His people. The day was coming when Zion would be rebuilt and God's servants would settle in the land. There they would live under God and at peace with Him. God would not forget His people. Though they may suffer the insults and slander of evildoers, God would deliver them. He would be their salvation.

For Consideration:

- What trouble does David experience in this Psalm?
- Does David believe that because he served God and loved Him that God owed him protection and salvation? Explain.
- What is the attitude of David toward God and the work of His kingdom on earth?

- How does David show us prophetically what the Lord Jesus would suffer for us?
- What comfort did David take in the fact that God was a just God who punished sin and evil? What comfort do you take in this?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that though we may have to experience difficulties on this earth, He is able to keep us through them all.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful salvation. Thank Him especially that though we do not deserve it, He still reaches out to us in love.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord for His justice.
- Ask the Lord to give you something of David's heart when it comes to knowing Him and honouring the work of His kingdom.
- Ask God for strength to endure when you are misunderstood and feel abandoned.

RESCUE ME

Read Psalm 70:1-71:24

Psalm 70 and 71 seem to go together. Both are the cry of the righteous for help in time of need. We will examine them together in this chapter.

As we begin our reflection on these two psalms, the Psalmist is obviously in grief. He pleads with the Lord to come quickly to his aid. He has confidence that he can come to the Lord for the help he needs in this time of trouble.

Notice in Psalm 70:2 that the Psalmist is afraid for his life. People were seeking to kill him. He brings this to God pleading that those who sought to kill him would be thrown into confusion. He asked God to shame those who sought his ruin (72:2-3).

Not only does the psalmist plead with God that his enemies be put to shame but he also prayed that God would make those who sought Him rejoice and be glad. His

prayer is that those who sought the Lord would always have reason to proclaim: "Let God be exalted!" (70:4). The Psalmist recognised the reality of suffering for the believer. His prayer, however, is that the believer not remain under that suffering forever. It is his cry that believers experience the wonderful salvation of the Lord and praise Him for that salvation.

The Psalmist takes no joy in his suffering and pain. He asked God in Psalm 70:5 to deliver him. He wants to experience this delivery as soon as possible. What we need to understand here is that that trials and difficulties are not meant to defeat us. They are demonstrations of God's grace and power to overcome and testimonies to the world of His wonderful authority over evil.

The Psalmist continues in the same theme in Psalm 71. Notice his response to the struggles in his life. In Psalm 71:1 he reminds his readers that as he waited for deliverance, he took refuge in the Lord. He was confident that as long as he took refuge in the Lord, he would never be put to shame.

What does it mean to take refuge in the Lord? Those who take refuge in the Lord cling to Him and His truth. I like to imagine this as a young child clinging to his mother or father. This is a picture of absolute confidence and trust. In times of trouble and difficulty, it is easy for us to try to take things on ourselves. The person who takes refuge in the Lord places their full confidence in Him and clings to God and His ways, refusing to move from them. The Psalmist was quite confident that in taking refuge in the Lord, he would never be put to shame. In times of trouble, cling to

what you know about God. Trust in His ways and don't let the enemy lure you away from God's truth and promises.

The Psalmist asks the Lord to deliver him in His righteousness (Psalm 71:2). His confidence is in the righteousness of the Lord God. He knows that the Lord will always do what is right.

God was a rock of refuge for the Psalmist. No enemy arrow could penetrate that Rock. Notice that the Psalmist reminded his readers that God was a rock of refuge to which he could always go. No matter how difficult the trial was, the Lord's arms were always open to receive His children. Even when the Psalmist had failed in his own walk with the Lord, he was confident that he could still go to that rock of refuge and find grace, forgiveness and salvation.

Notice also in Psalm 71:3 that the Psalmist asked the Lord God to give the command to save him. No matter what we are going through in life we are merely one word away from victory. There is nothing the enemy can do to us that, with one word, the Lord cannot heal. There is no prison that cannot be opened with one word from the Lord. At the sound of His voice, the enemy flees. What wonderful comfort this is to us in our time of need.

The Psalmist also asked the Lord for deliverance from the hand of the wicked (71:4). Notice that they had a grasp on him. The Psalmist was in the hands of wicked and cruel men. He knew, however, that they could not hold him against the will and purpose of the Lord God.

From the days of his youth the Psalmist had put his trust in the Lord. From his birth he had relied on God. It was

God who had brought him from his mother's womb. Throughout his life he had trusted in God and God had been his Deliverer. There was no reason now that God would not deliver him again.

In the eyes of the world, the Psalmist was a bad omen. The world looked at him and felt that he had no hope. They believed he would perish. What others thought of him and his future did not deter the Psalmist's confidence in God. God was a strong refuge. The day was coming when his mouth would be filled with praise, declaring the splendour of the Lord (71:8). Though things looked bleak, he knew that Lord would not let him down. He clung to Him and would not let the enemy strip away his hope in God.

All through his childhood and youth, God had rescued him in times of trouble. He pleaded with God not to cast him away now that he was old and his strength was fading.

The Psalmist's enemies spoke against him and waited for the right time to kill him. His life was at stake. They felt God had forsaken him. They believed that they could pursue him and no one would rescue him from their hands. This shows us the depth of suffering the Psalmist faced. Notice, however, in Psalm 71:12 that his confidence is still in the Lord God. The words of his enemies and the terrible circumstances of life could not sway this confidence. He prayed that his accusers would perish in shame and be covered with scorn and disgrace. He commits them and what they are doing to the Lord (verse 13).

Notice the strength of the Psalmist's conviction in Psalm 71:14:

But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

The Psalmist believed that the day was coming when he would praise the Lord for His righteousness and salvation. He did not know how that salvation would come or what form it would take. Right now things did not look very good for him but this would not sway his confidence. The day was coming when he would proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord (71:16). The Psalmist's reasoning is quite simple. God was righteous and would always do what was right. God had taken care of him in his youth and there was no reason why He would not do the same for him in his old age. He believed with all his heart that God had not finished with him. He would declare the power of God to the younger generation (71:18).

There was no God like the God of Israel. The Psalmist reminds us that the righteousness of the Lord God reaches the sky. He is always God and will always triumph over evil.

Though the Lord had allowed the Psalmist to see troubles and bitterness in life, He would restore him in time. God would reach down to the depths of the earth and raise him up (71:20). God would increase his honour and comfort him again (71:21). The Psalmist would take out his harp and sing of the faithfulness of God. He would praise Him with the strings of the lyre (71:22). His lips would shout for joy and sing praise to the One who had redeemed him (71:23). His tongue would tell of the righteous acts of the Lord all day long while those who had sought to harm him would be put to shame.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to make the Lord our refuge?
- How has God delivered you in the past? Did you always deserve that deliverance? What does this tell us about His deliverance today?
- What is the righteousness of God? How does this give us hope in time of trouble?
- The enemy will try to take our focus away from the Lord God in our time of distress. How has he tempted you in this regard in your time of trial?
- What is the challenge of this Psalm for you in your time of trouble?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the deliverance of the Lord in your past. Thank Him for specific occasions when He has been your Deliverer.
- Thank the Lord that no matter what happens in life, He will always do what is right.
- Ask the Lord to give you the confidence of the Psalmist in your time of trouble.

THE KING'S PRAYER

Read Psalm 72:1-20

Psalm 72 is a prayer of King David concerning his reign. In this prayer, David brings his reign to the Lord and asks for His blessing. Notice as we begin that David asked the Lord for two things.

First David asked the Lord for justice. Justice is the ability to treat all people with equality and fairness. The poor are treated as the rich. In justice, there is no preferential treatment. The second request of David is for righteousness. In this context, righteousness has to do with respecting the law of God and living according to His purpose. David is asking that the Lord would enable him to reign according to His holy standards. It was the desire of David to rule God's people with righteousness and justice (verse 2).

Notice what this psalm tells us about the reign of David. Verse 3 tells us that the mountains brought prosperity to the people. The picture is of the rain coming down the mountains and refreshing the land below. Here in this

case, instead of the rain it is the blessing of God that pours down the mountain streams to the land where God's people dwell. The reign of David was blessed by God and was a prosperous reign.

Not only was the reign of David prosperous but it was also a reign of righteousness. In verse 3, the hills bring forth the fruit of righteousness. David followed the ways of the Lord during his reign. The fruit of righteous deeds and judgments abounded during his time as King.

In verse 4, we see that David defended those who were afflicted among his people. He saved the children of the needy from their oppressors. David was keenly aware of those who were being treated unfairly and took special note of them.

The blessing of God was on the life and reign of David in that he lived to be an old man. In Psalm 21, David asked the Lord for the blessing of a long life:

He asked you for life, and you gave it to him—
length of days, for ever and ever. (Psalm 21:4)

In verse 5, David describes his life and reign as one that endured as long as the sun and moon "though all generations." This long life was a sign that God was pleased with David and a clear evidence of God's blessing on his ministry.

David also compares his reign to rain falling on a mown field or like showers watering the earth (verse 6). Rain came to renew and bring prosperity. The falling rain brought an abundance of crops from the fields. In a similar

way, the reign of David was a refreshing blessing for the people of God. Some of the kings of Israel and Judah would turn their backs on the Lord and forfeit His blessings. This was not the case for David. He led his people into great blessing and refreshing.

During the reign of David, the righteous flourished and prosperity abounded (verse 7). David loved the Lord and followed His ways. The blessings the country experienced were a direct result of their King seeking the Lord. Because David sought the Lord during his reign, God extended his kingdom. David became very powerful. He describes his reign in verse 8 as being a rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Further evidence of the Lord's blessing on David's reign can be seen in verse 9 and 10. Here David tells us about the desert tribes bowing before him and the enemies licking the dust. The kings of Tarshish and other distant shores brought their tribute to him. The same was true for the kings of Sheba and Seba. They too came to present him with gifts. Kings of many nations bowed down to David and served him. God granted him success as a king.

Though he was a powerful king, David never lost sight of the needy and afflicted. His heart was burdened for them. He delivered the needy and reached out to those who had no one to help them. He took pity on the weak and saved many from death, oppression and violence. Their blood was precious in his sight (verses 13-14).

What we are seeing in these verses is the outworking of justice and righteousness in the reign of David. His cry is

that the Lord would continue to enable him to reign with this justice and righteousness.

In verse 15-17, David asked the Lord for special blessings. In verse 15, he asked that he would live long and continue this reign of justice and righteousness. He also prayed for blessing and prosperity in verses 15-16. Here in these verses, he asked God that the gold of Sheba would be given him. He also asked that grain would abound throughout the land and that it would be seen swaying on the tops of the hills. In verse 16, he prayed that fruit would abound and that the land would prosper and flourish like Lebanon. He wanted fruit to thrive like the grass of the field. David does not hesitate to ask the Lord for abundance of blessing. He saw it as his duty to provide all that was lacking to his people. He does not trust his own skills to do this. He seeks the Lord's provision.

A third request of David is found in verse 15. Here David asked that people would pray for him and bless him all day long. He recognised his need for the prayers of those who were under him. Again, he knows where his strength and wisdom came from. For this reason, he wanted God to raise up people to stand behind him in prayer as he ministered.

David also prayed that his people would bless him all day long. The reason people would bless him was because of what he had done for them. He treated them with justice and fairness. Under his administration, the poor and the needy were being cared for. Blessing abounded in the land. These things were the direct result of David's efforts in the land on behalf of his people. David wanted people to respect him as their leader and see the impact of his

righteous and just rule in their midst. He wanted them to see the benefits of serving the Lord and walking faithfully with Him.

In verse 17, David asked the Lord that his name would endure forever and that all nations would be blessed through him. David is asking God to expand his ministry. He wanted whole nations to remember his righteous and just rule. He wanted the nations to experience the blessings he experienced. Through the Lord Jesus, this prayer would be abundantly fulfilled. The Lord Jesus would reach out to the far corners of the earth and bring blessing through the salvation He offered.

What is important for us to note here is that David wanted to have a reign that people would look up to and admire. He wanted to be an example for others to follow, especially in the area of justice and righteousness. There is a real challenge here for us. Do we live lives of righteousness and justice? Do we live in such a way that people are blessed and encouraged in our midst? Will we leave to our children a powerful and godly example to follow? Do they see evidence of our walk with God and the benefits of a godly lifestyle? David's heart was that the far corners of the earth would be blessed through him and his faithful walk with God.

David is not asking for all these blessings for himself. In verses 18-20, he makes it quite clear that all praise and glory was to go to the God of Israel. It was God alone who did marvellous deeds. He recognised God as the source of all his wonderful works and confessed that without Him his reign would be fruitless.

In verse 19, David expressed his desire that the name of the Lord be praised forever and that the whole earth would be filled with His glory. David is not asking that his own name be blessed and remembered. He wants the earth to be filled with glory and praise for the Lord. He did not hesitate, however, to pray for great things to be done through him so that God would receive the glory.

People see God in and through us as His representatives. Do our lives reflect the glory of God? Do people look at us and see the deeds and thoughts of the Lord? David does not hesitate to pray for an abundance of blessing so that the whole earth would be touched by the ministry of the Lord. What do we want people to understand through our lives? What would you like people to remember you for in this life? How much of God have they seen in you? Have they become aware of the power, justice and holiness of God by watching us? May we, like David, pray that God would use us powerfully to expand His kingdom. May we never hesitate to ask for even more blessing so that His name would be lifted higher.

For Consideration:

- What is justice? What is righteousness?
- What is your prayer for your ministry and personal life?
- What is the difference between praying for great things for ourselves and praying for great things for the glory of God?

- What kind of testimony and witness do you have in your community? Are those around you aware of the presence and power of God in you? Explain?
- What evidence is there of the presence of God in your life and ministry?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the ministry He has given you. Ask the Lord to expand that ministry for His glory.
- David wanted to have a team of prayer supporters to stand behind him in his reign. Do you have such a team? Ask the Lord to give you a prayer support team to keep you and your needs before the Lord.
- Ask the Lord to enable you to be a practical demonstration of His righteousness, power and justice to the world.

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