



PSALMS

Volume 2

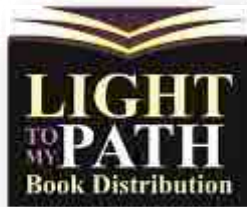
*A Devotional Look at Books
3-5 of the Psalms of Israel*

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Psalms

Volume 2

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of the Psalms of Israel*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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Psalms (volume 2)

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INTRODUCTION

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	Psalms 73-89
Book 4	Psalms 90-106
Book 5	Psalms 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 at 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.

Preface

The purpose 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 Mac Leod

THE PROSPERITY OF THE ARROGANT

Read Psalm 73:1-28

This psalm was written by a man named Asaph. He was a Levite who lived in the days of David. He was one of the men David put in charge of the temple music (1 Chronicles 6:39). 2 Chronicles 29:30 describes him as a seer. The seer was one who heard from God or saw visions. Asaph would express what he saw in his psalms.

Have you ever wondered why the righteous person suffers while the wicked person seems to prosper? Asaph shares his struggle with this question in this psalm. He begins with a general statement about the Lord God and His goodness to Israel and especially to those who were pure in heart. This was the truth he had heard, likely from his youth. He was, no doubt, aware of the wonderful stories of how the Lord God had proved His faithfulness to His people through the years.

While the Psalmist was aware of the doctrine of God's goodness in the life of His people, his personal experience cast some doubt on what he was taught. The struggle of the Psalmist here is to reconcile what he knew about God with what he was seeing in life around him. In verse 2 he told his readers that his feet had almost slipped and he nearly lost his foothold. The idea seems to be that the struggle between doctrine and real life was such that he almost began to doubt the truth of God's goodness.

Instead of clinging to the truth, Asaph began to envy the arrogant. As he looked around him, the Psalmist saw many who did not follow the ways of God. These people seemed to prosper. They did not appear to have the same struggles as the believer. They enjoyed full health and were strong (verse 4). They were not weighted down with the burdens of life nor were they plagued by illness (verse 5).

In verse 6 the psalmist tells us that these wicked individuals wore pride as a necklace and clothed themselves in violence. In other words, their lives were characterised by pride and violence. From verse 7 we understand that the hearts of these wicked people were hardened. From these hard hearts sprang the fruit of sin and evil. The pride of their evil minds knew no limits. They would scoff at the righteous (verse 8). Verse 9 tells us that with their mouths they laid claim to heaven and with their tongues they took possession of the earth. They believed that nothing was too big for them. They boasted of their power and wealth and believed that the world belonged to them.

Notice in verse 10 that these evil men had a following. Their proud boasts were heard by men and women of the day. These men and women came to them and drank up waters in abundance. The phrase "drink up waters in abundance" is unclear. It may be that Asaph is referring to the

prosperity of the wicked. The fact that the waters are abundant may indicate plenty. If this is the case, then those who came to these evil leaders experienced a measure of blessing and prosperity by following their evil ways.

It should be noted that these individuals knew that what they were doing was wrong but they continue in it anyway. In verse 11 they said: "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" These individuals understood that the Lord God would not be pleased with their actions but they also believed that either they had adequately covered up their sins, or that God had turned a blind eye to what they were doing. They did not expect to be judged by God for their ways.

As the Psalmist looked at the wicked people of his day he saw them as a carefree and prosperous people. They lived their lives with no obvious concern for the ways of the Lord and they did not seem to suffer for their evil.

This is where that Psalmist struggled. What advantage was there to keeping one's heart pure? Was there an advantage to keeping one's hands innocent of evil? If the righteous suffered and the wicked prospered, what benefit was there in following the Lord? Was he keeping himself pure for nothing? These things troubled Asaph's heart. He felt as if God were punishing him for being good and following His ways.

In verse 15 the Psalmist's struggle can also be seen in the fact that he does not have freedom to express his thoughts publicly. He knows that if he were to express these thoughts publicly, he would betray the children of God. God's children had, down through the years, attested to the fact that God was a good God and that He honoured

those who served Him. The Psalmist found himself now questioning these truths.

The burden of trying to understand why the wicked prospered when God's people were suffering became oppressive. What he saw before him did not seem to correspond with the testimony of God's children through the ages.

The answer to his questions came one day when the Psalmist entered the sanctuary of God. We are not told what in particular happened that day, but there was a revelation that came to his heart and mind. There in the sanctuary, the Psalmist came to understand the final destiny of the wicked. It is true that they prospered in this life but they were walking on slippery ground. The day was coming when they would fall into ruin. In an instant they could be destroyed along with all they had accumulated. Like a dream vanishes when one awakes from sleep, so it would be for the wicked. Their dream was beautiful, but they would wake from it to be judged by God. On that day their wealth and prosperity would not save them. It would leave them hopeless in the end.

It was at this time that the Psalmist came to realize the foolishness of his thinking. He had allowed his heart to be grieved and his soul to become bitter. He recognised now however, that he had been senseless and ignorant. He was thinking like an animal that had no eternal soul. He had been focusing on the things of this world and failed to look at eternity.

Despite his foolishness, God did not abandon Asaph. Instead, He took him by the hand and guided him with His counsel (verses 23-24). God took his mind away from temporary things and showed him eternity. There was much more to life than what the Psalmist saw on this earth.

It is true that the wicked may prosper on this earth. The believer may suffer at the hand of the wicked. Believers, however, are not to focus on the things of this earth. Instead they are to look to eternity.

The Psalmist realised the error of his thinking. In verse 25 he said: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you." His eyes were taken away from the temporary things of this world and set on eternal matters. He had a hope in heaven and realised that the greatest treasure was not in perishable things, but in the Lord God.

He now could confess that while his flesh and his heart would fail, God was his strength and portion. God was his strength in these times of difficulty and confusion. God was also his portion. The idea is that God was what his soul longed for. His desire is no longer for what he can get in this world but in knowing God. To know God was greater than anything this world could ever give him. Now it didn't matter if his flesh or his heart failed him. He didn't cling to worldly things. He had found something much greater than worldly goods. He had found the Lord.

The Psalmist concludes his reflection by reminding his readers that those who are far from God will perish. They will be destroyed despite their happy and prosperous life here below. They can enjoy all the blessings this world has to give but, in the end, will be separated from God.

As for the Psalmist, he now delighted in being near God. He would find a refuge in Him and tell of all His wonderful deeds (verse 28).

There is a radical change in the heart of the Psalmist. At one time he struggled with the fact that wicked people lived

prosperous and carefree lives. Now he saw how shallow those lives were. If they didn't have the Lord God, they really had nothing at all. The challenge of the Psalm is for us to examine our priorities in life. The Psalmist came to a point in his life where he recognised that the knowledge of God far surpassed any temporary joy this world could give. May we know the Lord God and enjoy Him like the Psalmist.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever focused on earthly things rather than spiritual? Explain.
- What difference does it make when we learn to focus our attention on spiritual matters rather than earthly matters?
- What does the Psalmist teach us about the possibility of rejoicing in God even when we have nothing in this world? Are you presently experiencing the joy of knowing God? What hinders you from a deeper experience of God today?
- What do we learn here about the foolishness and shallowness of the things of this earth?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to draw you closer to Himself.
- Are there things in this world that attract you? Ask the Lord to show you how much greater He is than those things.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to eternal matters.
- Take a moment to pray for a friend or loved one who has not yet had their eyes opened to the beauty of knowing the Lord God in a personal way.

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RISE AND DEFEND YOUR CAUSE

Read Psalm 74:1-23

The Christian life is sometimes filled with many difficulties. There are times when the believer is overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. Psalm 74 speaks to this matter.

As he began this psalm, Asaph the Psalmist asked God a difficult question. "Why have you rejected us forever, O God?" (verse 1). We should not take from this that God had actually rejected His people forever. This was, however, what the Psalmist was feeling as he cried out to God. He could not see help on the way. His agony seemed to be prolonged and God did not seem to notice. "Why does your anger smoulder against the sheep of your pasture?" he asked (verse 1). He knew that God was their Shepherd. It was because of this special relationship that the Psalmist feels that he has a case before God. If God was their Shepherd then why had He abandoned them in their time of grief?

It is clear that the Psalmist believed God would come to His people's aid. In verse 2 he pleaded with God to remember the people He had purchased of old. God had rescued them from Egypt and made them His own. Why would God now abandon those He had paid so much to redeem?

Notice also in verse 2 that the Psalmist reminded God that He had chosen to dwell in their midst. In the Old Testament context the people of Israel knew God's presence in the sanctuary where it rested over the Ark of the Covenant. They had experienced the power and glory of that presence in their battles. God had chosen to reveal Himself to them as a people. Why should He now turn His back on them?

Their city now lay in ruins. Even the sanctuary where God had revealed His presence had been destroyed by the enemy. Where was God when all this happened? In verse 3 the Psalmist called out to God to return to the ruins and remember His people. He reminded the Lord of what the enemy had done to them. This enemy had roared like proud lions in God's holy sanctuary. There in that sacred place they had set up their flags and standards as a sign of their victory over God, blaspheming the name of the Lord who dwelt there. This enemy had come with axes in hand. The Psalmist compared them to men cutting through a thicket of trees (verse 5). They smashed the carved panelling with their axes. They had neither regard for the beauty of the sanctuary nor any concern about the God who dwelt there. They went as far as to burn the sanctuary to the ground.

In their pride, the enemy said in their hearts "We will crush them completely!" (verse 8). They went throughout the

land and burned every place where the Lord God was worshipped.

What seemed to make matters worse for believers was the silence of God. They were given no miraculous sign or prophetic word. God was silent and the enemy went on its rampage. God's people questioned how long God would remain silent. We can sense their anguish in verses 10-11:

How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?

The silence of God is probably one of the most terrifying things the believer can experience. When we hear from God we take courage. Those who have heard from God have willingly faced persecution and death. Stephen faced his stoning with joy and peace in his heart when he saw the presence of the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Acts 7). God's people here, however, were faced with silence. They pleaded with God to break that silence and come to their aid. "Take your hand from the folds of your garment," they pleaded with God (verse 11). Show us your presence.

Despite the confusion and questions, the Psalmist has great confidence in the Lord his God. He realised that apart from God there was no salvation. God was their King. He had always been their true King. He alone could bring salvation to the earth (verse 12). He had often demonstrated His power in the past. He split the sea by His power so that their ancestors could cross over to the Promised Land. After God's people had crossed in safety God broke the head of the monster that chased them. This may be a reference to how the Egyptians were drowned in

the water after pursuing the children of Israel (see Genesis 14:21-28).

In verse 14 the Psalmist told his readers that it was God who crushed Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert. This may still be a reference to the way in which the Egyptian army perished in the desert after their pursuit of Israel. Leviathan, in Scripture, refers to a great sea monster pictured often as a threatening enemy. This could very clearly refer to Egypt. The Psalmist, in this time of silence, looks back to the time when the Lord God reached out to His people in a powerful way to rescued them. God dried up the streams of water for His people in days gone by. Could He not do the same now? The Psalmist placed his trust in the Lord who had revealed Himself to their ancestors as a powerful God.

This powerful God owned the days and the nights. He determined when it would be day and when it would be night. The sun and the moon listened to His voice. He set the boundaries of the earth. He determined when it would be summer and when it would be winter. He made the good times as well as the bad times. All were under His sovereign control.

In verse 18 the Psalmist pleaded with the Lord to remember how the enemy had mocked Him as they burned down the sanctuary. They had reviled His name.

Notice in verse 19 that the Psalmist is still confident in the love of God for His people and His faithfulness to them.

Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever.

The word "dove" is a term of endearment. The dove was peaceful bird. By calling God's people His doves, the Psalmist is telling them that they are dearly loved by God. All around him was chaos and destruction. The enemy had destroyed the city of God. They had burned down the sanctuary. God was silent. Still, the Psalmist tells his people that Israel was the dove of God. God still loved them and cared deeply for them.

Asaph pleaded with God to have regard for His covenant. I like to see a picture of marriage. He calls God to remember that they have been united with Him through a covenant. God's covenant partner was being defiled by the enemy. Don't let this happen to your people. Don't let us retreat in shame. "Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long" (verse 23).

The Psalmist cries for justice. He concluded in verse 23 with a cry to God not to ignore the clamour and uproar of the enemy that cried out against His people and His purpose.

There are times when God allows us to face trials on this earth. There have been times in my life where God seemed to be silent. These will be times of stretching and growth for us. The Psalmist reminds us that God is still in control even when things are difficult. Even when He is silent, He is still our salvation and hope. Trials do not diminish His power. Obstacles do not remove His love for us. Despite the silence and destruction, the Psalmist continued to look to God. In time, he would see His salvation.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation to the Psalmist? How did you feel at that time?
- Why do you suppose God allows us to pass through difficult times?
- Does the silence of God mean that He has forgotten us? Explain.
- What evidence do we have in this psalm of the Psalmist's faith and trust in God?
- What victories has God given you in the past? How do these victories encourage you in your faith today?

For Prayer:

- Do you know someone who is presently facing a difficulty in their life? Take a moment to commit them to the Lord.
- Praise the Lord for past victories.
- Thank the Lord that though He allows suffering at times, He is still Lord and His love never fails.
- Thank the Lord that there is no obstacle or trial He cannot overcome. Place your present trouble in His hands.

ARROGANT PEOPLE

Read Psalm 75:1-76:12

Psalms 75 and 76 are a challenge to all people who would lift themselves up above God.

As he begins, Asaph points the attention of his reader to the Lord God (75:1). He begins with a word of praise and thanksgiving because His name was near. This speaks of the intimacy and fellowship we can have with the Lord God. He is not a God who is far away. He chooses to draw near to His people.

The evidence of the "nearness" of the Lord to His people is seen in Psalm 75:1. The Psalmist told his readers that the wonderful deeds of the Lord had been passed down by word of mouth. The Israelites had experienced the presence of the Lord God in many different ways. God had, on numerous occasions, come near to rescue His people in their time of need.

Notice also that the Lord God also draws near to judge (75:2). Though at present people were acting in arrogance

against Him, a day of judgement was coming. On that day evil will be dealt with.

In Psalm 75:3 the Psalmist told his readers that on that day of God's wrath, when the earth shakes, God would hold its pillars firm. Even though this earth shake and terror strikes the hearts of the human race, we can have confidence that God will care for His own. He will hold the pillars firm so that they will not be destroyed.

In Psalm 75:4 Asaph speaks about the arrogant. They had boasted in themselves and their achievements. The Psalmist commands the arrogant to boast no more. Nor were they to lift up their horn. For the animal the horn was a weapon and symbol of strength. The Psalmist is telling the arrogant that they were no longer to boast of their great strength. From Psalm 75:5 we see that these individuals had lifted up their horns against heaven. That is to say, they challenged God Himself.

The arrogant were to stop speaking with outstretched necks. It is generally agreed that the idea here is that they were speaking out of arrogance and boasting in themselves. Psalm 75:6 seems to support this idea when the Psalmist reminded his readers that no one from either the east or the west or from the desert could exalt humankind. What do we have to boast about as mere humans? We can boast of our great technological and scientific achievements but we need to realise that all this comes from God. He is the source of all wisdom and strength. Without Him we can do nothing.

Asaph continues in Psalm 75:7 to remind his readers of the judgement of God. At that time God would bring one person down and exalt another. Our position in this world has more to do with God and His purpose for our lives than

our achievements and wealth. God brings down and He exalts.

The Lord God had a cup of foaming wine and spices (75:8). This was a bitter cup of judgement. When the time was right, the Lord would pour that cup out on the wicked of the earth and force them to drink it to the very bottom. What a terrible day that will be.

The picture before us is of arrogant men and women boasting of their achievements and wealth. They do not see their need of God nor do they follow His ways. They don't realise that they would have nothing were it not for the Lord God. They take the credit and glory for themselves. This angered the Lord who came to judge them. Psalm 75:10 tells us that the Lord would cut off the horn of the wicked. That is to say, He will destroy their power and wealth. They would fall because they lifted themselves above God.

Notice also in Psalm 75:10 that while the horn of the wicked would be cut off, the Lord would lift up the righteous and give them power and authority. Reflecting on this, the Psalmist declared in 75:9 that he would praise the God of Jacob forever.

In Psalm 75:1 we were told that the name of the Lord was near. In Psalm 76:1 His name is described as great in Israel.

This great and awesome God had determined to set up His tent in Jerusalem (76:2). He made His dwelling place in Zion. God chose to reveal Himself in Jerusalem. There in that city, God chose to demonstrate His power. Not only did He reveal His presence in Jerusalem but He chose to defend His people in that city. Psalm 76:3 tells us that God

broke the flashing arrow, the shields and the sword. He surrounded His people in the city so that the enemy could not penetrate. Despite all their strength, the enemy could not defeat the people of God.

Not only is God described as "great," but in Psalm 76:4 we are told that He is resplendent with light and more majestic than the mountains rich with game. Majesty is that characteristic that causes us to stand in awe and admiration. Faced with His majesty, even the most valiant men lay plundered. They perished under the majestic hand of the Lord. As mighty as they were, not one warrior could as much as lift a hand against this awesome and majestic God (76:5). They stood helpless beneath His majesty. His mere presence broke them.

At the rebuke of the Lord, the horse and chariot lay still (76:6). They were no match for this great and majestic God. A word from His mouth and all strength fled.

As powerful as the armies of that day were, they were no match for the Lord God of Israel. He was a God to be feared. There was no army that could stand against Him. When the Lord pronounced judgement from heaven the whole land feared and was silent before Him (76:8). There was nothing they could say. His judgement was final. God stood against arrogant people but reached out to save the afflicted of the land (76:9).

The wrath of God against the arrogance of humanity would bring him praise (76:10). People would see true greatness in the Lord in His wrath. They would also see His compassion and grace toward the humble. They would see His power over the proud and arrogant oppressors. They would worship Him as the great and majestic God. Proud and arrogant people make their boasts but they are

humbled by the God of Israel. Nations and kingdoms make their boast but they must all realise that they are nothing without God. He alone is great and majestic and worthy to be praised.

Notice in Psalm 76:10 that not only does God's judgement against the arrogance of humanity bring Him praise but the survivors of His wrath are restrained. These individuals may have boasted in themselves but when they were disciplined by the Lord they saw how weak they really were. Now they restrained themselves when it came to boasting in their own strength and wisdom. According to Psalm 76:12 God breaks the spirit of proud rulers and is feared by the kings of the earth who realise that their power comes from Him alone.

The Psalmist concluded by challenging his reader to make and fulfil their vows to the Lord. These are vows of sacrifice and obedience. He challenged the neighbouring lands to bring their gifts to the one God who was to be feared above all others. What else can our response be to such a holy and awesome God? All we can do is to lay ourselves down at His feet in humble service and offering.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever boasted of your own achievements? What do these Psalms say to this?
- What evidence is there of the Lord's "nearness" in your life?
- The Lord is a great Judge. What does this mean for you personally?
- What is majesty? How is the Lord majestic?
- Why is God a God to be feared?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His "nearness" and the way He has demonstrated that nearness to you personally.
- Ask the Lord to strip away any pride in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live each day realising that you will stand before a holy God to give account of your life.
- Thank the Lord that though He is a God to be feared, in the Lord Jesus, we can stand boldly before Him. Thank Him for this tender compassion and grace.

71

I CRIED OUT

Read Psalm 77:1-20

It is hard to read the Psalms and not see the real life struggles of ordinary people. Life is full of difficulties. At the same time, however, the believer can always turn to the Lord in those times for comfort and strength.

In Psalm 77 the Psalmist found himself in trouble. In his trouble he turned his attention to the Lord God for help. In his distress he sought the Lord. This was true especially at night when he stretched out his hands to God. Likely the Psalmist is not able to sleep because of the cares and concerns on his mind. His soul refused to be comforted. At this time, he would cry out to God seeking His help. Notice in verse 3 that he groaned and his spirit grew faint because of the trials that surrounded him.

It is particularly interesting to note that it was remembering God that caused his soul to groan and that meditating on God made his spirit grow faint. One would think that remembering God and meditating on Him would have strengthened the Psalmist but it seems to have the

opposite effect in verse 3. Very likely this is because the Lord was silent. As the Psalmist reflected on God and the way He had worked in the hearts and lives of his fathers, his heart grew weary. Why was God not doing the same in his day? Why did he have to suffer? Where was God now? These were very likely the questions that perplexed his spirit and caused him to become weary and faint.

The weariness of the Psalmist was such that his eyes wanted to close but he was not able to sleep. His troubles kept him from sleeping. He came to a point where he was too troubled even to speak and vent his feelings.

During this time of trouble, the Psalmist reflected on the years gone by. He remembered the days when the sleeplessness had given way to songs of praise and thanksgiving. In verses 7-9 the Psalmist reveals to us the questions that were on his mind in this time of trouble.

1. Will the Lord reject forever?
2. Will He never show His favour again?
3. Has His unfailing love vanished forever?
4. Has His promise failed for all time?
5. Has God forgotten to be merciful?
6. Has He in anger withheld His compassion?"

These are difficult questions. Who among us, in our time of distress, has not asked similar questions? We remember the promises of God but they do not seem to be fulfilled. We see nothing but difficulty and trial around us. We know God is a God of mercy and compassion but we are just not seeing this compassion at work. This is the struggle of the Psalmist in this psalm.

What is the response of the Psalmist to his trials and the silence of the Lord? We find the answer to this in verses 10-12.

I Will Appeal (verse 10)

In verse 10 the Psalmist told his readers that in light of his trouble, he would appeal to the "years of the right hand of the Most High." In other words, he would take his case to the Lord God whose right hand had for years worked on behalf of His people. Throughout the years the Lord had been good to His people. The Psalmist longed to experience the goodness of the right hand of the Lord as his ancestors in years gone by had experienced that goodness. He appealed to God for mercy and compassion. He did this because he knew from the history of his people that God was a God who saved and rescued those who loved Him. He appealed to God on the basis of His past work.

I Will Remember (verse 11)

Notice, second, that the Psalmist determined that he would remember the deeds of the Lord and His miracles of long ago. That is, he would put his hope and confidence in the God who had performed miracles and wonders in the lives of his ancestors. He would take courage in this God who never changed. What He did in the past, He could do again. He had no reason to doubt that God would again show compassion and mercy to him even as He had done to his fathers and mothers of long ago. He took great courage in remembering what God had done in the past.

I Will Meditate (verse 12-15)

In verse 12 the Psalmist told his readers that in this time of trouble he would meditate on the works of God and consider all His mighty deeds. In meditating on those ways, he discovered that God's purposes were holy. He realised that there was no god as great as his God (verse 13). His God performed miracles and displayed His power among the people (verse 14). His mighty arm had redeemed His people (verse 15), rescuing them from the hand of the enemy. Meditating on these mighty works was a blessing and encouragement to the Psalmist. It strengthened his faith and gave him deeper confidence in God at this difficult time.

What we need to understand here is that it is very difficult for us sometimes to get our eyes off the problems we are facing long enough to meditate on God's acts of power. In his time of trial, the Psalmist chose to focus on the great things that God had done, not on the problems he was going through. In God there was hope.

Verses 16-20 show us the response of God. The Psalmist told his readers that the waters saw the Lord and they writhed and convulsed. Waters, in Scripture, are often used to speak of affliction (see Psalm 18:16-17; Psalm 32:6). What the Psalmist seems to be saying here is that the waters of affliction saw the Lord and were overcome by His power.

In answer to the prayer of His afflicted servant, the clouds of heaven poured down their water and the thunder roared. God's arrows of lightening flashed back and forth in the sky. The thunder of His voice was heard in the whirlwind. The lightening lit up the whole world and the earth quaked. Notice the reference here to the way the Lord led His

people through the Red Sea after delivering them from Egypt (verses 19-20). Like a tender shepherd, the Lord led His people by the hand of Moses and Aaron. He opened up a path through the sea and led His people through. The Psalmist is assured that the God of Moses' day would deliver him as well.

In his difficulty the Psalmist chose to focus on the Lord God and His powerful working in the past. Though he did not see God, he chose to appeal to Him, remember His deeds and meditate on His past acts on behalf of His people. As he does, his faith in God is built up. He concludes the psalm believing that God would deliver him just as He had delivered his fathers. What a comfort it is to know that the God who worked wonderful miracles in the past will again shake heaven and come to our aid.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever been in a struggle where you did not understand what the Lord was doing or where He was? Explain.
- Have you ever found yourself dwelling on a particular problem? What does the Psalmist challenge us to do in Psalm 77?
- Has God changed? Can He rescue you as He did in days gone by?
- Do you believe personally that God can shake heaven and earth for you as He has done for others? What encouragement does this passage give us in this regard?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to reflect on the mighty works of God. Thank the Lord for His power and miraculous deeds.
- Commit your problem to the Lord today. Ask Him to shake heaven and earth and bring the victory you need.
- Ask God to take your eyes away from your problem and set them on His greatness and sovereign care.

A WORD TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Read Psalm 78:1-72

Psalm 78 is a clear example of how a psalm can be used as a teaching tool. This Psalm is in reality a brief history of the children of God up to the time of David. The desire of the Psalmist is to instruct the younger generation in their walk with God. He uses the history of his people to warn them about falling away from the Lord God.

The Psalmist began by challenging his people to listen to the teaching he was going to bring them. He tells them in verse 2 that he is going to use parables to speak of things of old. The idea is that there is a spiritual lesson to be learned but that spiritual lesson is hidden in a poetic form. The truths that the Psalmist was going to convey to his readers were truths that had been heard from their fathers and mothers long ago.

In verse 4, the Psalmist challenged his readers not to hide from their children the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, the

demonstrations of His power or the wonders He had done. We are to proclaim to our children what God has done. Our faith must be passed on to our children. This is the obligation of each parent.

The Psalmist continued in verse 5 by reminding the older generation of how the Lord had decreed statutes and established His law in Israel. He then commanded each generation to teach their children those statutes and laws so that they would know the Lord and His ways.

From verse 8 we see that the Psalmist wanted every generation to learn from the mistakes of the past generation. Israel had proven to be stubborn and rebellious. Their hearts were not loyal to God nor were their spirits faithful to Him. If anything, the former generations were a bad example to the newer generation. The reality of the matter, however, is that sometimes we can learn from bad examples. By sharing their failures with the newer generation, the older generation was warning them not to fall into the same trap. The Psalmist shares the result of the many failures of the past generations to honour God.

As he began the Psalmist reminded his readers about the men of Ephraim who turned back from the enemy on the day of battle even though they were fully armed with bows (verse 9). There is difference of opinion among Bible scholars regarding the meaning of this verse.

Some see a particular conflict in which Ephraim was engaged where the tribe turned back and was defeated. Others see Ephraim as a symbol for the whole nation. Ephraim was the son of Joseph who led Israel in their time of bondage in Egypt. Joshua, who was a mighty warrior and led the children of God in the conquest of the Promised Land, was also a descendant of Ephraim. In this sense Ephraim

did lead the people of God and played an important role to the nation as a whole. It may be that the term "Ephraim" is used to represent the entire nation of Israel.

What we see here is that God's people (whether they be specifically Ephraim or the nation as a whole) were turned back by the enemy. Notice the reason why they were turned back. Verse 10 tells us that they did not keep God's covenant and they refused to live by His law. They also had forgotten what the Lord had done and the wonders He had shown them. Had they remembered what God had done, they would not have lost faith in their time of trouble. Instead, they would have trusted the Lord and allowed Him to lead them to victory.

Notice that the nation of Israel had forgotten how God had worked in the lives of their fathers and mothers in Egypt (verse 12). They had forgotten how He had divided the sea, and led them through to safety. They failed to consider how God guided His children through the wilderness with a cloud by day and a fiery light at night.

As Israel wandered through the desert, God split rocks for them, providing water enough to quench their thirst and the thirst of all their animals. The Psalmist told his readers that God provided water as abundant as the seas for His people as they wandered in the desert (verse 16).

Despite all that God had done for His people, they continued to rebel against Him. They put God to the test by demanding that He give them the food they craved. They lacked faith in God and His ability. After seeing His provision they still said: "Can God spread a table in the desert?" (verse 19). They doubted His provision and care. They had seen God provide all the water they needed but they

doubted that He could provide them with enough food (verse 20).

The Lord saw their lack of faith and what they were saying and He became angry with His people. Fire broke out against Jacob, and God's wrath rose against Israel. Some see reference to Numbers 11:1-3 where God, in His anger, literally destroyed the outskirts of the camp by fire. He did this because they did not believe in Him or trust in His deliverance.

Our disbelief does make God angry. God was angry enough here to destroy part of the camp with fire. How often have we grieved the Lord because we failed to believe and trust in His provision and promises in our time of need?

In spite of their lack of faith and trust, God demonstrated His compassion toward His people in opening the skies and the doors of heaven. He rained down manna for His people to eat (verse 23-24). The people of Israel ate this manna (described here as the bread of angels) for many years. God provided them with all the food they could eat. None of them went hungry. Not only did God provide His people with bread from heaven but He also sent an east and south wind to bring birds as numerous as the sand on the seashore. God's people had more than enough meat to eat. They ate more meat in those days than they needed. They became gluttons and filled themselves.

Again God became angry with them. He rose up against them and put to death the most sturdy men among them (verse 30). God's people did not take this warning to heart but kept sinning. They still did not believe or trust in God.

This cycle of judgement and repentance continued for many years. God's people would turn from Him. God would punish them and in their grief Israel would call out to God. When they were disciplined they remembered that God was their Rock and Redeemer. But their hearts were not in tune with Him. They made an outward show of faith and would flatter God with their mouths but their hearts were not loyal to Him nor were they faithful to His covenant (verse 37).

God continued to be merciful to His children. He forgave them of their sins and shortcomings. Repeatedly the Lord had to restrain His anger. He held back His full wrath. God remembered that His people were mere flesh and blood. The Psalmist compared them to a passing breeze that did not return. In an instant their lives would be over.

Again and again in the wilderness Israel rebelled against God. They continually put Him to the test. They forgot His wonderful power and how He had rescued them from the hands of those who had oppressed them. God delivered His people from the hands of their Egyptian oppressors with miraculous signs and wonders (verse 43). In those days, God turned rivers to blood so that the Egyptians could not drink from their streams. He sent swarms of flies that devoured them. Frogs devastated their land. He gave their crops to grasshoppers and the locusts. Hail destroyed their vines, sleet killed their fig trees. Their cattle were given over to the hail and the lightning. In His intense wrath against Egypt, God sent a devouring angel to kill the firstborn of every Egyptian family.

The result of all these judgements was that the people of God were set free from their bondage in Egypt. God led them like sheep in the desert. He cared for them and provided for their every need. God's people had no reason to

be afraid. Their enemies were devoured in the sea when God closed the waters on them. Egypt's power was broken at the hand of God.

God brought His people to the border of the Promised Land. Through men like Joshua, God drove out the nations and gave the land to Israel as their inheritance.

Again God's people put God to the test. In this new land they did not keep His statutes and laws. They were disloyal and faithless like their parents. The Psalmist compared them to an unreliable bow. Every time an arrow is shot from such a bow it misses its mark. Such a bow cannot be trusted. It is useless to the marksman.

In the land God had given them, Israel set up religious sites devoted to other gods. God heard their prayers to other gods and was angry. Verse 59 tells us that God was so angry with these people that He rejected them completely. We should not see here that God had rejected the nation of Israel but, rather, those particular people who had turned to idols and other gods. God turned away from the tabernacle that had been set up in Shiloh. He chose to take His presence from that tabernacle. As for the Ark of the Covenant, it was sent into captivity (1 Samuel 5:1). Instead of defeating their enemies, God strengthened Israel's enemies against them. He gave His people over to the sword. Fire consumed their young men and the wedding song of the young maiden was no longer heard in the land. Even the priests suffered for abandoning the Lord. Verse 64 tells us that they were put to the sword but their widows could not weep. This may be because their husbands had deserved their judgement. For a time, the anger of the Lord burned intensely against His people.

Verse 65 tells us that in time the Lord awoke from His sleep. The term sleep here seems to imply that the Lord God turned His eyes from His people and stopped His work in their midst. This period of inactivity, however, did not last forever. In time the Lord opened His eyes to the plight of His people again. He again rose up and pushed Israel's enemies back, putting them to shame.

In that day the Lord chose to do something special in the tribe of Judah. He chose to use their descendants to build a great sanctuary in Jerusalem. He chose a shepherd by the name of David and called him to be king over His people. He was to shepherd them in their time of need. David led Israel with integrity of heart and skilful hands. He turned his heart over to the Lord God and remembered the wonderful deeds He had done in the past. David led his people back to God and to His purposes for their lives. He prospered because God was with him.

The challenge of this Psalm was for God's people to understand their sinfulness and return to God. The Psalmist particularly challenged the younger generation to learn from the mistakes and failures of their parents. He challenged his readers to examine the history of the nation and see the patience of God with a rebellious nation. They were also to see God's judgement because of disobedience. It was not too late to return to God. He would still be patient and forgiving to those who returned to Him.

For Consideration:

- Take a look at your family history. What lessons do you need to learn from the failures and successes of your parents?
- What have you personally learned from past failures and victories? How does this affect how you face problems today?
- What do we learn in this psalm about the patience of God with His people?
- What do we learn here about the judgement of God and the removal of His blessings from those who persist in disobedience?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to learn from the failures and victories of others. Ask Him to open your eyes personally to what He has been teaching you in this regard.
- Thank the Lord for the many times He has been patient with you and not given you the judgement you deserved.
- Thank the Lord that He is your provider and strength. Ask Him to give you strength to step out in the lessons He has taught you.
- Take a moment to pray that the Lord would reveal Himself to the next generation so that His name would be glorified in their midst.

REVIVE US

Read Psalm 79:1-80:19

God's people are suffering. The enemy has invaded their land and left them wondering where the Lord was in their trial. These foreigners defiled the temple of God. They reduced Jerusalem to rubble (79:1). Psalm 79:2 tells us that the enemies had given the dead bodies of the servants of God to the birds for food and the flesh of the saints to the beasts of the earth. Jerusalem was filled with blood and there was no one to bury the dead. The bodies of God's children lay in the city being eaten by the birds of the air and the animals of the field.

Beyond all the physical death and devastation, God's people were objects of reproach to the nations around them (79:4). They were mocked and ridiculed. They had no more witness to their neighbours. They were powerless before their enemy. What a terrible picture we see here of the people of God. We need to realise that it is quite possible for that picture to be repeated in our day. In this case the reason for the devastation was disobedience to the Lord God. God's people had driven the presence of the

Lord from their midst by disobedience and disregard for His holy Word.

The question goes out in Psalm 79:5:

How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?

We learn two things from this verse. First, God was angry with His children. Second, God's jealousy burned like fire. The picture is of a husband being roused to holy jealousy because of His wife's unfaithfulness. Israel had turned to other gods and bowed her knee to them. God would not stand by and watch this happen. He loved His people too much to share them with anyone else. His anger is justified. God's people had broken their covenant with Him.

Having emphasised the fault of the nation of Israel, the Psalmist asked God to pour out His wrath on the nations that did not acknowledge Him and did not call on His name. In saying this, the Psalmist is distinguishing the nation of Israel from the other nations. It is true that at this moment the people of God were disobedient and living in rebellion against God but they were still His chosen people. Israel was not like the other nations. They had a long history with the Lord. The Psalmist pleads with God on the basis of this relationship to break the power of the enemy over them.

While we may be disobedient children, we are still children. God does not forget His people. The Psalmist knew that God had chosen them as a nation and would always have a special place in His heart for them.

As a chosen people, Israel was being devoured. Their homeland was destroyed. The Psalmist pleaded with God not to hold the sins of their forefathers against them. As a people, they had a long history of disobedience. In Psalm 79:8 the Psalmist pleads with God, in His mercy, to come quickly to them for their need was desperate.

I find it wonderful in this passage to see the Psalmist crying out to God. What is so special about this passage is that it is the cry of the guilty for mercy. The Psalmist does not doubt that the nation deserved the wrath of God. He still calls out to God for mercy, however. This gives hope to the wanderer. No matter how far we have wandered from the Lord God, we can still come back to him and plead with Him for mercy.

Notice in Psalm 79:9 that the Psalmist cried out for help not only for the sake of the nation but also for the glory of the Lord God. God's glory was at stake. His people were devastated and their land was in ruins. What would be the response of the nations to such a God? Surely they would mock the God of Israel. They would see Him as a powerless God. They would lift themselves up above Him. They would say about Israel: "Where is their God?" (Psalm 79:10).

The Psalmist pleads with God to avenge the deaths of His servants at the hands of these evil nations. He prayed that the Lord God would open His ears to the groans of the prisoners and preserve the lives of those who were condemned by the nations to die (Psalm 79:11). The Psalmist is so bold as to ask that God would repay seven times the reproach that the nations had hurled at His people. The number 7 represents completeness or perfection in the Bible. The idea here is that the revenge of God would be complete.

The Psalmist ends the 79th psalm by telling God that when His people were avenged and the enemy driven back, then they would praise Him from generation to generation. They would recount the story of how He had delivered them from the enemy.

In Psalm 80:1 the Psalmist cried out to God as the Shepherd of Israel. As a Shepherd, the Lord God cared for His people and watched over them. As Shepherd, however, He sat enthroned between the cherubim. This is a reference to the Ark of the Covenant where God revealed His presence between the two carved cherubim on the lid of the box. It reminded the people that their Shepherd was also their God. The Psalmist pleads with God to shine forth and to make His glory known in their midst.

This combination of Shepherd and holy God is a very difficult one to grasp. As a holy God He is separate from us and all that is sinful in us. As a shepherd, however, God cares for and provides for all the needs of His people. He is holy and yet compassionate, perfect and yet intimate.

In Psalm 80:2 the psalmist asks God to awaken His might. It seemed to him that for a long time, the strength of the Lord had been asleep. Israel was not seeing evidence of His strength and power in their midst. In Psalm 79 we saw how the enemy had devastated the land and had left the people of God weary and dying. The Psalmist pleaded with God to awaken His strength, restore, save and make His face shine on them (80:2-3).

Notice that the same question is asked in Psalm 80:4 as was asked in Psalm 79:4:

O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smoulder against the prayers of your people?

God appeared to be silent at the moment. The psalmist longs to see Him move again in power. He pleads with God to awake from sleep and open His eyes to the trials of His children.

Notice in Psalm 80:5-6 the condition that God's people found themselves in. God had fed them with the bread of tears. They "drank tears by the bowlful." Their suffering was intense. Their pain was very real. God had made His people to be a source of contention to their neighbours. These neighbours mocked and ridiculed the people of God.

The Psalmist pleads with God to restore His people and to make His face shine on them again so that they could be saved (80:7). He reminded the Lord how He had brought them out of Egypt. He drove out the nations in the land He had promised them and planted them as a vine. As an expert gardener, the Lord cleared the ground and cared for that vine. Under His merciful care, the vine took root and filled the land He had promised to their fathers. The nation of Israel (the vine) became prosperous. The vine grew and covered the mountains with its shade and the mighty cedars with their branches. God's people prospered under the blessings of the Lord their God. They sent their boughs to the Mediterranean Sea and as far as the Euphrates River.

Though they had known such wonderful prosperity, things were quick to change. The walls surrounding that vine were broken down; and those who passed by helped themselves to their grapes. Israel was plundered. Wild boars ravaged the vine and the creatures of the field fed on it. In their time of need, Israel cried out to the Lord in Psalm 80:14-15:

Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself.

The cry is desperate but hopeful. The Psalmist realised that Israel could not save herself. She needed the Lord. Though she deserved to be punished, the Psalmist reminded God of the special relationship He had with Israel. He had planted them and cared for them. Now, however, the vine He had planted had been cut down and burned with fire (Psalm 80:16).

The Psalmist knew that this terrible discipline was from the hand of the Lord. In Psalm 80: 16 he said: "at your rebuke your people perish." It was true that the enemy had burned down the city of Jerusalem. It was true that the enemy had slaughtered and captured God's people but the Psalmist is able to look beyond these facts and realised that ultimately it was God who had allowed these "bad" things to happen. Even their struggles were ordained by God to accomplish His purpose in their lives.

The Psalm concludes in Psalm 80:17-19 with the prayer of the Psalmist for the hand of the Lord to rest on them as a people. Notice in particular the phrase used in Psalm 80:17:

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand.

The "man at your right hand" refers initially to the people of God who were favoured by God. "The right hand" was the place of favour and blessing. Israel sat at the right hand of God because God favoured her as a people. There may also be a prophetic aspect to this verse and the reference to the "man at your right hand." Paul tells us in Romans

8:34 that Christ himself was seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Ultimately it would be through the Lord Jesus that favour would be restored between God and His people.

In Psalm 80:17-18 the Psalmist prayed that the hand of God would rest on His people so that they would no longer turn away from Him. God alone can keep us. His hand alone can save us from the power of the enemy. He alone is able to keep us from falling. The prayer of the Psalmist is that the Lord would keep his people from falling. He understood how frail they were. He knew how easy it would be for his people surrender to temptation. Only the hand of God could restore them and keep them faithful.

The writer of this psalm cries out to the Lord God for revival in his nation. He saw a people who had wandered from the truth and were now powerless against their enemy. They had often fallen short of the standard God had set for them. They needed to be revived so that they would again call on the name of the Lord. They needed to be restored so that the face of the Lord could shine on them again. That prayer is as real today as it was in the day when it was written. We too have fallen short and need to see this revival and restoration in our land.

For Consideration:

- How were God's people suffering at the hands of the enemy? How does this compare to the church today?
- What do you learn in these psalms about the jealousy of the Lord? What encouragement and warning do you take from this?

- Will God abandon His children forever? On what basis does the Psalmist call out to God in these Psalms? Do His people deserve God's favour?
- What do we learn about God's hand in the "bad" as well as the good?
- What do we learn about our need of the Lord if we are to be faithful to God and our walk with him?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is Lord of the "bad times" as well as Lord of the good times.
- Thank the Lord that He has accepted us as His children. Thank Him that we can always come to Him on this basis.
- Thank the Lord for the way He has cared for you in your time of need. Thank Him for how He has kept you from falling deeply into sin.
- Ask the Lord to restore and revive His people so that they can become everything He wants them to become.

IF YOU LISTEN

Read Psalm 81:1-16

Psalm 81 begins on a very positive note. It begins with a call to the people of God to sing for joy to God their strength. Notice also the call of the Psalmist to his people to shout aloud to the God of Jacob! Quiet worship is honourable and good but for the Psalmist this was not a time for quiet. He calls for loud shouting. This was a time for all to hear the praises of the Lord God of Israel.

Notice the connection between music and worship in verses 2-3. The Psalmist called for the music to begin. God's people were to strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre and sound the ram's horn at the New Moon and at the full moon on the day of the Feast. The New Moon Festival was celebrated at each new moon and required special sacrifices accompanied with the sound of the ram's horn or trumpet (see Numbers 28:11-15; Numbers 10:10).

Notice also in verse 3 the reference to the Feast when the moon was full. The Tyndale Bible Dictionary, speaking

about the festivals observed during the full moon, says the following:

The ancient Hebrew calendar was lunar, the months beginning with the new moon, marked by special rituals. The two great festivals, Passover and Tabernacles began in midmonth when the moon was full." ¹

The reference to the "Feast" when the moon was full is likely, then, a reference to either the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles.

Notice that worship and the sounding of these instruments was by command of God (verse 4). It was God who decreed that musical instruments be used in the worship of His name.

Verse 5 tells us that this command to celebrate the Passover was established as a statute for Joseph "when he went out against Egypt, where we heard a language we did not understand." This verse can be quite difficult to understand. It may be best to see Joseph as a symbol of the people of God. Joseph was a leader of his people in Egypt. When he died, the children of Israel were oppressed by the Egyptians whose language they did not understand. God heard their cry for help and set them free from their captivity in Egypt. On that day they took the body of Joseph and left the land of Egypt.

¹ "Moon": Comfort, Philip W., Elwell, Walter A, (editors), Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Electronic Edition, 2001: Tyndale House Publishers

That occasion was celebrated each year in the Passover. This celebration was a joyous celebration. It marked the time that God had removed the "burden from their shoulders," and set their hands free from the basket (verse 6). In Egypt, God's people had been reduced to slavery. They were forced to carry heavy burdens on their shoulders. They filled their baskets with brick used in Pharaoh's construction projects. God set them free from these burdens.

In their distress God's people called out to Him and He answered them out of a thunder cloud (verse 7). We read in Exodus 9:23-25:

When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.

It was through that thunder cloud filled with hail that God answered the prayers of His people for deliverance. God devastated the land of Egypt and set His people free. This was a great cause to celebrate.

As God's people left Egypt, God put them to the test to see if their worship was sincere. Verse 7 tells us that God tested His people at the waters of Meribah. This is a reference to Exodus 17:1-7. Here the people of God came out into the desert. In the desert, they were thirsty and grumbled against Moses and the situation they found themselves in. In doing so they proved that they really did not trust God and His provision for them.

God gave His commandments through Moses as His people wandered in the wilderness. In those commandments

He told them that they were not to serve or bow down to any other god. God's people did not listen to Him. Instead, they chose to worship foreign gods. Their worship and praise was given to another.

On another occasion the Lord told His people to open their mouths and He would fill them (see verse 10). He promised to provide them with all the food they needed as they wandered through the wilderness. Verse 11 tells us, however, that His people would not listen to Him or submit to Him. They could not find it in their heart to trust His provision. This resulted in God giving His people over to their stubborn ways to "follow their own devices" (verse 12).

This was not God's heart for His people. God wanted them to be a joyous and celebrating people. He wanted to fill them with joy in worship and celebration of His goodness. He wanted to give them reason to celebrate His name. They had chosen, however, to give that worship to another.

In verse 13 the psalmist expressed the heart of the Lord for His wandering people.

If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes!

God longed to be gracious to His people. He longed to subdue those who were mistreating them and turn their enemies away. He promised in verse 15 that those who hated the Lord would cringe and be punished forever.

In an instant God would return to His children if they would listen to Him and follow His ways. Their disobedience

destroyed their worship of God. Their distrust stood between them and the experience of God's wonderful work on their behalf. If only they would return to Him they could feast on the finest wheat and be satisfied with honey from a rock. Wonderful blessing awaited God's people if they would only return to Him.

The Psalmist started this Psalm with a call for God's people to worship Him with music and celebration. As the Psalm progresses, we find that the people of God were not experiencing this wonderful worship. They were worshipping other gods. They turned from the true God and His blessings. The heart of the Lord God is for a worshipping people who will listen to Him and obey His word. He delights to give such a people great cause to worship and celebrate His goodness.

Maybe today you too have been distracted by other gods. The Lord waits patiently with His offer of renewal and restoration. If you will turn again to Him, He will fill you with reason to celebrate and glorify His great name.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about God's desire for joyous worship and praise to His name?
- Why should worship be joyous?
- This Psalm tells us that God is looking for a celebrating and worshipping people. What stands in the way of this today?
- What is the heart of God for fullness and blessing in His people's lives? Are you personally experiencing this in your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to make you a worshipping person.
- Thank the Lord for the many reasons He has given you to worship and celebrate His name.
- Ask the Lord to fill you even more. Ask Him for even greater blessings in your ministry.
- Ask the Lord to reveal anything that stands in the way of you becoming a greater worshipper.

THE MOST HIGH GOD

Read Psalm 82:1-83:18

We begin in Psalm 82:1 with God presiding in a great assembly. The context suggests a court room setting. God is seated as the judge. In his midst are smaller gods. The context again lets us know that these smaller gods are leaders and judges. They are earthly leaders who have been given authority in this world.

As these rulers stand in the presence of the Lord God the question is asked: "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?" (Psalm 82:2) The question appears to be asked by God to the rulers of the day. As earthly rulers they had been unfaithful to the Lord God in their administration of justice. They had defended the cause of the unjust and shown partiality to the wicked. God holds them accountable for this injustice.

In Psalm 82:3-4 the challenge goes out to the rulers of that day to defend the cause of the weak and fatherless and maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. They were to rescue the weak and needy from the hand of the wicked.

The earthly rulers of the day should have been doing this but they were not.

In Psalm 82:5 the Psalmist speaks about these earthly rulers.

They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness.

How could they possibly lead others to the light when they knew nothing about that light? They did not practice truth and justice themselves so they could not possibly lead others on the path of truth and justice.

"All the foundations of the earth are shaken," the Psalmist said in Psalm 82:5. The foundations of truth and righteousness, honesty and goodness were all shaken. All the principles that this earth was founded on were being ignored by these earthly leaders. They did what was right in their own eyes but they knew nothing about truth and justice.

These leaders were seen as gods. They had authority and power on this earth. In reality, however, they were mere men who would fall like every other evil ruler had before them (82:7). They would be held accountable by God and He would judge them in truth and righteousness.

The Psalmist calls the Lord to judge the earth (82:8). These evil earthly rulers were not living up to their responsibility. There was, however, a higher authority that would never be corrupted. The Lord God is the Judge of all judges. He will rise up and defend the cause of righteousness and truth.

In Psalm 83 the call goes out to the Lord God to be silent no longer (83:1). In Psalm 82 we saw that the rulers of this earth were judging unfairly. For a time God did nothing about this. This did not mean, however, that God would not rise up and speak out against this injustice. The Psalmist calls on God to break His silence.

In particular, the Psalmist asked God to see how their enemies were rearing their heads (83:2). They were conspiring against the people of God and plotting against those God loved and cherished. These enemies were saying: "let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (83:4).

These enemies formed an alliance against God and His people. The Edomites, Ishmaelites, Moabites and the Hagarites, as well as the nations of Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre and Assyria joined against the people of God. Notice in Psalm 83:8 how these nations loaned their strength to the descendants of Lot. We understand from Genesis 19:36-38 that the descendants of Lot were the Moabites and the Ammonites:

So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

God's people were struggling. The earthly leaders of the day were unfairly targeting them. Their plans were to destroy them. The Psalmist called out to the Lord God for help. As we saw in Psalm 82, though the earthly "gods" of this world were unjust and unrighteous, there was a higher

authority for the people of God. They called on God to arise from His sleep and judge these evil rulers.

Asaph, the psalmist who wrote this psalm, asked God to do to these enemies what He had done to the Midianites (83:9). This may be a reference to how Gideon, with only three hundred men, defeated the superior army of Midian in Judges 7. Asaph also asked God to do with their enemies what He had done to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon. This story is found in Judges 4. Jabin was a Canaanite king. Sisera was his military commander. They had oppressed the people of God but under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, Sisera's army was routed and pursued to Endor where they were devastated (83:10). Sisera fled on foot and found refuge in a tent where he was killed by a woman named Jael. In the culture of the day Sisera's death, at the hands of a woman, brought shame on him and his army.

In Psalm 83:11 Asaph continued to ask God to make the nobles of their enemies like Oreb and Zeeb and their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna. Oreb and Zeeb were Midian military commanders who were defeated by Gideon (Judges 7:25). Zebah and Zalmunna were kings of Midian who were pursued by Gideon and killed (Judges 8:5-21). These men boasted that they could take the pasture land of God (83:12) but were defeated by a much smaller army.

Asaph prayed that God would make their enemies like tumbleweed and chaff that blew helplessly before the wind. He called on God to consume these foes like a fire consuming the forest and setting the mountains ablaze. He pleaded with God to pursue them like a great tempest and terrify them in the storm of His wrath (83:15). He wanted their faces to be covered with shame for the things they had done to God's people (83:16).

Asaph prayed that the faces of the enemies of God would be covered with shame so that men would seek God. In other words, he wanted to see God avenge His holy name. He wanted to see God rise up and judge evil. Only then would people see that God was greater than these small earthly "gods." He was the Most High God over all the earth, the God of truth and justice.

We cannot fail to see the comparison between the Most High God and the small earthly "gods" of the day. The same comparison can be made today. No matter how powerful our earthly leaders are, they will all be held accountable to the Most High God. We have a God who loves and cherishes us at our side. He is our defence and will judge us with righteousness and fairness.

Asaph's passion for righteousness and truth is evident in this psalm. He cries out to God for justice to prevail. God will answer that request.

For Consideration:

- What encouragement do you take from the fact that the Lord is over all leaders of this world?
- What warning is there for leaders today in these psalms?
- What foundations are being shaken in our day?
- Does the silence of God mean that He will not hold us accountable? Explain. Does His silence mean that He has forgotten us?

For Prayer

- Thank the Lord that He is over all earthly leaders and that all will be held accountable to Him.
- Thank the Lord that though He may be silent for a time He will come to judge.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal anything that He does not find desirable in it.
- Thank the Lord for His love and the assurance you have of His salvation and ultimate victory.

REJOICING IN GOD

Read Psalm 84:1-85:13

In Psalms 84-85 we catch a glimpse of the heart of the Lord for His people to rejoice in Him. In Psalm 84:1 the Psalmist communicates his delight in being in the house of the Lord.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD.

Notice the heart cry of the Psalmist. He loves to be in the dwelling place of God. By "dwelling place" we should understand the temple of God. This was the place where the Lord God chose to reveal His presence to His people. Notice particularly the words the Psalmist used to describe his delight in being in the presence of the Lord. His soul yearned and even fainted for the courts of the Lord. There is strong attraction in the heart of the Psalmist to the courts of the Lord. His passion was almost too much for his body to endure. Also in Psalm 84:2 we see that both the heart and the flesh of the Psalmist cried out for the living God. In

other words, his desire for the Lord God was such that it affected not only his heart but his body as well.

This depth of passion is hard for us to imagine. The Psalmist describes a relationship with the Lord that many of us could only dream of having. He longs for the Lord as a hungry person longed for food or a thirsty person for water. His soul cried out with intense hunger for the Lord his God. We could only imagine what our worship services would be like if every person who came to worship had this depth of passion and longing for God.

In Psalm 84:3 the Psalmist spoke about how the sparrow and the swallow found a home near the altar of the Lord. It is difficult to say why the Psalmist gave this illustration. It may be that as he was in the temple he noticed the way the birds had free access to the altar. It may be that he saw a bird's nest in the temple and found himself wishing that he too could make his home close to the altar so that he would never have to leave.

From this thought about the swallow and the sparrow building their home in the temple, the Psalmist moved to reflect on the servants who lived and worked each day in the temple. In his mind, these individuals had an enviable position. They were able to stay in the presence of the Lord and worship Him all day long.

While there was a very special sense of God's presence in the temple, the Psalmist realised that God was not limited to the temple. In Psalm 84:5 he reminded his readers that all whose strength was in God were blessed no matter where they were. God's strength was available for those who have set their heart on pilgrimage. That is to say, those who have committed themselves to follow the Lord and His ways will know His enabling in their lives. This

pilgrimage would take them through some difficult times in life. Some of them would have to pass through the Valley of Baca (84:6). The word "baca" can be translated by the English word "weeping." This pilgrimage would not always be easy but the strength of the Lord would be available for all who willingly passed through the Valley of Weeping in their pursuit of God and His purposes. God would make that Valley of Baca (weeping) a place of streams and pools (84:6).

The Valley of Baca was a dry and barren place. It is a place of weeping that many of us have had to cross at one time or another. God's presence, however, will be our refreshing in these days. The dry valley will be watered with His wonderful blessings. The presence of the Lord God will be in that Valley and in God's people they would have great cause to rejoice.

Those who undertook to follow the Lord on this pilgrimage would go from strength to strength until they appeared before the Lord God in Zion (84:7). In other words, the strength of the Lord would be with them all of their lives.

The Psalmist asked God to listen to his heart cry and to look on Israel's shield with favour (84:8-9). The "shield" very likely refers to their earthly king who defended them. In the context, the Psalmist has been speaking about the Lord God being their strength. He realised, however, that God could use those He had put in authority to defend them. The Psalmist gives credit to God who was the strength of the king, His "anointed one" (84:9).

The thoughts of the Psalmist return to the house of the Lord where the presence of God was very particularly revealed. "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere," he told the Lord (84:10). The delight he

experienced as he worshipped the Lord in His temple was beyond any other pleasure in life. One day in the presence of the Lord was greater than any amount of time elsewhere.

The Psalmist went on to say in Psalm 84:10 that he would prefer to have the lowliest job in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of the wicked. Being a door keeper in the house of God was far better to him than living in all the luxuries of the wicked.

God was a sun and shield to all who came to Him (84:11). As a sun, He brought light and warmth. As a shield, He was their defence. The God of Israel gave His favour and honour to those who loved Him. He would withhold nothing good from those who walked in His ways. What were the pleasures and treasures of this life compared to the beauty of knowing the Lord and His blessing? Nothing on earth could compare to knowing and serving the Lord. Those who trusted in the Lord were blessed. God would show favour to the lands of those who walked in His ways. He would restore their fortune (85:1). The desire of the Psalmist was that he find his treasure in God, for the things of this world could not compare to what God had to offer.

As a loving and forgiving God, He would forgive the sin of His people (85:2). He would turn His wrath and fierce anger from those who followed Him.

There was so much blessing in knowing God and being in His presence. The Psalmist realised, however, that God's people did not always appreciate the wonderful privilege they had. For this reason, he cried out to God in Psalm 85:4 to restore His people and put aside His anger from them.

Instead of delighting in the Lord God, His people had turned to the world. God was angry with them. In Psalm 85:6 the Psalmist prayed that God would have mercy on His people and revive them so that they could again rejoice in Him. This is probably one of the most powerful definitions of revival in the Scripture. Revival is when God's people learn to rejoice again in God. How many times has our faith become a mechanical or ritual practice of religion? In Psalm 84 we catch a glimpse of the heart of the Psalmist. There we see his heart rejoicing and delighting with intense passion in the Lord God. All too often we have lost the joy of knowing God. Revival brings us back to that place of rejoicing in the Lord God.

Notice also in Psalm 85:7 that the Psalmist prayed that God would show His people His unfailing love and grant them salvation. The love that the Psalmist spoke about here was a love that would willingly forgive His people of their sin. Not only does the Psalmist want his people to learn how to rejoice in God, but he wants them also to experience personally the unfailing love of God and His forgiveness of sin. This is a very personal matter. There are those who speak of the love of God in a very general way. It is one thing for us to say: "God loves the world" and quite another to say: "God particularly loves me." The Psalmist speaks here about this very particular love of God for the individual. He speaks about the assurance of forgiveness of his or her particular sins. This was a love the Psalmist knew personally as he went to the temple to be in God's presence.

In Psalm 85:8 the Psalmist reminded his readers that not only could they know joy and love, but the Lord also promised peace to His people. They could know this peace if they did not return to folly. In other words, they could experience the wonderful peace of the Lord if they did not

return to the foolish things of the world. There needed to be a separation between the believer and the foolishness of the world. The world or the ways of the world will never bring the peace of God. Only in God and in obedience to His ways can we know this peace.

Those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways will know His salvation and deliverance, (Psalm 85:9). That is to say, the Lord would protect and keep those who feared Him. He would allow His glory to dwell in their land. When the glory of God is removed from the land people are left to the natural fruit of their sinful lifestyles. Morals and godly principles are tossed aside in favour of greed, selfishness and lust. Shame and disgrace fill the land when the glory of God is removed. By allowing His glory to remain, God was richly blessing that land. Truth and grace would triumph. Obedience and joy would flourish.

In Psalm 85:10-11 the Psalmist describes the salvation of the Lord in very poetic terms. He describes the salvation of the Lord as the meeting of love and faithfulness. That is to say, the salvation of the Lord is a combination of God's faithfulness and love. In His faithfulness He remembers His promises. In love He reaches out to forgive and show mercy.

Salvation is also described in Psalm 85:10 as when righteousness kisses peace. Salvation, in other words, is the coming together of righteousness and peace. In God's righteousness He had to deal with sin. Righteousness demanded that the penalty be paid. God, in, His righteousness, took that penalty on Himself so that we could have peace with Him through the forgiveness of our sin. Righteousness and peace are united in salvation.

Salvation is also described as faithfulness springing from the earth and righteousness looking down from heaven (85:11). In faithfulness the Lord Jesus came to earth and took on human form. He lived a perfect life, faithful even to death. While salvation springs up from the earth it also looks down in righteousness from the heavens. I like to see the picture of the Father looking down with all His righteous requirements at His son who sprang up from the earth as a human like us. As the Father looks down from heaven He sees that all the righteous requirements of the Law are fulfilled in His Son and is pleased. This is what salvation is all about (the work of the Son and the acceptance of the Father).

The Psalmist concluded in Psalm 85:12-13 by telling his readers that the Lord would give what was good so that their land would yield its harvest. Everything God did was done in perfect righteousness. Righteousness went before Him and prepared the way for His steps (85:13). Before God will move in power the demands of righteousness needed to be met. Only through the forgiveness of sin and the determination of His people to follow Him could these blessings be experienced.

As we examine these two Psalms there seems to be a central theme. God desired a people who would seek Him passionately. His heart cried out for men and women who would follow Him in a spiritual pilgrimage. Those who chose to do so would experience His joy, peace and strength. This pilgrimage would not always be easy. Sometimes they would cross the Valley of Baca (weeping), but even there the wonderful hand of the Lord would guide them. The prayer of the Psalmist was that God would revive His people. He wanted God to restore His people so that they would again be able to see the wonder of their God and rejoice in Him.

He describes for them the wonderful salvation and deliverance that God had in store for them. God would reach down to them in faithfulness and love. He would restore them to a relationship of intimacy and passion again.

For Consideration:

- Describe the passion of the Psalmist for God. Does this describe your passion for Him as well?
- What is the promise of the Lord God to those who set their hearts on walking with Him?
- What is the Valley of Baca? How does God meet us in these places in our lives?
- What does this world have to offer that we cannot have in greater measure in the Lord God?
- Are you completely satisfied in God? Why are we tempted to look to the world?
- What is revival according to Psalm 85:6? Do you need this revival personally?
- How does the Psalmist describe salvation in Psalm 85?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to increase your passion for Him and His presence.
- Take a moment to remember a time when the Lord strengthened you. Thank Him for that strength.
- Ask God to take your eyes away from the world. Ask Him to give you a greater desire for Him and His Word.
- Ask the Lord to revive you personally so that you can rejoice afresh in Him.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful salvation.

HAVE MERCY ON ME

Psalm 86:1-17

Psalm 86 is a Psalm of David. We are not told the circumstances of the psalm but the context clearly speaks of a time in the life of David when his enemies surrounded him. In this Psalm, David cried out to the Lord for help. Notice in this psalm that in this time of trial, David clung to what he knew about God and to the relationship he had with Him.

David begins in verse 1 by confessing his need and recognising that he was poor and needy. We are not told what the circumstances of David's life were at this time. We do know at this time that David realised his enemies were stronger than him and would surely defeat him if God did not come to his aid. He does not trust his own strength. He knows that his enemies are too much for him to handle. He comes to the Lord God, recognising his need.

Notice in verse 2 that David asked the Lord to guard his life because he was devoted to Him. The word "devoted" in the Hebrew language has the sense of being holy,

faithful and godly. In other words, David had committed himself to follow the Lord and His ways. Even in this time of trouble, the commitment of the Psalmist was to follow the Lord and to do His will. This is the reason David can come to the Lord and ask Him to keep him in this time. Had David been living in sin he would not have had the same confidence as he stood before God. He comes before God with a clear conscience.

Notice also in verse 2 that the confidence and trust of David was in the Lord. He did not look to any other god in this time of trouble. His eyes were solely on the Lord God of Israel. His full trust and confidence was in Him. He did not consider his own strength to be sufficient to overcome the enemy. God alone could give him victory. Sometimes we do not experience victory because we are still trusting in other things. David's confidence was in the Lord alone.

Notice how David called out to the Lord all day long (verse 3). He pleaded with Him to have mercy on him. David was not going to stop seeking the Lord until he found the answer he needed. He persevered in prayer because he knew that the Lord God alone could give him victory. He would not let God go until He blessed him and answered his prayer.

David went on to pray that God would give him joy because he lifted up his soul to Him. I like to see a picture of David lifting up his dried up and empty soul to the Lord for filling. Joy had fled from him. His pain and struggle had stripped him of joy and happiness. David lifted up his soul to the Lord and asked Him to fill it with joy. He does not look anywhere else for this joy. He came to the Lord because he knew that God was the source of joy and contentment. He knew that even in his trial, the Lord could give him the joy he needed to face each day.

David did not come to the Lord believing that he was perfect. He knew that he had his failures and faults as well. He came to God, however, with confidence that He was a forgiving and good God who showed love to all who called on Him (verse 5). David was thankful that God was willing to forgive his shortcomings. Had God not been a forgiving God, David would not have been able to come to Him at all.

Notice also that God abounded in love to those who called out to Him (verse 5). In other words, God's loving heart was open to receive all who called out to Him in their trouble. What a comfort this is to us today. God delights to hear the cry of His children and He will open His loving heart to all who will call out to Him.

It was on the basis of God's forgiveness and love that David could call out. In verses 6-7 David told the Lord that he would come to Him in the time of trouble and cry out for mercy. He had every confidence that God would listen to him and answer his prayer.

Notice in verse 8 that David reminded his readers that there was no god like the God of Israel. No one could compare with Him in awesome deeds. The God of Israel had created the earth. He had shown these awesome deeds to David's ancestors. David knew that nothing was impossible to God. He came to Him because there was no other god who could do what the God of Israel could do. Foreign nations recognised the wonder of the God of Israel (verse 9). In the days when the children of Israel were held in bondage in Egypt, God showed His awesome power to Pharaoh. When the Israelites came to Canaan, under the leadership of Joshua, God demonstrated His awesome power in conquering all the nations who opposed His people. All these nations recognised the power of the God of

Israel. The God of Israel alone could do marvellous deeds. He was a God to be worshipped in all the earth.

David's request in verse 11 is that the Lord would teach him His ways so he could walk in His truth. David is humble enough to recognise that he did not understand the ways of the Lord. He was presently going through a trial in his life. He did not know why he had to face that trial or what the purpose and plan of the Lord was for him in that trial. He prayed that God would teach him what he needed to know so that, even in his trial, he could walk in His truth. How easy it is in our trials to say or do things that we would not normally say or do. There are times when the Lord God will allow us to face trials to train us or teach us an important lesson. David's prayer is that the Lord would teach him what he needed to learn in this time of confusion and trouble.

Notice also in verse 11 that David asked that God would give him an undivided heart so that he would fear His name. An undivided heart is a heart that is fully committed to the Lord God alone. In our trials, there may be the temptation to wander from the truth. When Job went through his personal trial, Satan's desire was to have him curse God (see Job 2:9). We can be sure that this is the desire of the enemy for us as well. Satan will do his best to cause us to wander from the Lord and His purpose. David's prayer for an undivided heart is a crucial prayer for all of us in our time of temptation. His prayer is that he would be faithful to the Lord alone and that his eyes would not turn to another.

David's commitment even in this time of trouble was to worship and praise the name of the Lord (see verse 12). Admittedly, David did not know how things were going to turn out. He did not understand what God was doing or

why the enemy had been troubling him. There were many questions on his mind but David committed himself, no matter what happened, to praise the Lord and to honour His name. David was not going to let his troubles come between him and His God. This is a commitment we all need to make.

There were many reasons why David could make this commitment to worship and praise the Lord. The first of those reasons was because God's love for Him was great (verse 13). David had often experienced the love of the Lord God in his life. In particular, David mentions how God had delivered him from the grave. It is unclear if David was thinking here about a particular time in his life or about the fact that though his enemies had troubled him, God had continually rescued him. The fact that David was alive and well was thanks to the wonderful love of the Lord for him each and every day.

The second reason why David could commit himself to praising the Lord was because God was compassionate and gracious (verse 15). Compassion and grace are extended to those who do not deserve it. David knew he had fallen short of God's standard many times but God still forgave him and extended His hand of love toward him. Because of this, David would continue to praise the Lord no matter what happened in his life. At the time David was writing this Psalm, ruthless and arrogant men were attacking him (verse 14). Despite this, David's commitment was to worship a compassionate and gracious God. He would trust Him fully.

David also worshipped the Lord God because He was slow to anger and abounding in love (verse 15). In other words, David knew that there were plenty of times when God

could have become angry with him but instead He forgave him and waited patiently on him.

As he concluded his prayer, David asked the Lord for two things. In verse 16 he asked the Lord to have mercy on him and to give him strength. He did not know how long his trials would remain. He did not understand the purpose or timing of God. What he did know, however, was that if he was to get through this trial he was going to need the strength of the Lord. He pleaded with God, in His mercy, to give him the strength he needed to face the trial for as long as God allowed it.

The second request of David was that God would give him a sign of His goodness (verse 17). He wanted this sign to be of such a nature that his enemies would see it and be put to shame. He wanted his enemies to see that they were not just fighting David but the Lord God of Israel as well. In the midst of his trial, David wanted to see a clear demonstration of the power of the Lord God. This was not so much for him but for his enemies. Notice in verse 17 that David made it clear that God had already helped and comforted him. David did not ask for a sign because of any lack of faith. He had already committed himself to worship and trust the Lord no matter what. The sign he asked for was a sign that would speak to his unbelieving adversaries. He wanted them to see that God was real, so that they would put their trust in Him.

While David did not understand what God was doing in this time of trouble, he committed himself to seeking the Lord with all his heart. He refused to allow the enemy to take him from the truths he had learned from God. He opened his heart to learn from God in his trial and expected to be victorious because God was his strength.

For Consideration:

- Do we need to be perfect before we come to God? What do we learn from David about God and His mercy?
- What is the basis of David's confidence before God in this Psalm?
- What did David do when he found his soul emptied of joy? Have you ever lost your joy?
- Why is it important for us to be open to the teaching of God in our trials?
- Is it wrong to ask God for a sign? Why does David ask for a sign here?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the fact that He is willing to accept us even though we fall short of His standard.
- Do you find your soul emptied of joy? Lift up your soul to the Lord now and ask Him to fill it again.
- Ask the Lord to teach you through your personal trials.
- Ask God to strengthen you in your resolve to worship and praise Him no matter what happens in your life.

THE CITY OF GOD

Read Psalm 87:1-7

Psalm 87 is somewhat difficult to understand. In part the reason is cultural. To understand this Psalm one needs to examine it from the cultural perspective of the Israelite. It is written about the city of Jerusalem and expresses the heart of God for the city and its inhabitants. There is also a prophetic element to this Psalm that speaks of the purpose of God for His people.

The Psalm begins with a statement about the Lord's commitment to the city of Jerusalem and by extension to His people. The Psalmist declared in verse 1 that the Lord God had set His foundation on the holy mountain.

Throughout their history, God's people had wandered from one place to another. They had no land to claim as their own. They lived for four hundred years in the land of Egypt. When they were set free from the bondage of Egypt they wandered in the wilderness for a period of forty years. Under Joshua they conquered the land of Canaan and established a presence in the land. It was not until the time of

Solomon, however, that a temple would be built in Jerusalem. In a very special way the Lord God chose to reveal His presence in that temple.

The psalmist reflects on how God had chosen to dwell in that temple in Jerusalem. To the psalmist this was a wonderful thought. God was pleased to dwell with His people and to reveal Himself to the world from the city of Jerusalem. It was indeed tremendous to know this God and to experience His favour. In a similar way we as believers in our day can stand in awe of the fact that the Lord God should choose to place His holy presence in the lives of His children. What a beautiful thing it is to know the presence of God in our lives and hearts. God has chosen to set His foundation in us.

The thing we need to understand about a foundation is that it is permanent. It is easy to pull up the pegs of a tent and leave. A building set on a foundation, however, is there to stay. This may be in part what the Psalmist wants to communicate to us by the use of the word foundation. If God has set His foundation on His holy mountain, we can be sure that His intention is to stay. The same is true for the presence of the Lord in the hearts and lives of each of His children. When He sets up His foundation in us He intends to stay.

The Psalmist continues in verse 2 by telling his readers that the Lord loved the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of Jacob. The reference to Jacob is symbolic of Israel as a whole. What the Psalmist appears to be saying is that God had particularly favoured the city of Jerusalem with His presence and blessing. He chose this city over and above all the other towns and villages of Israel to reveal His presence.

Why should God choose to reveal Himself to this city in a special way? There is no answer given. God has often, in the history of His dealings with humanity, chosen to reveal Himself in special ways through chosen people. There are men and women of faith who seem to stand out in the history of the Christian church. Why should God save me and reveal Himself to me in a special way when my neighbour remains in the darkness of sin? We will never fully understand the mind of God and His ways. Suffice it to say that God does choose to reveal Himself in special ways at certain times and in certain individuals. Jerusalem was particularly favoured by God. It stood out above all other cities and towns as the city where God had chosen to make His presence known.

Because God had chosen to reveal His presence in Jerusalem, glorious things were said about it as a city. This should be the case for each of us as believers in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells. Men and women everywhere should see the evidence of the power of God in us and stand in awe. When the Holy Spirit came on the early church in the book of Acts, the people in the community took notice. They saw a difference in the lives of the believers. They were amazed at what they saw. The Psalmist told his readers that glorious things were said about the city of Jerusalem because God had chosen to reveal His presence in that city. Do people say glorious things about us because they see the presence of the Spirit of God in us?

In verse 4 the Psalmist speaks of Rahab, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Cush as nations that acknowledged God. The reference to Rahab is likely a reference to Egypt. Isaiah the prophet called Egypt, "Rahab" in Isaiah 30:7:

Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.

What is significant about this verse is that it points to a time when these nations would acknowledge God and God would say of them that they were born in Zion. To be born in Zion meant these nations were part of the chosen people of God. Because they acknowledged God and were accepted as citizens of Israel they would be blessed like all His children.

Could it be that what these people saw in Jerusalem was so awesome that they had to become part of it themselves? We can only hope and pray that our lives would have such an impact on those around us who do not yet know the Lord God.

So great would be the impact of the blessing of God on the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants that people could distinguish those who were born in Zion from everyone else (verse 5). The unbeliever would be able to see the evidence of God and His blessing on those who belonged to Him. The nature of the salvation of God is such that the unbeliever will notice that difference.

In verse 6 the Psalmist told his readers that the Lord wrote the names of His people in His register. Beside the name of those who belonged to him was recorded: "This one was born in Zion." In a very similar way, those who are born again into the family of God are "born in Zion." To be born in Zion is to be born into the spiritual family of God and to be children of God and inheritors of His blessing. How important it is for each of us to know that we have recorded beside our name in the book of life in heaven: "This one was born in Zion." Until we have been born in Zion, we

have no hope of eternal life. May God give us all the assurance of this wonderful salvation.

Notice as the Psalmist concluded his Psalm in verse 7 he prophesied of a time when those who were born in Zion would sing a song. The words of that song would be "All my foundations are in you." A foundation is something we can build our house on. It is solid and lasting. What these individuals are saying is that all their security was in the Lord God and His purposes. Their lives were built on the Lord as a sure foundation. Anything of eternal and lasting value came from the Lord.

God had chosen to reveal Himself to His people. Because they were blessed by the Lord, His people reflected His glory. Others could look on them and see the difference. So great and attractive was this blessing of God that the unbelieving nations would desire it for themselves. They would come to the Lord God of Israel and acknowledge Him as their God as well.

For Consideration:

- God set His foundation in Zion. What does this mean? What significance is there in the word "foundation"? What encouragement does this give us today?
- Do people see the difference the Lord God has made in your life? Explain.
- What does it mean to be "born in Zion"? Are you sure that you are "born in Zion"? How do you know?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He chose to reveal Himself in you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to show the difference He made in your life to those around you.
- Ask the Lord to give you the assurance that you have been "born in Zion."
- Take a moment to pray for an unbelieving friend or loved one that they would see the glorious difference the Lord God makes and come to Him.

THE GOD WHO SAVES ME

Read Psalm 88:1-18

Psalm 88 is a difficult Psalm to read. It is, however, the cry of many a believer. The Psalm is an honest expression of confusion in the midst of trial. It is an attempt to understand the mind of God and His purposes in a world of sin and evil.

As the Psalmist begins in verse 1, he gives us the one sign of hope we have in this Psalm. Notice how he speaks of God as the one who saved him. Deep down in his heart the Psalmist knows that God will save him. This knowledge, however, does not take away his confusion in a time of trials and struggles. While the Psalmist knows that the Lord God is his salvation, notice that this salvation is not evident at the time of writing. The Psalmist cries out day and night to the Lord. He perseveres in his prayer although the answer seems to delay in coming. He pleads with God in verse 2 to listen to his consistent cries for help.

There is nowhere else the Psalmist can turn in his time of need. God alone is his only hope. Though He delayed in answering, the Psalmist does not lose hope in Him.

Notice the struggle in verse 3. The psalmist told the Lord that his soul was full of trouble. He was afraid of losing his life. He told the Lord that his life was drawing near the grave. From verse 4 we see how those around him thought of him. He was counted among those who went down to the pit and like a man without any strength. In other words, even his friends and acquaintances saw him as a man ready to die with no hope of ever recovering. The picture is one of despair.

The psalmist felt that God had abandoned him in his suffering and sorrow. In verse 5 he told his readers that he was set apart like those who were dead and cut off from the care of the Lord. The Lord did not seem to listen to him in his suffering. Though he cried day and night, it seemed that the Lord was far away. What hope was there if even the Lord seemed to have forgotten him?

In verse 6 the psalmist goes even further. He told his readers that God had put him in the lowest pit and the darkest depth. In other words, God had cast him aside. More than this, however, God had placed him in the deepest and darkest pit possible. The Psalmist could not see things as being any worse than they were at that time.

The wrath of God was on the Psalmist. It was a heavy burden to bear. He was overwhelmed by the waves of God's anger. The picture is of a man drowning in the sea. The waves seem to continually beat him and drain him of his strength and desire to live. This is how the Psalmist felt God was treating him.

In verse 8 the Psalmist spoke about the friends he used to have. He told his readers that God took all his closest friends from him and left him alone in life. His pain and suffering was so great that even his friends turned from him repulsed at what they saw. There was nothing the Psalmist could do to change his circumstances. He felt like he was imprisoned in pain and suffering with no way of escape.

Despite the obvious signs of despair, the Psalmist did not stop crying out to the Lord. He felt like God had locked him up in this prison of grief and suffering but he also knew that God alone had the key to open that door and set him free. In verse 9 the Psalmist told his readers that his eyes were dim with grief but he continued to call out to the Lord each day. He daily spread out his hands to the Lord in hope of receiving an answer to his requests.

The reality of the matter is that persevering under this type of circumstance is very difficult. We have to admire that Psalmist who, under such terrible trials continued to plead with God for deliverance. He did not turn his eyes from God. Though he believed God had forgotten him, he continued to cry out to Him for help. How many people have turned their back on the Lord in lesser circumstances? Have you cried out to the Lord and not seen an answer? Don't lose hope. Keep persevering like this Psalmist.

The Psalmist expressed his confusion in verse 10. "Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you?" he asked. He didn't understand why God would allow him to die in suffering and grief. He knew God to be a God of wonders and miraculous deeds. Those deeds were wasted on the dead. The dead could not rise up and praise the Lord. Only the living could praise

the Lord. Why didn't God set him free in a miraculous way so that he could rise up and praise His name?

He continued in verse 11: "Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in destruction?" Again, notice that the Psalmist recognised that God was a God of love and faithfulness. That love and faithfulness is not felt by the dead. Only the living can express gratitude to God for His love. God's wonders are not known in the place of the dead nor are his "righteous" deeds recognised in the place where all is forgotten and empty (verse 12). Notice the Psalmist recognised God as a God of righteous deeds.

The truth the Psalmist knew about God continued to give him hope in a time of confusion. In times when we do not see the hand of the Lord at work we need to remain faithful to the truth we know about Him. The fact that God does not immediately answer our prayers does not change who He is. The faith of the Psalmist is being stretched at this point in his life. Notice, however, again in verse 13 that he continued to cry for help. Morning and evening his prayers came before God. He does not give up seeking God's favour and blessing.

The pain and suffering of the Psalmist was not a short term thing. Notice in verse 15 that from his youth he had been afflicted and close to death. From as far back as he could remember he had suffered God's terrors. He had been brought to the place of despair. He could not understand why God had rejected him and hid His face from him (verse 14). This makes his perseverance in prayer even more admirable. Who among us would persevere for this time in prayer?

God's wrath had swept over him and His terrors destroyed him. He was like a drowning man in a flood. He was

engulfed by the wrath of God day after day and year after year. All his friends abandoned him and there was no help or support in them. The only friend he had now was darkness and death. Death alone could relieve him of his pain and suffering.

This psalm is the helpless cry of a man in despair. It is, however, also the cry of a man who will not give up on God. It is the cry of a man who could not understand the ways of God but still kept looking to Him for relief. It is the testimony of a man of great perseverance and faith in a circumstance where everything seemed to be hopeless. It is a powerful lesson for each of us to trust in the Lord no matter what happens.

For Consideration:

- What truths about God does the Psalmist cling to in his Psalm? What does this teach us about dealing with our pain and suffering?
- What does the Psalmist teach us about perseverance in prayer and our walk with God?
- Is it really possible for us to fully understand the mind and the ways of God?
- Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation to the Psalmist? What challenge does this passage bring to you today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He never changes and that we can always rely on Him.
- Ask the Lord to give you the perseverance of the Psalmist in your trial today.
- Take a moment to commit your trials to the Lord. Thank Him that He knows what He is doing.
- Commit yourself in prayer to be faithful to the Lord no matter what might happen in your life.

WHERE IS YOUR FORMER LOVE?

Read Psalm 89:1-52

Psalm 89 is a mixture of praise and struggle. The Psalmist praises the Lord for His love and faithfulness but struggles with its seeming absence in his life. Though he does not seem to understand the ways of the Lord, he continues to worship Him.

The Psalmist begins in verse 1 on a note of praise and thanksgiving especially for the love and faithfulness of the Lord God. Notice that he told his readers that he would sing of the Lord's great love forever and make His faithfulness known through all generations. There are two things we need to see here. First, the Psalmist committed himself to sing of the love of the Lord forever. As we will see later in this Psalm, this was not always easy. There would be times in the life of the Psalmist when he did not see clear evidence of the love of the Lord. There would be times when he faced tremendous turmoil. The Psalmist knew, however, that circumstances did not change God and His

love for His people. God's love was unconditional and eternal. Nothing could separate him from that love so he would praise Him for it even in times when it was not evident to him. He worshipped on the basis of truth, not always on experience.

The second matter we need to notice in verse 1 is that the desire of the Psalmist was to declare the faithfulness of the Lord to the next generations. He wanted the next generation to understand what he understood about the faithfulness of the Lord his God. His faith was not for himself alone. He wanted to pass it on.

In verse 2 the Psalmist made it his commitment to declare that the love of the Lord stood firm forever. In other words, there was nothing that could change the love of the Lord God for His people. His love was constant and unchanging. What a wonderful comfort this is for us in our day as well.

Notice also that God established His faithfulness in heaven itself. When something is established in heaven there is nothing on earth that can ever change it. The faithfulness of God was established in heaven. This meant that Israel could rely on it. Nothing would ever keep God from being faithful to His people. The circumstances of life may change and become very difficult. One thing is sure. Because God has determined in heaven to be faithful to His children, nothing on this earth will ever separate us from that love.

This Lord God of heaven made a covenant with David. That is to say, He entered a special relationship with David. He promised to establish his family line forever and make his throne firm throughout all generations. God had a special purpose for David and his family tree. Hidden in

this verse is the promise of a Messiah who would come from the line of David and rule forever as our Sovereign Lord and King. The Lord Jesus was a descendant of David and He has become our king. His reign is forever.

As the Psalmist thought about this wonderful promise of God to David, he broke forth into praise. "The heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones" (verse 5). He realised that heaven itself was left in awe at the wonderful plan of the Lord God for His people and their salvation.

There was no one in the heavens that could compare to the Lord God. He is feared and revered in heaven because He is more awesome than every being that surrounds Him. He is the mighty Lord who promises to be faithful to His creation. He rules over the surging sea (verse 9). When the waves of that surging sea mounted up, He calmed them. Notice in verse 10 how the Lord crushed Rahab. The reference to Rahab is a reference to some great monster of the ocean. It may also be a reference to the nation of Egypt (see Isaiah 30:7). The Lord was able to defeat this great monster. With His strong arm He scattered His enemies. No one could stand against the Lord God and His purposes. His greatest foes would be scattered.

The psalmist speaks in this psalm about a God who owns the heavens and the earth. He is the founder of the world and all that is in it. He created everything we see around us. Without Him we would not exist. We owe everything to Him. In verse 12 the psalmist tells us that God created the north and the south. Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon are pictured as singing for joy at the name of the Lord God.

In verse 13 the psalmist speaks of the arm of the Lord. That arm was "endued with power." His hand was strong

and His right hand exalted. There was no god whose power could match the power of the Lord God

Righteousness and justice were, according to the Psalmist in verse 14, the foundation of God's throne. In other words, God's reign in the earth was based solidly on righteousness and justice. Justice would be provided for all. His reign was a reign of righteousness. God could never be accused of corruption and injustice. All His servants are guaranteed just and righteous treatment. Notice that while God's throne was founded on justice and righteousness, love and faithfulness went before Him. While justice and righteousness may at times require death and severe penalty, love and faithfulness would also be part of the Lord's reign. This love and faithfulness is directed toward His people. What He did was for the good of those who loved Him. Holiness and grace meet in this verse.

Those who learned how to acclaim and worship this wonderful God were a blessed people. They walked in the light of His truth and the knowledge of His presence (verse 15). They rejoiced in His name all day long and delighted in His righteousness.

God is the glory and strength of those who trust Him. It is by His favour that His people were strengthened. The Lord had been the shield of His people for generations. He had protected them and kept them from the hands of the enemy.

The wonderful thing about this awesome God was that He chose to enter a relationship with His people. In verse 19, the Psalmist speaks of a particular time when the Lord God had spoken in a vision to His people. In that vision God told them that He had given strength to a warrior and exalted a young man from among His people. That young

warrior was David (verse 20). God called David to be his servant. He chose to anoint him with oil as king of His people. God promised to keep David and strengthen him in the task to which He had called him (verse 21). No enemy would overcome him and subject him to paying tribute. During his reign, no wicked person would oppress David (verse 22). These were the promises of the Lord God to His servant David and by extension to His people.

God promised to crush all of David's foes and strike down all his enemies (verse 23). God's faithful love would be with David. He would strengthen his horn. The horn represented strength and power. Just as the animal used his horn to defend himself and overpower his enemy, so would David be strengthened by the Lord his God to overcome his enemies

Through the grace and mercy of God, David's hand would be set over the seas and the rivers. In other words, his influence would extend beyond the boundaries of his land. It would be felt beyond the seas and the rivers (verse 26). David would enjoy a special relationship with his God. He would call Him "Father," his "Rock," and his "Saviour." God would not be distant to David but very close and personal. According to verse 27 God would appoint David to be his firstborn child. As a "first born" David would enjoy the special blessing of God on his life. He would be given special privileges and responsibilities as the first born. He would be exalted over all the kings of the earth. We cannot fail to see a reference to the Lord Jesus as the descendant of David who would enjoy special favour as Saviour and King.

God promised to maintain His love for David and his descendants forever. His covenant agreement with His servant David would never fail. God would establish his family

line forever and his throne would last for as long as the heavens endured. In other words, that throne would be an eternal throne. Again this seems to be a clear reference to the Lord Jesus as a descendant of David who would reign forever.

God knew that the earthly descendants of David would not always follow His ways. In verse 30 He reminded David that if his sons did forsake His laws and statutes, violating His decrees and breaking His commandments, then they would be punished. God would punish them with His rod of judgement, but He would never take His love away from them nor would He ever betray His faithfulness to them as a people. God would not violate the covenant He made with David or alter what He had spoken to him. David's line was secure. God would love them and continue to work with them forever. God swore by an oath to David on His own holiness that He would not lie to Him or change what He had agreed to do for His people. David's line would continue forever (verse 36) and his throne would endure like the sun. Clearly the Lord Jesus is today the true King on the throne of David. God has never, nor will He ever forget His people, the descendants of David. Though for a time, we do not see clearly what God is doing among the Israelite people, we can be sure that they are still in His purposes. "They will be established forever like the moon" (verse 37).

All that the Psalmist has said to this point is absolutely true. The reality of the matter, however, was that the Psalmist struggled with what he was seeing around him. He does not doubt the promise of God to His people but circumstances seem to say something different.

In verse 38 the Psalmist said: "But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your

anointed one." God was angry with the descendants of David and was punishing them for their sin. To the Psalmist, it appeared that the Lord had renounced the covenant He had made with David. Enemies had broken through the walls of the city and reduced it to ruins. Those who passed by plundered Israel. As a people, they were scorned and mocked by their neighbours (verse 41). God had exalted the right hand of the enemy so that they conquered Israel. Israel's enemies rejoiced at her defeat. Instead of protecting His people, God turned the edge of the sword against them and refused to support them in battle (verse 43). Israel's splendour was no more. Her throne was cast to the ground (verse 44). Israel's days were cut short and she was covered with shame.

God had hidden His presence from His people. His wrath was burning against them like fire (verse 46). The Psalmist reminded God of how fleeting the life of a human being really was. He questioned why God had allowed them to see such futility in their lives. At that time they were being oppressed and shamed by the neighbouring nations. God seemed distant. What purpose was there to go on living under these conditions? All they had to look forward to was death and the grave (verse 48).

For the Psalmist it was hard to understand how God was being faithful to His covenant promise with David. In verse 49 he cried out: "O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?"

He called on God to remember how His servants were being mocked and scorned by the nations around them (verse 50). As the enemies mocked God's people they also mocked her Lord (verse 51). The psalmist's confusion is great but notice how he concluded his Psalm. In verse 52 he concluded with the words: "Praise be to the LORD

forever! Amen and Amen." The psalmist had committed himself to worship God for His faithful love and declare that to the generations to come. Nothing was going to change that commitment to God. Despite the confusion and the obvious chaos all around him, the psalmist still found it in his heart to praise the Lord.

What we need to understand is that the ways of the Lord are very different from our ways. His timing is not the same as ours. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth, many expected Him to be different. When they saw Him die on the cross they immediately dismissed Him as King. They couldn't imagine that suffering and pain was part of the loving process of God for our salvation. Suffering does not mean that God has rejected us. If anything, it means that He is working all the more in our lives to refine us. Faith stands firm where human reason fails. God's faithful and loving purposes are being worked out in the trials of life. The psalmist did not understand what God was doing or how it fit into the overall purpose of God but he did not stop trusting and believing that God, as a faithful and loving God, would always be true to His people. May God give us faith to worship even in the midst of tremendous obstacles.

For Consideration:

- The Psalmist made a commitment to sing of the love of the Lord God forever. Can you make this commitment today despite the struggle you are facing?
- What are some of the reasons for the Psalmist's worship in this Psalm?
- Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne. What comfort does this give you as

a believer? How does this change how you look at your struggle?

- Does God's love and faithfulness change when our circumstances change? Explain.
- What trial are you going through now? Can you find it in your heart to worship God and trust His promises?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to always sing of His love for you.
- Thank the Lord that His throne is founded on righteousness and justice. Ask Him to make these qualities part of your own life.
- Thank the Lord that though circumstances may change in life, He is always the same.
- Take a moment to praise the Lord. Thank Him for your current trial and ask Him to give you grace to trust Him through that trial.

MAKE US GLAD

Read Psalm 90:1-91:16

Psalms 90 and 91 have a common thread flowing through them. In Psalm 90 the Psalmist expressed his concern about not seeing the power of God at work in the lives of his people. He cried out to the Lord to show that power once again. Psalm 91, on the other hand, speaks very positively of the wonderful power of God that is demonstrated in the lives of those who make the Lord God their refuge and shelter. We will examine both of these psalms in this brief meditation.

As we begin, the psalmist confesses that the Lord had been a dwelling place for His people throughout all generations. As a dwelling place, the Lord had been their shelter from the enemy. He had protected and provided for His people.

This God, who was their shelter, was an eternal God. Before the mountains were born or the earth existed, He was God. Notice in Psalm 90:2 that God was from everlasting to everlasting. In other words, He always was God and He

always will be God. Nothing will ever strip Him of His power or authority.

As God, He turned men and women to dust. We came from dust and will return to dust. All this is in the hands of the Lord God. He is in complete control of life and ordains the length of each life and the time of each death.

As an eternal God, time does not have the same value as it does to us as human beings. A thousand years, said the Psalmist, was like a single day in the Lord's concept of time. As an eternal God, He had no beginning nor does He have an end. As human beings, however, how different we are. We are like grass that grows up new in the morning but by evening it is dry and withered (90:5).

Notice in Psalm 90:7 what the writer tells his readers about the lot of men and women on this earth. They will be consumed by God's anger and terrified by His indignation. God is a holy and righteous God. He holds each individual accountable for their actions. He will not pass over our sins. All our sins are set out before Him. Even our secret sins are open before God.

What hope has man before such an awesome and holy God? Who among us could live a life that met up to His holy expectations? Every one of us falls short of the Lord's standard. We are all sinners who fall under the wrath of a perfect and holy God. The Psalmist put it this way in Psalm 90:9: "All our days pass away under Your wrath; we finish our years with a moan."

While these statements seem to be quite negative in their outlook, the fact is that this is the reality for every individual who does not know the forgiveness of the Lord God. God is a holy God and we are sinners. As the Psalmist said:

"All our days pass away under His wrath; we finish our years with a moan." How thankful we need to be for a solution to this problem of sin. The Lord Jesus has provided a way for us to be forgiven and cleansed. Through His life and death we are given a new chance. His death paid the penalty for sin and satisfied the wrath of God. Those who turn to the Lord Jesus can know this forgiveness and renewal.

In Psalm 90:10 the Psalmist reminded his readers that the average length of our days is only seventy years. If God gives us extra strength, we may even see eighty. In those seventy or eighty years we will see much trouble and sorrow. As we pass through this life we are often touched by sin and its results on this earth. Death, sickness, broken relationships, disappointment are all part of this life and the result of the sin problem. None of us will pass through life unscathed. We are born into a sinful world. For seventy or eighty years we pass through that world suffering the consequences of sin and its curse and then we die.

In light of the shortness of life, the Psalmist prayed in Psalm 90:12 that each of us would number our days and learn from them so that we might gain a heart of wisdom. This is an important statement. God has given us these days to prepare ourselves for entering His presence. If there is one thing we need to learn from life in a sin cursed earth it is that we need the forgiveness of a holy God. We need to see the futility of these seventy or eighty years without God. We need to understand our need to turn to Him. God gives us seventy or eighty years to learn these lessons and turn to Him.

The Psalmist concluded Psalm 90 with a plea to God. He asked Him to relent from His anger and have compassion on His servants. How thankful we need to be that this

particular prayer has been answered in the person of the Lord Jesus. Through Him the anger of God has been satisfied and God has shown compassion on His servants.

In verse Psalm 90:14 that Psalmist pleaded with God to satisfy them in the morning with His unfailing love so that they could sing for joy and be glad all their days. It is the heart cry of the Psalmist that his heart be joyful and satisfied. Again this is only possible through the ministry of the Lord Jesus and His Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to understand that it is indeed the heart of God that His children be satisfied and joyful in their lives. It is possible to live in this world of sin and evil with a heart of satisfied joy. God offers this to all who will come to Him. It is the prayer of the Psalmist that he and his people would experience that joy.

Notice in Psalm 90:15 that the Psalmist prayed that God would make them glad for as many days as He had afflicted them. For every moment of suffering and pain the Psalmist asked God for an equal moment of joy and rejoicing in the Lord God. I believe that the world needs to see men and women today who are experiencing this joy and rejoicing in the Lord God. Too many believers are living their lives as though it was the purpose of God to make their lives miserable. The prayer of the Psalmist ought to be a challenge for us.

As he concluded Psalm 90, the Psalmist asked that the deeds of the Lord be shown to His servants again. He pleaded with God that His favour rest on His children and that the works of His hands be established. The Psalmist longed to see God demonstrate His wonderful power again in the lives of His children so that they could live in victory over sin and have great cause to celebrate His name.

While Psalm 90 seems to focus on the struggles and pain of living on a sinful earth, Psalm 91 turns our attention to the reality of victory for the believer.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty," the Psalmist told his readers (Psalm 91:1). That is to say, all those who choose to make the Lord their shelter will know the blessing of living under His shadow. The shadow of the Lord is a place of protection from the hot and harmful rays of the sun. There are many things in life that can harm us but when we are protected under the shadow of the Lord, we are secure.

The Psalmist speaks of the Lord as a refuge and fortress (91:2). In God he was safe from the snare the enemy had set for him. In the Lord he was secure from the deadly and evil plagues of this sinful earth (91:3).

The Psalmist describes God as a mother bird who covered her young with her feathers (91:4). There under His wings God's children were safe. There they could find refuge.

God was a faithful God. He would not let His children down. He would be a shield and a rampart. No enemy sword would penetrate nor could their spear devour (91:4).

Because God was a fortress and shield, His people had no cause for fear. The terror of the night would no longer overcome them (91:5). The arrows the enemy shot at them during the day could not penetrate the strong shield of the Lord. The pestilence that stalked the darkness and the plague that devoured many at noon would not affect those who were sheltered in the Lord God (91:6). We saw in Psalm 90 that the believer lived in a sin cursed earth. We are told that those who find shelter in the Lord God can live as overcomers. God's desire is to give victory not only over

our own personal sin but also the sin that surrounds us in this world.

God's promise through the psalmist is that a thousand or ten thousand will fall at our side but we would be protected by the Lord our God (91:7). God's favour will be on us, protecting us and keeping us from evil.

Those whose hope is in the Lord will observe with their eyes the punishment of the wicked (91:8). In other words, the believer will not experience that punishment because his sins are forgiven. God wants us to live in victory over sin and evil in our world. He is big enough to overcome whatever sin comes our way. He will give us victory over those sins if we trust him.

There is a wonderful promise for believers living on this sin filled earth in the concluding verses of Psalm 91. Here the Psalmist promised that if we make the Most High our dwelling and refuge, then no harm will befall us nor will any disaster come near us (91:10). God will command His angels to guard us in all our ways (91:11). Those angels will protect those who find refuge in God and keep them from striking their foot against a stone (91:12). Those whose fortress is the Lord God would live in victory over the obstacles in their life. They would tread on the lion and the cobra. Special emphasis is placed on the "great lion" and the "serpent" in verse 13. Satan is described as both a lion (1 Peter 5:8) and a serpent (Genesis 3). As believers we can even have victory over Satan and all his temptations.

Because believers love the Lord God and acknowledge His name, God promises to rescue them and protect them (91:14). He would hear the cry of the believer who loved and acknowledged Him. God would deliver them from their

trouble and honour them (91:15). He would satisfy them with long life and show them His salvation (verse 16).

What we need to understand here is that the believer is called to live on an earth filled with sin and evil. While our lives will never be totally free from problems and struggles, there is hope for those who make the Lord God their shelter. It is the desire of the Lord God that His people live in victory. He invites us to call on Him and seek Him in our time of trouble. It is His delight to give us victory and joy. The world needs to see believers who are living in victory. This is only possible, however, if we turn to the Lord and make Him our shelter and fortress. He alone can rescue us and keep us in a world of evil and sin.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to make the Lord God our dwelling place and shelter?
- How does the Psalmist describe God in Psalm 90? What characteristics of God does the Psalmist underline?
- What do we learn in these two Psalms about the futility of life without the Lord Jesus and the forgiveness He brings?
- What does the Psalmist tell us about the desire of God to satisfy and fill His people with joy?
- Will believers suffer in this life? What is our confidence in times of trial according to Psalm 91?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a holy and eternal God.

- Thank the Lord that despite the evil that surrounds us, we are able to take refuge in Him.
- Thank the Lord that His desire for you is that you live in victory over sin and its effects on this earth. Ask Him to give you that victory.
- What has kept you from experiencing the satisfaction and joy of the Lord? Ask the Lord to give you victory.

IT IS GOOD TO PRAISE THE LORD

Read Psalm 92:1-93:5

The psalmist begins in Psalm 92 by reminding his readers that it is a good thing to praise the Lord and to make music to His name. There has always been a connection between music and praise. David, in particular, seemed to have a vision to see a greater use of music in the worship of the Lord God. We read in the book of Revelation that the angels of heaven use music to praise the Lord God (Revelation 5:9, 12; 14:3; 15:3). When the children of Israel crossed over the sea on dry land and saw the destruction of the Egyptian enemy, Miriam lead the women in a song of praise to the Lord God for His deliverance (Exodus 15:21). Over and over in the Bible we see the use of music in the worship of the Lord God. The psalmist reminds us that it is good to make music to praise the name of the Lord. In other words, this is something that delights His heart.

Notice in Psalm 92:2 that the writer also tells his readers that it was also good to proclaim the love of the Lord in the morning and His faithfulness in the evening to the music of a ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. There are two things I want to mention here. First, notice that love is proclaimed in the morning and faithfulness in the evening. Each day will bring its share of struggle and turmoil. As we wake in the morning we need to be assured of God's love for us that day. This assurance of love gives us courage to step out into the struggles of that day. We know we are not alone. In the evening, when we have seen how the Lord has kept us and demonstrated His love to us, we are then able to proclaim His faithfulness for that day.

The second thing we should notice in this verse is that we can proclaim the love and faithfulness of the Lord God through music. The music spoken of here is a personal expression of the hearts of men and women who have experienced the love and faithfulness of God. They proclaim, through songs, the glory of the Lord God. These are testimony songs that confirm through practical examples that God is a God of tremendous love and faithfulness.

Psalm 92:3 confirms to us that the Lord delights in the playing of instruments in the worship of his name. While instruments are not necessary, they are legitimate forms of worship that delight the heart of God.

The reason that psalmist wanted to express his worship of God through music was that God had made him glad though the things He had done for him. That gladness made him sing (92:4). Music and song is a natural expression of joy and gladness. The hearts of those who are joyous and glad want to sing. The Lord delights in the natural breaking out in song as an expression of a grateful heart.

In Psalm 92:5 the psalmist expresses his praise to the Lord God. He speaks of his gratitude to God for the greatness of His works and the depth of His thoughts.

The senseless person and the fool did not understand that while wickedness sprang up like the grass and the evildoer flourished, this would only be temporary (92:6-7). God will judge and evil will be destroyed. God is a holy and just God. While evil would be destroyed, God would be exalted forever. All His enemies would perish. Evildoers would be scattered. The psalmist worshiped God because of His justice and holiness. It brought joy to his heart to know that truth and righteousness would ultimately triumph.

Notice in Psalm 92:10 that the psalmist worshipped God because He had exalted his horn like that of a wild ox. The horn was a symbol of power. It was the ox's weapon and symbol of his strength. God had increased the power and strength of His servant and gave him victory. Notice also in Psalm 92:10 that fine oils had been poured over the psalmist. This was an indication that the Lord had anointed him for a particular ministry or work. He was chosen of God and had the privilege to serve and honour Him as a special vessel. This too brought joy to the heart of the psalmist.

As the psalmist reflected on his life, he remembered the defeat of his enemies. He had seen how God had routed foes that had come to overtake him. God had been his protection and shield. It was good to praise the Lord for these wonderful evidences of love.

The psalmist had the assurance that the righteous person would flourish like a palm tree or a cedar of Lebanon (92:12). The blessing of the Lord was on the righteous. They were planted in the house of the Lord and would flourish in the courts of God (92:13). All who belong to the

Lord God will one day enter His presence in heaven and live under His blessing forever. This blessing is not limited to the life to come, however. Even now the blessing of the Lord is on those who love Him and seek His face. He will honour those who honour Him. If you were to take a moment to look at your life, it should be very clear to you that you too, as a child of God, are experiencing this wonderful blessing of God. This is cause to praise the Lord.

Notice in Psalm 92:14 that those who belong to the Lord will bear fruit in their old age. They will always be fresh and green. Our walk with the Lord should never grow stale. It should always be fresh and new. Our experiences of God will continue even to our old age. God is not limited to using only the young and strong. He is more than willing to continue using us until our dying moment. There will always be new and fresh experiences of His love and faithfulness. There will always be new evidences of His power using us for His glory. Until our dying day we will be able to proclaim: "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him" (92:15).

As we move on to Psalm 93 the psalmist continues in this theme of worship and praise. He thanked God because He reigned and was robed in majesty. He was over all things and all people. Notice that as the reigning Lord, His was robed with majesty. Majesty is that part of God that causes us to stand (or fall) in awe and worship. He is a God whose presence alone makes us fall down in praise and worship.

The Lord God is not only robed in majesty but is armed with strength. Nothing is impossible to the Lord God. Nothing or no one is able to overcome Him. What He established cannot be moved. Neither Satan nor any of this world's leaders could ever change what He has established by His decree. His throne is established from

eternity past. That throne will be there throughout all eternity. Nothing will strip Him of His control and authority.

In Psalm 93:3 the psalmist compared the Lord to the seas. Those seas lifted up their voice and pounded the shores with their powerful waves. The Lord God, however, is mightier and more powerful than the great breakers of the sea crashing into the shores with all their force. He is mightier than the great thunder that sounds in the storm or the powerful rains that fall in the storm.

What the Lord decrees stands firm and can never be changed. Holiness filled His house for all eternity. Holiness relates to that which is good and separated from sin. It is a characteristic of God that will never change. All He does or ever will do is holy and good.

As the psalmist reflected on the Lord God and His work, his heart is stirred to praise and worship. He reflected on God's love, justice, holiness, majesty and strength. He remembered how the Lord had been His Rock, shelter and strength. He recalled how God had anointed him and strengthened him to be His servant. His heart broke out in songs of praise for who God was and what He had done. May we have such a heart.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the place of music in the worship of God from these Psalms?
- The psalmist praised the Lord because everything He did was good and just. Have you ever had times

when you wondered what the Lord was doing?
What encouragement does this bring you today?

- How has the Lord been your Protector?
- Take a moment to look over the events of the last couple of days. How has the Lord demonstrated His faithfulness to you?
- What do we learn in these Psalms about the purpose of God in the lives of His children?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for those whose gifts of music have enhanced our worship of the Lord.
- Take a moment to consider the various attributes of God as found in these two Psalms. Thank the Lord for who He is.
- How has the Lord been your Rock and strength? Take a moment to thank Him for the evidence of His faithfulness and love toward you.

THE GOD WHO AVENGES

Read Psalm 94:1-23

Psalm 94 is a Psalm about a God who avenges sin. There are times in the life of the believer when it seems that evil people have their own way. Throughout the history of the church there have been many periods of persecution. During those times it seemed that evil was triumphing. Evil men and women became bolder in their stand against God and His principles. The believer seemed to be left in despair crying out for justice. Such was the situation of the psalmist when he wrote this Psalm.

Notice in verse 1 that, though in despair, the psalmist found comfort in the fact that the Lord was a God who avenged sin. In other words, God was not blind to what was happening in this time of evil. He saw what evil people were doing to His children. The day was coming when He would call them to give an account of their actions. God's timing is not the same as ours. His ways are sometimes confusing to the limited human mind. God is an avenging God. He will rise up and deal with sin and evil in time.

The cry of the psalmist was for the Lord God to rise up in this time of evil. He calls Him to come as Judge of the earth to pay back the proud and arrogant. They had done much evil in the land. They seemed to be unhindered in their wicked ways. They rejoiced in evil and made much profit from it. They boasted of their achievements and accomplishments (verse 4). They crushed and oppressed the people of God (verse 5). They had no concern for the widows or the foreigners. They slew them and murdered the fatherless (verse 6). They felt that the Lord did not see what they were doing. This was possibly due to the fact that they seemed to be getting away with what they were doing.

There are many who think this way in our society. They justify their disobedience and sin by saying that if the Lord wanted to stop them He would. The psalmist challenged the evil doers of his day in their thinking. He reminded them of how foolish it was to think that God did not see their sin. "Does He who implanted the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?" he asked in verse 9. How foolish it would be to think that the Creator of our eyes and ears could not see or hear. God does see what is happening. He knows how we are being oppressed. He hears every word spoken out against us.

There is clear evidence in Scripture that God punishes nations because of their sin. In the days of Moses, the Egyptian nation had oppressed the people of Israel. The Lord punished Egypt. He brought the nation to its knees. How foolish it would be for an individual to say that God would not discipline him or her for their evil when He is willing to bring down whole nations because of sin.

God is a God of infinite wisdom. There is nothing man can teach God. Everything that we have ever learned is from

God. He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge. How foolish it is to say that God does not know what we were doing. God knows everything. Nothing can be hidden from Him. All the evil that is practised in our society is open before Him. We cannot hide anything from an all-knowing God.

Admittedly, even believers will fall into sin. The Lord is aware of this and will discipline His children to keep them in the truth. The psalmist reminds us that we are blessed if we are disciplined by the Lord (verse 12). The Lord's discipline is intended to rescue us from evil and its influence in our lives. When we discipline our children, it is to train them in the way they should go. Discipline will keep us from falling into evil.

As for the wicked, however, verse 13 tells us that a pit will be dug for them. In other words, the day of their destruction will come. The discipline of the Lord will rescue us from the fate of the evil doer. The judgement of the Lord, however, will destroy the wicked.

God will not reject those who belong to Him. He will not forsake His inheritance. The Lord will rise up to judge evil. Though for a time evil seems to triumph, its end is coming. As a righteous God, our Lord will rise up and conquer evil.

Admittedly, in this life there will be times when we will feel overwhelmed by evil around us. The psalmist felt this himself. In verses 16-17 he told his readers that he could have died under the oppression of evil in his day. He felt his foot slipping under the oppression of evil. The weight was so great that he was about to fall under it. At that time, however, the Lord reached out to him and supported him so that he was able to remain firm (verse 18).

There were also times in the psalmist's life when anxiety rose up in him. The stress and struggle of life was such that panic and turmoil seemed to fill his mind. In those times, the Lord consoled him and brought joy to his soul. The circumstances did not change but the psalmist was able to experience the joy of the Lord in his situation.

As the psalmist looked around him at the wickedness of his day, he knew that this power was not from God. In verse 20 he reminded his readers that those powers who brought only misery by their decrees were not allied with God. These were oppressive powers whose only desire was to accomplish their own evil agendas. They cared nothing for God and His ways. They were enemies. These evil powers banded together against the righteous. They condemned the innocent to death.

Where can the righteous person go in times when evil seems to reign? The psalmist tells us in verse 22 that when evil powers are in control, God is a fortress and rock of refuge for His people. He will protect His loved ones and keep them in this time. He will repay evil leaders for their sin. He will destroy them for their wicked ways.

What we discover in this Psalm is that there are times when evil seems to prevail in the land. God will not always stop evil but He will protect and keep those who are His. The day is coming when the Lord God will avenge His people. He is not blind to what has been done to them. He has heard the insults. He feels our pain. Though He tarries for the moment, the time is coming when He will arise and judge.

For Consideration:

- What evidence is there of sin in your society today?
- Is God's timing the same as ours? How does this affect you personally?
- Does God always stop people from sinning? Explain. Does this mean that He will not judge?
- Does God always see sin and evil?
- What is the purpose of the discipline of the Lord? How is the discipline of God a blessing for those who are trained by it?
- Do believers suffer at the hands of evil people? What comfort do you find in this Psalm?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray about the evil you see around you today. Thank the Lord that He will judge that evil.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to wait for His timing in your struggle today.
- Ask God to give you grace to accept His discipline in your life and learn the lessons He wants you to learn.
- Ask God to give you grace to trust Him in your time of suffering and trial on this earth.

SINGING AND SHOUTING FOR JOY

Read Psalm 95:1-96:13

In Psalms 95 and 96 the heart cry of the psalmist is to see the people of the Lord recognise His beauty and bow down before Him in wonderful and joyful worship. These two psalms call us to worship our wonderful God.

As the psalmist begins, he calls the people of God to worship (95:1). Notice how he includes himself in this call. He invites his readers to join him in worship to the Lord God. It is important that we notice the forms of worship in these two Psalms.

The psalmist began by calling God's people to sing. Music has always played a vital part in the worship of God. There are those who want to limit the worship of God to a reflection on His Word. I remember someone telling me once that the only reason they went to church was for the sermon. While this is good, worship involves more than quiet reflection on the Word of God. Worship, for the Psalmist,

involved music and singing. Notice, however, that the psalmist specifically mentioned that the singing was to be joyful. There is lots of singing that is not worship to God. The attitude of the heart is of utmost importance in worship. The psalmist called for joyful hearts. These hearts were joyful because they loved the Lord and were experiencing the joy that the Lord brought to their souls. The music spoken of here is a music that is focused on sharing joyfully the wonderful things the Lord has done.

Notice also in Psalm 95:1 that there is also a place for shouting aloud in the worship of God. Again the attitude of the heart is important. As with singing, there is also a type of shouting that is not worship to the Lord. There are those who shout to be heard by other people. They want others to think highly of them. This type of shouting is self-centred and not God honouring. We also need to understand that worship does not increase with volume. God is worshiped in quiet reflection as much as He is in loud shouts. The shouting the psalmist speaks about here has to do with our desire that everyone know our God is an awesome God. We shout to proclaim His value before those around us. We shout because we are unashamed to call Him our God. We shout so that others will take notice of Him and recognize Him as their Rock of salvation.

The psalmist invited his people also to come before the Lord with thanksgiving (95:2). Singing and shouting declare His worth to those around us. Thanksgiving is more personal. It is a personal recognition of the goodness of God in one's own life. We worship God by thanking Him for the wonderful things He has done for us.

Notice again in Psalm 95:2 that the psalmist called his people to extol the Lord with thanksgiving. The word "extol" in the Hebrew carries the sense of loud noise and shouting.

It is a word that could be used of a conquering army raising a joyful shout of thanksgiving over their conquered enemies. The King James Version uses the phrase "make a joyful noise." The sense here is that God's people were to come like conquering warriors and raise a shout of joy and thanksgiving for the victories the Lord their God has given them. Notice in particular that this "extolling" was to be done through music and song.

In the first two verses of Psalm 95 the psalmist called his people to worship the Lord through music, shouting and thanksgiving. As he continues he also wants his readers to understand why they were to worship the Lord with such passion.

In Psalm 95:3 he tells us that the reason the Lord deserves our praise is because He is a great God and King over all gods. There were many so called gods in the psalmist's day. These were false gods and could be compared to the God of Israel.

The God of Israel was greater than the gods of the nations because the depths of the earth were in His hands and the mountain peaks belonged to Him. He owned the sea because He made it and His hands formed the dry land. The Lord God is the Creator of the earth as we know it. His power and wisdom can be seen in the vastness of the universe. No other god has such power and wisdom. As Creator, He is in control of the whole world. He cares for it and is the source of all life. As the Creator and Sustainer of life this God deserves the praises of His people.

Notice another form of worship in Psalm 95:6. The psalmist calls his people to bow down in worship and kneel before the Lord their Maker. We bow down or kneel before someone who is greater than us. As we come into the

presence of God we recognise that we are unworthy of standing in His presence. The Bible speaks about men who were unable to stand in the presence of God (see Revelation 22:8 and Ezekiel 3:23). Bowing down or kneeling is an expression of worship and recognition of His worth and majesty. It is also recognition of our unworthiness to stand in His presence.

We have seen that the Lord God is the Creator and Ruler of the earth. Notice in Psalm 95:6-7 yet another reason to worship. In these two verses the psalmist reminded his people that this great and awesome God was also their Shepherd and they were the people of His pasture. What an awesome thought. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe cares for us like a shepherd cares for his sheep. There can be no greater comfort and security for us than this. No foe can defeat us. No weapon can destroy us. We are kept, safe and secure in His fold. This, for the psalmist, was cause for worship and praise.

As he concludes Psalm 95, the psalmist extends a warning to his people. He has just reminded them of the awesome nature of the Lord God of Israel and how He watched over them like the sheep of His fold. There was always the possibility that instead of surrender and worship to this wonderful God, His people would turn their back on Him. For this reason, the psalmist warned his people not to harden their hearts as they had done at Meribah. The reference to Meribah was a reference to Exodus 17 where the people of God complained to Moses because they had no water. They refused to trust the Lord though He had proven Himself faithful to them many times. God was angry with this. While they should have been praising the Lord, God's people complained. Complaining is the opposite of worship and praise. Complaining is the natural enemy of praise. Instead of extolling the character of God, complaining

criticises His ways. Where there is complaining, there can be no worship and praise. The psalmist warned his people of the dangers of complaining and hardening their hearts to the Lord their God.

Notice as we continue into Psalm 96 that the Psalmist challenges his people to come to the Lord with a new song. The word "new" is significant here. There is nothing wrong with old songs. They are the expressions of the faith of our spiritual fathers and mothers. We can sing along with them and identify with their faith experiences. A new song, however, is the expression of this present generation. It is recognition that God is still alive and working in this day. It is a statement to the world around us that God is much more than the God of our fathers and mothers. He is also our God and still deserving of praise. He is still a God of wonder and awe. Through these new songs we proclaim His wonderful salvation in our day.

Psalm 96:3 reveals yet another form of worship. Here the psalmist tells us to declare the glory of God among the nations and His marvellous deeds among all people. The word "declare" can also be translated "talk," or "speak." The idea here is to speak of the wonders of the Lord wherever we go. To declare is to testify to what God has been doing. This takes place in our relationships with people on an ongoing basis. This can take place at work or in our conversations with others. The desire of the psalmist is that the whole world know that God is a wonderful God. He tells us that we are to "declare" His glory wherever we go. This is an act of worship.

The psalmist reminded his readers that they were to declare God's glory because He was a great God who was worthy of all praise (96:4-6). He was to be feared or revered above all other gods because He made the

heavens. All other gods were idols with no power or authority and unworthy of attention or reverence.

Not only was the God of Israel the Creator of the earth but according to Psalm 96:6, He was a God of splendour, majesty and strength. His presence inspired awe and respect. To experience His presence was to be struck with fear and deep reverence.

The psalmist went on to tell his readers to ascribe glory and strength to the Lord (96:7-8). He is calling his people to recognise the character of God and speak that to Him. We do this with individuals when we remind them of their value. We may tell our husbands or wives that they are beautiful. We may remind our friend of his or her generosity and kindness. In the worship of God we are called to tell God about His value and worth. God already knows these things but delights to hear them from us.

In Psalm 96:8 the psalmist called his people to yet another form of worship. He asked them to bring an offering to the courts of the Lord. An offering was a sacrificial gift that expressed to God what the individual felt about Him. Just as we would offer a gift to someone we love as a reminder to them of our feelings, so it is with our offerings to God. We need to be reminded here that not all offerings are an expression of worship. Again the attitude of the heart is of utmost importance.

In Psalm 96:9 the psalmist further called his people to tremble before the Lord. The trembling spoken of here has to do with God's holiness. Trembling indicates a fear. When we come before the Lord with trembling we recognise that we are sinners. We recognise that we are coming before a holy and glorious God. This is not something we take lightly. Were it not for His grace and forgiveness we

could not come at all. The trembling mentioned here is an act of worship in itself. It not only recognises God's holiness but also His grace and mercy. Notice that the psalmist tells us to tremble "before" God. The fact that we are to do this "before" God shows us that we are not to let our trembling keep us away from God. Instead, we are to come before Him with trembling recognizing that we *can* come to Him on the basis of His mercy and grace.

As we come with trembling before the Lord we are to come recognising that the Lord God reigns. That is to say, He is the Lord of all. He is worthy of praise and honour because He is the reigning Lord of the universe. There is no higher authority or power. He established the world so that it cannot be moved. As a sovereign Lord, His purposes will stand. There is no power that can stand against Him. There is no force of heaven or hell that can thwart His purposes.

As we come before the Lord with trembling, we need to recognise that He is a God who judges with equity (96:10). In other words, His judgement is always fair and right. He will not show any partiality. Our position in society means nothing to Him when it comes to exercising judgement.

We are also, according to the psalmist, to come before the Lord with gladness. He called heaven and earth to be glad before the Lord. The fields were to be jubilant. The trees were to shout for joy. They were to do this because God was coming to judge the earth in righteousness and truth. Evil will never triumph. Sin and wickedness will be broken. Righteousness will reign. This was wonderful news. This was reason to be glad and shout with joy.

Here in these two psalms the psalmist calls us to worship the Lord. He reminds us that worship is not a stale

expression but has many different dimensions. Worship is the grateful expression of the heart of God's people toward Him. It is a joyous, sacrificial and reverent expression of His worth not only to God but to all who will listen.

For Consideration:

- What do these Psalms teach us about the various expressions of worship? What are the various expressions of worship in these two Psalms?
- Why is God deserving of our praise? What are some of the reasons the psalmist gives to worship God in these Psalms.
- Why is complaining the enemy of worship? Have you been guilty of complaining about what God was doing?
- What is the importance of the attitude of the heart in worship?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to ask the Lord to broaden your expressions of worship. In other words, ask Him to teach you more about the various expressions of worship mentioned here in these two Psalms.
- Ask the Lord to examine your heart attitude in worship. Ask Him to give you a joyous and surrendered heart.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any complaining you have done concerning His ways and purposes in your life. Ask Him to change your complaining to praise and thanksgiving.
- Take a moment to express your worship to God for who He is and what He has done.

OUR REIGNING LORD

Read Psalm 97:1-98:9

Psalms 97 and 98 are Psalms of praise to the Lord God for who He is and the great things He has done. The psalmist begins in Psalm 97 with a clear declaration that the Lord reigns. He is the Lord of all lords. All powers on heaven and earth are in subjection to Him. He is in control of all the events, circumstances and people of history. For the psalmist this was great news. Because it was the God of Israel who reigned, there was great cause for rejoicing. There could be no greater Lord. In Him he was secure and confident. The psalmist calls for the distant shores of the earth to rejoice because God, the Lord of Israel was the ruling King and Lord.

Notice in Psalm 97:2 that God's reign was no ordinary reign. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him. While darkness is often associated with evil this is not the case here. The Lord is surrounded by thick clouds because of His holy and awesome nature. In reality, this covering is the result of His mercy and compassion for us as His people. His holiness and majesty would consume us so He covers His face so that we are not destroyed.

In Exodus 33:18 Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory. God reminded him that no one could see His face and live. While God did reveal some of His glory to Moses, He hid him in a rock and covered Himself so that the glory Moses saw would not consume him. This is what the psalmist is speaking about here. He tells that the Lord God of Israel was so glorious and holy that He needed to cover Himself with thick clouds and darkness so that those who saw Him would not be consumed.

Notice also in Psalm 97:2 that the foundation of God's throne was righteousness and justice. This is how the Lord God reigned. His reign was a reign founded on these two principles: righteousness and justice. All His judgements were true and good. He showed no favouritism in how He judged.

The psalmist went on to tell his readers that fire went before the Lord God to consume His enemies (97:3). He is an all-powerful God whose holiness and righteousness consumes evil. No evil can stand before Him. Like a raging fire of righteousness and holiness, He consumes evil and sin. All His enemies will be destroyed by His holy judgements.

The psalmist also speaks of lightning that flashed God's presence, lighting up the world. The lightning, like swords of justice flashed throughout the earth causing terror to His enemies. He was a God to be feared and revered. In the presence of His lightning, the earth trembled and the mountains melted like wax. Nothing could stand in His presence. The elements of nature feared His power and majesty.

The heavens proclaimed the righteousness of the Lord (97:6). As we look into the heavens and see the vastness

and order they contain, do they not speak to us about an awesome Creator? When we see the order, complexity and harmony by which the stars and the planets work together, do they not tell us something about the God who put them in their place? Day after day the sun rises and shines on us. Night after night the moon and the stars look down on us. They declare the faithfulness and trustworthiness of their Creator. They declare Him to be a good and righteous God.

Not only do the heavens declare that God is a God of righteousness, but the psalmist tells us also in Psalm 97:6 that those who live on the earth see His glory. They see His glory in the heavens. They see His glory in the oceans that beat the shores of the earth and the mountains that rise upward to the skies. Those who know Him see His glory in His dealing with them on a daily basis.

When the psalmist considered the Lord God of Israel and His wonders, he couldn't help but say something about those who worshipped idols and images. He reminds them that they would be put to shame. Their idols and false gods were nothing. They would all fall before the God of Israel. They were powerless and unworthy of praise. The day was coming when the earth would see the glory of the Lord God of Israel and know the futility of worshipping their idols.

The day was also coming when the Lord God would judge the earth. The judgments of the Lord were righteous and fair. He was the Most High God over all the earth (97:9). He was exalted over all the gods of the people. They would all bow to him.

In Psalm 97:10 the psalmist reminded his people that those who loved the Lord God hated evil. His reign was a

reign of truth and righteousness. All who love Him love and live in His ways.

There is a special relationship between the Lord and those who love and keep His ways. The Lord keeps and guards those who are faithful to Him. He keeps them from the hands of those who practice evil and wickedness (97:10). His light of favour shines on those who live in His righteousness (97:11). His joy fills those whose heart is right with Him (97:11). There is great cause for those who were righteous to rejoice in the Lord.

In Psalm 98 the psalmist continued on this theme of praise and thanksgiving. He reminded his readers that the Lord had done marvellous things. He encouraged them to sing a new song to the Lord. A new song is a fresh expression of thanksgiving to the Lord. It is true that God's people could worship Him because of what He had done in the lives of their fathers and mothers, but the marvellous deeds of the Lord did not end with their parents. They were fresh every day. There was a new song to sing today because the marvellous deeds of the Lord had been demonstrated afresh.

Those marvellous deeds could be seen in how the right hand and the holy arm of the Lord had brought salvation to His people (98:1). They knew His favour on them. Through them the Lord demonstrated to the whole world that He was a righteous God (98:2). God's people were a shining light to all the nations of the earth demonstrating His righteousness. God's heart has always been for the whole world. Here we see that He chose to demonstrate His salvation through the Jewish nation so that the entire world could know Him and His righteousness. God remembered to show faithfulness and love to the people of Israel

so that the ends of the earth could see His salvation and come to Him (98:3).

What a wonderful plan we see in this Psalm. God chose to use the nation of Israel to be a witness and example of His love for the whole earth. That plan has not changed. Today He uses you and me to be that shining light for the nations. He wants to demonstrate His salvation, love and faithfulness to us so that others might see and know Him too.

This plan of God was so wonderful that the psalmist could not help but call His people to shout for joy. He called them to break forth into joyful singing with music. He called for the harp to be brought forth. He called for the trumpets and the ram's horn to blast in declaration of the marvellous purpose of God. He challenged those who knew this God and His plan to shout for joy. Even the seas, rivers and mountains were to enter into this joyful expression of worship. The psalmist cries out for the sea and all the creatures in it to resound in praise. He challenged the rivers to clap their hands and the mountains to join together in joyful song to the Lord God (Psalm 98:4-9).

They were to do this because the Lord was going to come to judge the earth with righteousness and equity. He would come to bring His salvation to the earth. He would come to rid the world of sin, evil and injustice. He would come to establish the earth on principles of righteousness and holiness. All His enemies would be defeated. God would reign in righteousness from His throne. His people would be secure in His love and faithfulness. Nothing would harm them.

As the psalmist reflects on the Lord his God, here in these two Psalms, he declares Him to be a God who reigned in righteousness. He was an awesome God who inspired

fear and terror but He was also a faithful God who loved His people and desired that the nations know His favour. His deeds were marvellous and His salvation was offered to the entire earth. Through Israel, He demonstrated His faithfulness and righteousness so that all the earth would know Him and surrender to His righteous reign. For the psalmist this was reason for great rejoicing and praise.

For Consideration:

- What does the psalmist teach us about the reign of the Lord God? What illustrations does he use in Psalm 97 to describe that reign?
- While God is a holy and righteous God, what evidence do these two Psalms have that declare Him also as a God of wonderful love and compassion to His people?
- What is the heart of God for the nations? Why did He demonstrate His favour and marvellous deeds to Israel?
- To what extent is your life a demonstration of the wonderful salvation and favour of God? Could people look at your life and see the hand of God? Would they desire your God because of what they have seen of Him in you?

For Praise:

- Take a moment to praise the Lord for His holiness and righteousness. Thank Him that though He is holy, He still desires to enter a personal relationship with you.

- What has the Lord done for you and through you recently? Take a moment to offer Him praise for His wonderful work.
- Thank the Lord that He will come to judge the earth and deal with all wickedness and evil. Ask Him to search your heart and deal with any sin you might be clinging to today.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a shining light and example of what He wants to do in and through those who love Him.

AWESOMENESS AND INTIMACY

Read Psalm 99:1-100:5

Repeatedly in the book of Psalms we see the contrast between a God who is awesome and holy in nature and one who draws near to His people in love and compassion. This combination is something that deserves our highest praise and adoration. God does not draw near to us because we deserve it. He does so because He wants to. This is something we will never fully understand but we need to accept with joy and thankfulness.

The psalmist begins in Psalm 99:1 by telling us that the Lord God of Israel reigned. There was no higher authority or power. His reign was a glorious and awesome reign. God sat enthroned between the cherubim in heaven. Those cherubim were His servants who executed His desire with joy. Nothing on this earth or in heaven could compare to such a God. Who among the great kings and rulers had such glorious beings as their servants?

The psalmist calls the nations to tremble before such an awesome ruler. The earth shook in the presence of such glory and majesty. This was a God above all gods, deserving of highest respect and adoration. He was exalted over all nations and powers (99:2).

The Lord God was holy (99:3). Unlike the rulers of the nations, God was completely separated from all that was unholy and impure. No evil intentions would cloud His judgement. No sinful motivations would motivate His actions. Everything He did was pure and holy. His name, (representing His character) was glorious and awesome, deserving of praise.

The God of Israel was also a Mighty King (99:4). His power has no limit. There is no force of earth, hell or heaven that can match His power.

What delights the psalmist in Psalm 99:4 is the fact that the Lord loved justice. Everything He did was fair and good. Everyone was treated with equality. The rich were not respected more for their money. The poor were not treated with less dignity because of their lack. All could come to this God and experience fair judgement.

As the psalmist reflects on this truth he is drawn to praise. "Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool; He is holy." he tells his readers in Psalm 99:5. Such impartiality, power, authority and justice was worthy of great praise.

Notice in Psalm 99:6-7 that the Lord God of Israel spoke to His servants. Moses, Aaron and Samuel were among those who called on His name and God answered them. Who were these individuals? Moses was born as a lowly child destined for the Egyptian sword. God rescued Him and put him in the home of Pharaoh's daughter. Aaron was

the brother of Moses, who did not have the advantage of being brought up in a rich Egyptian home. He suffered the abuse of the Egyptian whip and lived as a slave to the Egyptian cause. God raised him up and made him priest and leader of His people. Samuel was the answer to childless Hannah's prayer. God gave his barren mother a child and raised him up to be a powerful prophet in his day. All three of these individuals were chosen by God to enter into a wonderful relationship with Him as His servants. They were humble individuals but they were chosen by God to call on His name. God heard their cries and answered them.

God gave His decrees to Moses, Aaron and Samuel. They were humble people but they were God's instruments to hear His voice and carry out His purpose. Why should the great God of this universe speak to lowly servants like Moses, Aaron and Samuel? Why should He hear their cry and answer them? He is a God who delights in His people. For this, He is deserving of our greatest praise and thanksgiving.

Not only is the Lord God willing to listen to the cries of his chosen servants but we discover in Psalm 99:8 that the Lord God is also a forgiving God. It is true that in His holiness He will punish sin but He is also a God who will forgive those who come to Him seeking His grace and mercy. What chance would we have before a holy and just God? We are a sinful people and our sin separates us from God and places us under His judgement and wrath. Only His mercy, grace and forgiveness can restore our relationship with Him. Because He is a forgiving God we have hope. Again the psalmist calls his people to exalt the Lord and worship Him at His holy mountain (a reference to the temple in Jerusalem).

In Psalm 100 the psalmist challenges the whole earth to shout for joy. They have cause for great rejoicing. He calls for the whole earth to worship the Lord God with gladness of heart and come before Him with joyful songs (100:2).

The psalmist wanted the whole earth to know that the Lord God of Israel was God. Knowing that the Lord God of Israel is God is much more than being aware of this in one's mind. To know that He is God is to bow before Him in worship and adoration. To know that He is God is to surrender to Him in obedience and reverence. It is to align one's life with His purposes because He is Lord. This was the heart cry of the psalmist for the whole earth. He understood who this God was and desired that the whole earth recognise Him as the one true and holy God.

The God of Israel is the Creator of the universe (100:3). The psalmist wants us to realise that we owe our existence and everything we have to the God of Israel. There are many people in this life to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. There is none, however, to whom we owe so much as the Lord God of Israel. He created us and is the source of every blessing we have.

More than being our Creator, however, the psalmist reminds us that the Lord God is also our Shepherd (100:3). The Lord God does not create us and leave us. He is also our daily provider and caregiver. The Lord cares for those He creates. Every breath we breathe and every beat of our heart is a gift from this wonderful Shepherd. The Lord personally watches out for each of us and provides all our needs. He is a holy and awesome God over all the powers of heaven and earth yet He delights to minister personally to our needs as a shepherd would care for his sheep.

The thought of God entering into such a wonderful relationship with His people caused the heart of the psalmist to overflow in praise and thanksgiving. He invites his readers to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise (100:4). Their only legitimate response was to fall before this God in praise and worship. No God could be compared to Him.

God's love and faithfulness toward His people endures forever. He will be as faithful to our children as He has been to us. Nothing will strip Him of His love and devotion to us and to our children's children.

The contrast between the awesomeness of God and His wonderful love and faithfulness toward His people is striking. It is because God is so great and holy and yet desires to be our Shepherd that He is so deserving of our praise and thankfulness. We owe Him so much, not only because of who He is, but also because of what He has done for us personally.

For Consideration:

- What do these two Psalms teach us about the character of God? What characteristics does the psalmist mention in particular?
- Can we approach such an awesome God? What does the psalmist tell us about God's desire for intimacy with His people?
- What does it mean to know God? Can we truly know Him without bowing before Him and submitting to Him?
- Take a moment to consider what you owe to the Lord God. What has He done for you?

- Have you entered a personal relationship with the Lord God? What do these two Psalms teach us about the desire of the Lord God to enter into a deep and intimate relationship with us?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for who He is. List specific qualities for which you wish to thank Him.
- Thank the Lord for the fact that though He is such an awesome God, He still delights to enter into fellowship with us as His sheep.
- Thank the Lord that His faithfulness is forever, not only for you, but for the generations to follow.
- Ask the Lord to enable you to praise Him more for who He is and what He has done.
- Ask the Lord to help you to enter into a deeper fellowship with Him.

CUTTING OFF EVIL

Read Psalm 101:1-8

Over the last few Psalms we have heard the call of the psalmist to worship in the presence of the Lord and to fall down before such an awesome and holy God. We need to realise however, that coming to a holy God is not something we can take lightly. In Psalm 101 the psalmist reminds us that we cannot come to a holy God without dealing with our sin.

As he begins, the psalmist sets the scene. He tells his readers that he would sing of the love and justice of the Lord. He recognised the Lord God for two characteristics. First, he reminds us of His love. It is true that the Lord God is a holy, sovereign, majestic and awesome God. These characteristics separate us from Him. How could we ever approach God in all His splendour and glory? What the psalmist is telling us here is that God is also a God of wonderful love. That love is directed toward His children. It is love that links us to God. In love, the Lord God reaches out to us and invites us into His presence. For the psalmist, this was cause for singing.

Notice also that the psalmist wants to sing of the justice of the Lord God. Admittedly, justice can be a scary thing. Because God is a just God, He will always deal with sin and evil. We are guilty before Him and, as such, fall under His divine wrath. On the other hand, the Lord knows the oppression we feel at the hands of those who persecute us. The poor and unlovely will receive fair treatment. Unlike earthly leaders, this great God of justice does not show favouritism. The poor will be treated like the rich. The popular will be given the same justice as the unpopular. The psalmist rejoiced because he knew that God would listen to his cause and do what was right.

As he reflects on the love and justice of the Lord his God, the psalmist's heart was drawn to praise and thanksgiving. In particular he wanted to sing to the Lord. Singing was an expression of joy and thankfulness. He wanted to tell the Lord, through song, of his great delight in Him.

The psalmist has another response to the love and justice of the Lord in verse 2. Notice that he tells the Lord that he would be careful to live a blameless life. The love of God for the psalmist caused him to desire to please Him by living a blameless life. There are those who want to take advantage of love. They say that because God loves them they can do what they want. This is to misunderstand the love of God. God's love and mercy are not permissions to do as we please. Instead those who truly understand the undeserved love of the Lord are drawn to honour Him by living a life that will please Him. This is the response of the psalmist.

Notice also in verse 2 the phrase "when will you come to me." It is hard to tell what the desire of the psalmist is in this phrase. Some see a call for help. The psalmist knows that if he is going to live a blameless life, he will need the

assistance of God. Others see a simple cry of longing. The psalmist cried out for the Lord's presence. He is aware of the love of the Lord for him. His heart's desire is to enter into a deeper relationship with the Lord his God. He wants the Lord of love and justice to draw near to him.

Notice in the second part of verse 2 that the psalmist not only tells God that he would live a blameless life but that he would walk in his house with a blameless heart. This cannot go without comment. It is one thing to live a blameless life and another to live with a blameless heart. The Pharisees of the New Testament prided themselves in keeping the Law of Moses but their hearts were often not blameless. Jesus spoke of them as "whitewashed tombs", clean on the outside but full of death and decay on the inside (see Matthew 23:27).

The desire of the psalmist was to be pure on the inside as well as on the outside. He wanted the Lord God to be pleased with him completely. This meant that he had to watch the attitude of his heart as well as his actions. He wanted his heart to be blameless and not only his actions. This is the response of love. Those who understand and experience the love of the Lord desire to live blamelessly before Him. This is an act of worship.

Notice in verse 3 that the psalmist determined in his heart that his worship and praise of God would affect how he used his eyes. He told the Lord that he would not set anything vile before his eyes. In the Hebrew language this word translated "vile" can mean "ungodly, evil, worthless or unprofitable." The psalmist is telling us that as an act of worship to a loving and just God, he was going to set a fence around his eyes so that nothing evil, unprofitable or ungodly would enter. What came into the eyes would ultimately corrupt his heart. In order to keep his heart pure

before a holy God the psalmist determined to keep his eyes from vile and wicked things.

Notice also in verse 3 that he determined that the deeds of faithless men would not cling to him. In other words, he would not allow the evil deeds of unfaithful men to overtake or become part of his life. He would not be joined together with them in their evil. He would push them away. He would have nothing to do with the wicked deeds of unfaithful people. He would keep watch over his ways and only do those things that pleased and honoured the Lord his God. Because his attitude was the same as the Lord God's, he hated the evil deeds of the wicked. They were repulsive to him and he wanted nothing to do with them.

In verse 4 the psalmist takes this matter a step further. He told his readers that he would separate himself from men of perverse heart. He would place these individuals far from him. He would not associate with those whose lifestyle did not honour the Lord his God. He would have nothing to do with those whose heart was perverse and rebellious against God. His love for God affected the friends he kept.

Not only did the psalmist keep his distance from those who lived in evil, but in verse 5 he tells us that he went even farther than this. There were times when he would actively seek to put to silence those who slandered their neighbour in secret. The psalmist understands that there are times when we need to be active in our defence of righteousness. Here the psalmist put to silence the slanderers who dishonoured the Lord by harming their neighbour with their tongue. Sometimes we need to take an active stand against evil. To do so is to honour the Lord. We honour Him by putting an end to the actions of those who blaspheme our Lord's purpose. In this case, the psalmist

speaks about those who slander their neighbour. There are many other examples of this, however, in our day. Maybe it will mean stopping the tongue of the one who consistently takes the name of the Lord in vain. Maybe it will mean speaking to the person who seems compelled to tell "dirty jokes." There can be any number of ways to put an end to the evil around us. What we need to see here is that the psalmist felt compelled to do what he could to stop those who were dishonouring his Lord in their actions. Not only did he refuse to associate with them but he also chose to do his part to see that their evil was silenced.

In verse 5 he tells his readers that he would not endure those who had haughty eyes and a proud heart. The person who has a haughty eye is one who sees things through the eye glasses of a proud heart. He only sees what he wants or what profits him personally. He overlooks anyone or anything that does not advance his own personal cause. His proud heart and eyes cause him to show favouritism. He does not treat people with equality and fairness as God does. Instead, he is self-centred and arrogant. The psalmist wanted nothing to do with such a person.

Instead, the psalmist chose to associate with those who were faithful to God. These people would be his friends and associates. These would be the people who would encourage him and minister to him when he was in need (verse 6).

The psalmist made up his mind that no one who practiced deceit would live in his house or stand in his presence. His hatred of deceit and falsehood was so great that he would have nothing to do with those who practiced such things (verse 7). He would make it his commitment every morning to silence and cut off those who were wicked in the land (verse 8-9).

The heart of the psalmist was to praise the Lord God for His love and justice. This he did in song but he also by his lifestyle. He chose to live a life that would honour the Lord his God. He chose to watch the attitudes of his heart. He set a guard around his eyes and chose to disassociate with those who practiced evil. In fact, the psalmist took an active stand against evil and actively fought against it in His land.

What we need to understand here is that those who truly understand the love and justice of the Lord God will honour Him in their deeds and actions. They will worship Him, not only in their song, but also in their lifestyle.

For Consideration:

- How does our lifestyle reflect what we think about God? Can our lifestyle be an act of worship?
- What is the difference between a blameless life and a blameless heart?
- The psalmist tells us that he set up a guard over his eyes. What things do you need to keep yourself from seeing? Why is this important?
- How do those with whom we associate affect our testimony and our relationship with God? Do you have associates that hinder your relationship with God or affect you in a negative way?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a lifestyle that is an act of worship to Him.
- Thank the Lord for those friends who encourage you in your walk with Him and minister to you in your need.
- Ask the Lord to show you anything in your life that does not bring Him honour. Ask Him to take it away so that your life brings Him the honour He deserves.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any particular role He wants you to play in silencing evil in your land.

JERUSALEM**BROKEN AND RESTORED**

Read Psalm 102:1-28

While the context of this Psalm is not completely certain, we do know from verses 14-16 that the psalmist reflects on the city of Jerusalem that had been broken down and lay in ruins. The enemy had conquered the city and destroyed it. It was in this time of pain and questioning that the psalmist wrote the reflections of this particular Psalm.

As he began the psalmist cried out to the Lord for help. From verse 2 we get the impression that the Lord had hidden His face from the city of Jerusalem. God's people were in distress and it seemed that the Lord was distant. Obviously, the people of Israel were being disciplined by the Lord at this time. The psalmist, in particular, felt the pain of the Lord's silence. He saw the devastation around him and cried out for help. He pleaded with the Lord God to cease hiding His face from him especially in this time of distress. He asked Him to hear his cry for help and answer him.

There is nothing worse for the believer then when the Lord hides His face. The silence of the Lord is probably one of the most terrifying things the believer can face in life. There have been times of such silence in my life when I just couldn't seem to communicate with the Lord God. In those times, it seems as if we are separated from our source of strength and encouragement. When we see the Lord in our struggle, it seems that we have all the strength we need to face the foe. We stand against all odds because we know He is at our side. What happens when that awareness of His presence is removed? In these times, all I can do is continue to trust in Him and His purpose. Though I may not see Him, hear Him or feel His presence, I can still trust Him.

Having said this, the silence of the Lord is still a terrifying thing for the believer. In these times our faith and confidence are stretched. For the psalmist this stretching was beyond what he felt he could endure. He saw the devastation around him. There were many questions. He needed to hear from God, so He cried out in agony to Him.

In verses 3-11 he reminded God of his situation. In verse 3 he tells us that his days vanished like smoke and his bones burned like glowing embers. He felt as if he was being consumed by the suffering and agony he felt. Maybe you have been brought to the point in your life when you wondered if you were going to get through the trials you faced. The trials were stripping years off your life; your hope of victory was fading. This is what the psalmist was feeling. His trials were consuming him like a raging fire.

The psalmist told his readers of how his heart was withering away like dying grass (verse 4). The heart is the seat of our passions and emotions. The struggle the psalmist felt was affecting him emotionally. He was losing courage.

One of the signs of depression and loss of courage is the loss of appetite. Notice that the psalmist forgot to eat his food. His concerns and emotional pain were such that even his physical food lost its appeal.

With the loss of appetite came the loss of weight. The stress and pain affected him physically. In verse 5 he testified that he was reduced to skin and bones because of his loud groaning.

The psalmist compares himself to a desert owl among the ruins. This is a picture of loneliness and despair. Ruins surround him. Like a lonely owl, he sits among the ruins and contemplates his despair. As he looks around him, all he can see was hopelessness. From verse 7 we can see how all this affects his sleep patterns. He could not sleep at night. The cares and concerns he carried were so heavy that he lay awake at night unable to release them.

Notice also in verse 7 that throughout this time the psalmist felt like "a bird alone on a roof." The imagery again is one of loneliness. God was silent. There was no one he felt he could speak with who could understand his pain and agony. Though there were many others in Jerusalem at that time, he still felt lonely and all alone.

The psalmist's enemies taunted him all day long (verse 8). These times of discouragement and depression are times when the enemy is very active. We can be sure that Satan delights in kicking us when we are down. He knows that we are vulnerable at this time and will do his utmost to cause us to turn from the Lord and His purposes. His enemies taunted the psalmist. Maybe they were asking him where his God was at this time. They mocked him and his commitment to the Lord God.

Not only were his enemies taunting him but they were actively mocking and cursing him at this time of despair. They railed against him. That is to say they blasphemed and reproached him in his suffering. The sense here is that they spoke out actively against him and his stand. They not only mocked him but used his situation as a means of cutting down and blaspheming the cause he represented. They openly cursed his name. More particularly however, they cursed the cause he represented. This was not easy for the psalmist to bear. He told his readers that his food at that time was ashes and tears (verse 9). The psalmist felt he could not find anyone who understood him and the grief he felt. People around him saw his response to the pain he felt and mocked him for it.

All this trial and suffering made the psalmist feel like God had thrown him aside (verse 10). There were times when his faith in God was stretched and he wondered if God had finished with him. He felt useless. He could do nothing to change his circumstances or the circumstances of those around him. He felt helpless to make any significant change.

We all need to feel useful. We all want to feel as if we can make an important contribution to society or the cause of our Lord. This sense of usefulness was stripped from the psalmist and he was left feeling discouraged. He withered away like an evening shadow and like dying grass. Was this how his days would end? Was there nothing he could do? Had God finished with him? Would he end his days feeling useless and helpless? These were the discouraging thoughts that filled his mind.

While the psalmist felt the agony and despair of defeat, he also knew deep down inside the strength of faith. Everything was falling apart around him. His emotions and

physical being were suffering the effects of the devastating blow of God on the land. Despite this, deep down inside, faith silently continued to flow. This silent, almost unnoticed, stream of faith kept giving him glimmers of hope. Though withered away emotionally and physically, his spirit was kept alive by this life sustaining stream of faith. In the strength of that silent stream he could declare in verse 12 that the Lord sat enthroned forever. He did not come to this conclusion based on what his enemies were saying to him. Nor did he come to this conclusion by looking at the devastation around him. He certainly did not come to this conclusion through his human reason. Faith alone was the source of this expression of praise. In the midst of the cloudy confusion of suffering and pain, a declaration of faith springs forth from his lips: "But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations" (verse 12). From that silent stream of faith, hope springs forth:

You will arise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favour to her;
the appointed time has come" (verse 13).

The psalmist understood by faith that God would not abandon His people. He believed by faith that the time had come for God to show His favour again. As he poured out his heart to God, it seems that God began to stir up his faith. God assured the psalmist that the time was drawing near for Him to act. God had not forgotten His people and the devastation of the city of Jerusalem. He knew how much the loss of that city meant to His children. God was aware of the pain and suffering His people were feeling. He would not leave them in their hopelessness. He would come to their aid.

In a powerful declaration of faith, the psalmist proclaimed in verse 15 that the nations would fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth would revere His glory. Again this declaration did not come from an examination of his circumstances. The enemy was mocking the city of Jerusalem. The declaration that these very people would one day bow down to the God they mocked was a declaration of faith.

The day was coming when the Lord would rebuild Zion. He would appear in Zion in glory. Jerusalem would again be a place of power and glory. God's presence would again be revealed in her streets. The whole world would see that glory and bow down to Zion's God. What encouragement this must have brought to the heart and mind of the psalmist. He knew that God would respond to the prayer of the destitute and hear their plea.

In verses 18-20 the psalmist called for a record to be written for future generations to read. He wanted future generations to realise that God did care for His people. God did look down from His heavenly sanctuary and see their trouble. His ear listened to the groans of the prisoners. He would release them from the bonds of death. The psalmist understood what it meant to be discouraged and despairing. He experienced the silence of God and the loud mocking cries of the enemy. He knew agony of body and mind. He also knew that his God was enthroned forever. He knew that his God was in control of every event and circumstance of life. For this reason, he wanted to record a written statement for all generations. He wanted those who might face the same trials to realise that their God was enthroned. Their God would care for them.

The psalmist looked forward in time to a day when the name of the Lord would be declared in Zion and His praise

in the city of Jerusalem (verse 21). Out of despair and ruin would arise a cry of praise and thanksgiving. Whole nations would assemble to worship and praise the Lord God of Israel. We are seeing this as the gospel of the Lord Jesus is reaching out to every nation and tribe.

As the psalmist reflected on the suffering and ruins around him, he saw the fragile nature of his life. In an instant, his days could be cut short. He was dependent on God for life and breath. God, on the other hand, was a big God. He laid the foundations of the earth. The heavens were the creative work of His hands. These heavens and the earth would eventually wear out like a garment but God would remain. Time would have no effect on God. He would be the same forever. The contrast is striking. Time will age and weaken us. We will pass away from this life like dust blown by the wind. God alone is constant.

The psalmist concludes with a most wonderful thought. He told his readers that God's children would live in His presence and their descendants would be established before them. That is to say, their descendants would live with them and prosper in God's presence. In a trial filled and turbulent world this thought brings us great comfort. Those who belong to the Lord will know the joy of His presence. They will walk with Him throughout all eternity. This gives us courage to face the trials of this temporary existence. While trials may abound in this life, we have a great hope for all eternity in the presence of our loving Creator and Shepherd

For Consideration:

- Have you ever experienced the silence of God? Why is this silence so difficult for the believer?
- How does the psalmist feel in his trials? What are his physical and emotional symptoms? Can believers experience these symptoms? Explain.
- What role did faith have in the life of the psalmist? Does faith remove our trials and suffering?
- Can you say in your trials that the Lord is enthroned? Is He enthroned in your personal situation? What comfort do you take from this?
- Compare the frailty of human beings with the eternal nature of God. What comfort do you find in the fact that your God is eternal and never changes?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is enthroned no matter what circumstance or trial may come to us.
- Thank the Lord that He is eternal and never changes.
- Ask the Lord to give you the faith of the psalmist to face your personal struggle.
- Thank the Lord that even when we do not see Him, and anxiety and problems keep us awake at night, He remains our God and will come to our aid.
- Thank the Lord for the hope you have of an eternity in His presence. If you do not know Him personally today, ask Him to forgive you and make you His child.

DON'T FORGET HIS BENEFITS

Read Psalm 103:1-22

Have you ever taken the time to consider how blessed you are as a child of God? There are many times in our lives as believers that we get so caught up in the struggles and trials we face, that we lose sight of the wonderful privilege we have of being a child of God. Here in this Psalm the writer recognises this problem and challenges his readers to consider the privilege they have to belong to the Lord and to know His blessings.

As the Psalm opens, the challenge of the psalmist is to praise the Lord. He calls his soul to bow down in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord God. Notice in verse 1 that this praise is from the inmost being. That is to say, it is from his heart and soul. It comes from the place where the deepest gratitude and thanksgiving reside. This praise is not superficial. It is heartfelt and sincere.

In verse 2, the psalmist challenges his soul not to forget the benefits of the Lord. These benefits are for those who know the Lord. The psalmist calls his readers to take a moment to consider all the blessings they had obtained from the Lord. He challenges them never to forget those blessings but to make them the subject of their praise to the Lord their God. To help them in this reflection, the psalmist, over the next several verses, lists the many blessings that are common to all who know the Lord. We will consider these benefits individually.

In verse 3 the first of these benefits is the forgiveness of sin. Where would we be today if it were not for the forgiveness of sin? We were enemies of God and condemned to an eternity of separation from Him. In His grace, the Lord God reached out to us and pardoned our sin. Notice that the Lord is willing to forgive "all" our sins. We may not feel like we deserve to be forgiven of a particular sin but the psalmist reminds us that all our sins can be covered and forgiven by the Lord God. No more will these sins stand between us and our God. We can walk in wonderful fellowship with Him both now and for all eternity.

Notice also in verse 3 that the Lord God heals all their diseases. We should not see from this that as believers we will never be afflicted by disease. The fact that they needed to be healed is an indication that these believers were subject to the same diseases as the unbelieving nations around them. We live in a sinful world in earthly bodies. These earthly bodies are frail and subject to sickness and disease. The reality of the matter is that believers still die from disease and sickness in this life. Some of the most powerful believers I have met have suffered tremendously through sickness and disease. I have often admired a blind friend and his wonderful faith. God has never set him free

from that blindness. There are three things that I would like to say here about this verse.

First, God is able to heal us of all our diseases. Testimonies abound of how the Lord God has set His people free from every disease and sickness known on this earth. I do not believe that there is a disease that God has not demonstrated through one of his children that He is able to conquer. He has set believers free from every disease known to human kind. He is Lord over all disease and sickness. He has proven this. There are, however, times when the Lord will allow a disease or sickness to afflict one of His children to draw them closer to Himself and accomplish greater good.

Second, God's grace is always greater than any disease or sickness with which I will ever be afflicted. I have met individuals who have been in the midst of tremendous suffering and pain but who have demonstrated wonderful victory. Maybe you have met believers on their deathbed who shone with the light of God's glory. They were living in wonderful victory in the suffering and disease that afflicted their body. Though physically afflicted they were spiritually filled with health and vitality.

Finally, the Lord will ultimately remove all sickness and disease from His children. His plan is for our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The day is coming when all sickness and disease will be wiped out. We will live in the presence of the Lord God forever where sin, sickness and disease will never touch us. All disease will be defeated. This is the promise of the Lord God in Revelation 21:4.

The next benefit the psalmist mentions in this psalm is found in verse 4. He reminds his readers that the Lord God redeemed their lives from the pit. The pit here is a

reference to the grave. What the psalmist is telling us is that death, as the ultimate disease, cannot conquer the believer. Our God is Lord over death. He has conquered death and will give us life eternal in His presence where death has no more dominion.

Not only is there victory over death but there is also wonderful victory in life. The psalmist reminded his readers that the Lord God crowned their life with love and compassion. As His children they could face each trial under the gracious love and compassion of their God. They could know that He cared deeply for them. What comfort this was in their afflictions and trials!

As they walked through this life, the Lord God satisfied their desires (verse 5). This is not to say that they got everything they wanted. God did give them all they needed for their hearts to be satisfied. The good things they received from His hand blessed and satisfied them fully. We would do well to pause on this point for a moment. There are times when we are not satisfied in the Christian life. This is not because God has not given us all we need for fullness of joy and complete satisfaction. Often we are not satisfied because we have not learned to be happy with what God has provided. I have had many times in my life when I desired something but when I received it, I quickly lost interest. There are many things we desire in life. The psalmist is *not* telling us that we will always get what we want. He *is* telling us however, that the Lord God is able to satisfy all our desires with good things. We simply need to receive those good things and learn to rejoice in them.

In verse 5, the psalmist reminds us that the Lord God renews our lives like the eagle. The eagle is a symbol of strength and vitality. The Lord gives us all the strength we need as His children. He will equip us to do whatever we

need to do for His glory. His strength will always be equal to the task. God is able to give all the vitality I need to accomplish the task He is calling me to do. How we need to praise Him for the fact that He renews us like the eagle. We can soar in the sky despite the winds of opposition that come our way. We can overcome with the youthful vigour He provides.

In verse 6 we read that the Lord works righteousness and justice for the oppressed. In other words, the Lord God will hear our cause. He always has time for those in need. This life does not always treat us fairly. Sometimes godly and innocent people suffer at the hand of the ungodly. God is not blind to these things. He sees all the injustice and unrighteousness that surround us. We can be assured that the day is coming when He will conquer evil and render justice. What a wonderful hope we have. Righteousness and justice will prevail. God will hear our cry for help. He will treat us with justice and righteousness.

From verse 7 we learn that God reveals His ways and His deeds to His servants. In other words, God will show us the way we need to go. He will not leave us without direction in life. He will walk with us and guide us all the way. More than this, however, God will also make known His deeds. He will show us clear demonstrations of His power. We can know His guidance and His powerful working in us each day.

The Lord is slow to anger and abounds in love. As we live the life of faith, we will stumble on the way. There will be times when we fall. We can take comfort from verse 8. God is not quick to get angry. He treats us with love and compassion. He is full of grace for the person who stumbles and falls. The psalmist tells us in verse 9 that He will not always accuse us. That is to say, there are times when

God will put up with our failures and graciously encourage us along. He knows that we are not perfect. He has great tolerance for our failures and shortcomings. He will not stand over us like a slave master whipping us each time we fail. Instead, like a loving father He gently lifts us back on our feet and encourages us to keep going.

He will not harbour anger forever (verse 9). Yes, there are times when the Lord God will be angry with us. That anger, however, will not last forever. God will forgive our shortcomings. He does not always treat us as our sins deserve (verse 10).

God's love for His children (even with all their shortcomings and inadequacies) is as high as the heavens. This love is so vast, it cannot be measured. He willingly removes our transgressions and sins from us. The psalmist tells us that He removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west. How far is the east from the west? They are in opposite directions. The distance between them can never be measured because the east keeps going in one direction and the west in another. The psalmist is telling us that the distance between us and our sins is an infinite distance that can never be measured. We will never see those sins again.

God treats us like a father. He is loving and compassionate. When we stumble, He picks us up. When we fail He restores us. His love for us is real. His patience with us is unending. His understanding is comforting.

God is vastly different from us. He is eternal; we were created from the dust. He has no beginning or end. We are like the grass that grows up and fades or like flowers that bloom for a moment and then wither. The wind blows these flowers away and they are no more. They live and die in

an instant and are quickly forgotten. God is so different. Despite such differences between us, God's love for us is sure and constant. His love for us lasts from everlasting to everlasting. That same love will be passed on to our children and to all who live in obedience to Him. How this ought to comfort and encourage us!

This God of tremendous love and compassion is a God who sits enthroned in heaven. He reigns over all. There is no greater authority or power. There is no one more worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.

As the psalmist concludes his reflection on the benefits of the Lord, he calls the angels of heaven to praise Him. He calls them to think on such wonderful benefits and marvel at the deeds and compassion of God in heaven. He challenges the angels of heaven to worship God on behalf of all His children who are so blessed.

Not only does the psalmist call the angels of heaven to praise the Lord for His benefits to humankind, but he also calls the works of God everywhere to lift up their voices in testimony to His benefits. What are these works? They are the works of creation which demonstrate His power and glory. They are works of provision for need. They are works of power over enemies. They are works of compassion and tenderness in times of suffering. All these works are to be testimonies of God's great grace. They are loud declarations of His glory and worthiness to be praised.

Lastly, the psalmist calls for his own soul to rejoice and give glory to the Lord for all His benefits. That call goes out to us personally as well. What benefits have you received as a child of God? May your soul rise up in praise and thanksgiving for these wonderful benefits. May they never be forgotten.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever grumbled against the Lord and His provision? Do you have reason to rejoice in the benefits of the Lord? Explain.
- Does knowing the benefits of the Lord mean that we never have to face difficulty and struggle in this life?
- Are you satisfied? What is the difference between getting what we want and being satisfied with what God has given?
- How have you experienced God's enabling and renewing in your life?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God treats us like a father? What does this mean for us when we fall short of His standard?
- Take a moment to consider the blessings the Lord has given you in life.

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for several benefits He has given you personally.
- Ask the Lord to teach you to be fully satisfied in His goodness toward you.
- Ask God to give you more courage to walk in obedience. Ask Him to enable you to take greater steps of faith, knowing how much He loves you and will forgive any shortcomings.
- Are you in need of strength for a task today? Ask the Lord to renew you like the eagle so that you can soar in His strength and enabling.

PRAISE TO OUR CREATOR AND SUSTAINER

Read Psalm 104:1-35

In Psalm 103 the psalmist called his readers to reflect on the wonderful benefits the Lord their God had for all who loved Him. Here in psalm 104 he focused his attention on the way God both created and sustained His creation.

He began, in verses 1-2, by reflecting briefly on the majesty of the Lord God. The psalmist reminds us that the Lord God is a great God who is clothed with splendour and majesty. These are the qualities of God that make Him worthy of honour and adoration. When we see splendour and majesty we are struck with awe. Our desire is to bow in worship and admiration. The psalmist is telling us that God is clothed with majesty and splendour.

In verse 2 he attempts to describe some of that splendour and majesty. He tells us that the Lord wrapped Himself in light like a garment. If you have ever tried to look at the sun in all its brilliance you would have some understanding of

what the psalmist is trying to convey here. He is telling us that the brilliance and majesty of the Lord God was such that it was difficult to gaze upon. His presence was no ordinary presence. When He appeared, things changed. All thoughts were on Him. Nothing else mattered.

This God of splendour and majesty was an all-powerful God. He stretched out the heavens like a tent. If you have ever contemplated the vastness of the universe and immensity of the sky you will realize that the One who stretched out the heavens is an awesome and powerful God.

Not only did God stretch out the heavens above the earth but the psalmist reminds his readers that He also laid the beams of the upper chambers on their waters. The reference is to the sky with all the water it contained. That psalmist imagines a vast supply of water that was the reservoir from which the earth was watered. He tells us that God built the upper room of heaven to contain the rain and the snow. We need to see this in a poetic sense.

The clouds of the heavens were the chariots in which God rode from place to place. He rode on the wings of the wind. Again we need to see this verse in a poetic sense. God does not literally drive on chariots made from clouds driven here and there by the wind. The idea in the psalmist's mind is that that Lord God was over the skies. The clouds and the winds were His servants. They did as He commanded. He makes this clear when he tells us in verse 4 that the winds were His messengers and flames of fire His servants. Because the psalmist speaks of the heavens, it may be possible for us to understand the "flames of fire" to be lightning. The winds and lightning are all under the authority of the Lord God of heaven. He controls them and uses them as He sees fit.

From his reflection on the heavens the psalmist turns to the earth. He tells his readers that the Lord also set the foundations of the earth so that it could not be moved. The earth as we know it has been in existence for thousands of years. It has stood firm though plagued by storm, disease and the sinful hearts of humankind. God has set it in place and there it will remain until such time as He determines its end.

God covered the earth with waters. Those waters clothe the earth like a garment. Notice in verse 6 how the psalmist tells us that the waters stood above the mountains. This may be a reference to the shape of the ocean floor. Under the ocean floor deep valleys and mountains exist. The waters of the ocean cover those tall mountains.

From verse 7 we understand that the waters of the earth are themselves, like the forces of the heavens, all under the control of the Lord God. At His rebuke the waters flee. They take flight at the sound of His thunder. They flow down the mountains and into the valley in obedience to the purpose and plan of the Lord God their Creator. God had a place assigned for each stream and river. He set a boundary that they could not cross so that they would never again cover the entire earth. This may be a reference to the flood of Noah's day when the Lord God covered the whole earth with water and destroyed it. The psalmist is telling us that God is in control of this great and powerful force of nature. It must listen to His voice and obey His call.

The springs of water that God causes to flow from the mountains pour down into the lower regions; giving water to the beasts that live there (verses 10-11). The birds of the air make their nest by the waters and in them find life. They sing as they sit in the trees sustained by the waters

God causes to flow for their benefit. All this water comes from the Lord God and is stored in His upper chamber. That water satisfies and sustains life on the earth. It is a wonderful gift of God and evidence of His compassion and care for creation.

The Lord God also makes the grass grow for the cattle of the earth. He allows the plants of the earth to gladden the hearts of human beings. He gives them wine to gladden their hearts, oil to make their face shine and bread to sustain their heart. It is important that we consider this for a moment. The Lord God is concerned not only to sustain us but to give us quality of life. Notice how He gives wine to gladden and oil to make our face shine. God does far more than keep us alive; He gives us a joyous and blessed life. There are times when we have the idea that the Lord only wants to give us what we need to survive. The reality is that He delights to give us far more. His resources are not limited. He is able to give all we need and even more.

In verses 16-17 the psalmist turns his attention to the trees of the earth. Notice how he calls them the trees of the Lord. They all belong to Him. In verse 16, the psalmist tells his readers that these trees were both planted and watered by the Lord. The imagery here is of a gardener taking care of his precious plants. There in those trees the birds made their homes. They delighted in the trees the Lord planted and watered.

On the high mountains the goats and coneys roamed. The coney is assumed to be some kind of rock badger. There in the isolation and quietness of the high mountains these wild animals lived and played.

The lights of the heavens had their order. They were created by the Lord God. The moon marked off seasons in a

regular way. The sun marked off each day. The sun knew when to go down and to rise. All of this is marvellous. The order and harmony, in which these lights function, is amazing. Our God brought this order.

When the sun went down, darkness filled the earth. That did not mean that life ceased. This was time for wild animals to prowl. The lions lay in their dens during the day but when the sun went down they rose to seek their food. Man, on the other hand, enjoyed the light of the sun and rose up when it was light to work. Even in this, there is order; the darkness for the prowling animals and the light for working man.

The earth, according to the psalmist, was filled with the wonderful works of God. God made each creature with His marvellous wisdom. The sea was teeming with numerous creatures. On the surface ships went to and fro. Under the surface, the great sea monsters played. Each had its place. Again we see the harmony that exists in creation.

All of God's creatures were dependant on Him for their food and livelihood. Each received from God what they needed. God satisfied the need of all of His living creatures. Again, if we take a moment to reflect on this, we can only marvel at the wonderful provision of God and His watchfulness over all His creatures, both great and small.

If God were ever to hide His face from any of His creatures they would be terrified. All hope would perish. They would return to the dust from which they were created. Only by the grace of God do they live. How absolutely dependent we are on God for all things. When God sends His Spirit life comes into being (verse 30). When His Spirit moves the whole earth is renewed and brought to life, but when He removes that Spirit, all life perishes. How utterly

dependant on God and His Spirit we are. Everything we have comes from Him.

For this reason the psalmist concludes by saying: "May the glory of the LORD endure forever." All these works of the Lord are glorious and wonderful works. The psalmist delighted to see the harmony and life giving work of God in creation. This harmony and life reflected the glory of God. The psalmist wanted this to endure forever. Without this glorious work of God, nothing would exist. In calling for the glory of the Lord to endure, the psalmist is recognizing His absolute dependence on God for all things.

Notice also in verse 31 that the desire of the Lord is to rejoice in His works. What we need to understand here is that the Lord delights in giving life to His creatures. He delights in sustaining and keeping them. It is also the desire of the Lord to rejoice in us, His creation, as we walk faithfully with Him.

It is astonishing to the psalmist that the Lord God, who gives such life and harmony to the earth, is a God who also caused the earth to tremble when He looked at it. The mountains would smoke at the simple touch of His hand. This same God was so gentle that He gave life to even the smallest of His creatures. For this wonderful truth, the psalmist would praise the Lord all of his life (verse 33).

As he concludes his meditation on the Creator and Sustainer of life, the desire of the psalmist is that this would be pleasing to the Lord. It was his desire that God would notice his meditation and the reflections of his heart and rejoice in them. How wonderful it is to know that we can please the Lord by our worship and praise. He notices our heart attitude and delights in our praise.

So strong were his feelings toward God that the psalmist desired that all sinners would vanish from the earth and that wicked people would be no more. When he considered the wonderful works of the Lord God and His gentle care for His creation, it repulsed the psalmist to think that there would be individuals who would rebel against such a delightful God. It grieved his heart that there would be people who cared nothing about the Lord and His ways. His desire was that the Lord be praised by all who lived on the earth. May that be our desire as well.

For Consideration:

- What is splendour and majesty? How is God a God of splendour and majesty?
- Consider the vastness of creation. What does this tell us about God?
- The psalmist reminds us that the Lord God is in control of all of His creation. What encouragement do you find in this?
- What do we learn here about the gentleness of God?
- Does God delight in providing, sustaining and blessing? What comfort and challenge do you find in this?
- Consider what the psalmist tells us here about God. Why is sin and rebellion against such a God so awful in this light?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

- How has God personally demonstrated His gentle care to you over the last week? Thank Him personally for this.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times when you failed to recognise your absolute need of Him for all things.
- Thank the Lord that He delights in providing for and blessing you personally.

PRAISE TO A COVENANT KEEPING GOD

Read Psalm 105:1-45

As we examine Psalm 105 we see that God is a covenant keeping God. In Psalm 103, the psalmist spoke of the general benefits the Lord gives His people. In Psalm 104 he challenged his readers to consider that God was their Creator and Sustainer. In Psalm 105 the psalmist calls the people of God to look at their history and see how the Lord God had entered a very special covenant relationship with them.

In the first seven verses of this psalm, the psalmist calls his people to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Lord God. He challenges them to do so in a variety of ways. In verse 1 he challenged the believers to give thanks to the Lord. While, in this context, the reason for that thanksgiving was related to the fact that God had entered a special relationship with His people, there is any number of reasons why we need to give thanks to the Lord. Believers are to be characterized as being a thankful people.

Notice also the challenge of the psalmist for his people to call on the name of the Lord. What a wonderful privilege we have to be able to call on the name of the Lord God. We can come to Him at any time. We call on Him to praise Him and thank Him and we call on Him to minister to us in our time of need. As we call on the name of the Lord we do so recognizing that He is the source of our strength. He is our hope, assurance and comfort. In calling on His name, we recognize Him as the Sovereign Lord over our situations.

We are not to keep the blessings of the Lord to ourselves. The psalmist goes on to tell his readers to make the deeds of the Lord known among the nations. We want everyone to know what the Lord has done for us. Our excitement about the Lord and His deeds is such that we cannot keep it to ourselves. We want the whole earth to know the beauty of our Lord.

Our praise of the Lord explodes in songs from our lips. Songs and music is a natural expression of joy and happiness. Even young children express their joy and contentment through song. The believer is one whose joy is to bubble over in glad songs of praise to the Lord. These songs express the acts of the Lord and declare them to all who will listen (verse 2).

In verse 3 the psalmist tells his readers to glory in the holy name of the Lord. The word glory could also be translated by the phrase "boast in." In other words, the person who glories in the name of the Lord is one who boasts of the Lord and His deeds. Notice in particular that His name is a holy name. That is, it is perfect and without sin in any form. This is something to boast about. We have a holy and

perfect God who is completely separated from sin in any form. There is no god like Him. We boast of His character and His acts. We are called to let everyone know the wonderful things our God has done.

Also in verse 3 the psalmist tells his readers to let their hearts rejoice in the Lord. Rejoicing is to be a characteristic of the believer. It is a natural expression of the heart of praise and thanksgiving. There are many things the believer has to rejoice in. Often however, we allow the cares and concerns of the world to come between us and this rejoicing. We are to let our hearts rejoice in the Lord. We are not to allow anything to come between us and this rejoicing.

In verse 4 the psalmist challenges believers to look to the Lord and His strength. There will be times of trouble and difficulty in this world. There will be times of pain and suffering. In those times we are to look to the Lord and draw on His strength. In that strength we find all we need to conquer and overcome the enemy.

We are also to seek the face of the Lord. It is the face of the Lord that brings courage. When we do not see His face we lose hope. When we see His face, all our problems and difficulties seem smaller. We know when we see Him that there is nothing He cannot handle. The enemy will try to get our attention away from the Lord and His smiling face.

In verse 5 we are encouraged to remember the wonders the Lord has done. We are to always keep before us the remembrance of the mighty deeds of the Lord. We are to remember the miracles He has accomplished in our lives and the lives of those who have gone before us. We are to remember how He judged sin and evil and brought justice

to the righteous. In times of trial and struggle, we are to remind ourselves of the powerful working of the Lord.

The psalmist reminds us in verse 7 that the Lord God is the Lord over all. He was a God of justice who would judge the whole earth. More than this, however, He was a covenant God who entered into a covenant relationship with His people. As a covenant God He promised to care for His people and provide for them. In return, He asked His people to honour Him and keep His commandments. They were to be faithful to Him alone and turn from all other gods.

God's covenant relationship with His people was forever. He would not forget them. He made this covenant with Abraham. He swore an oath to Isaac to be his God and the God of his descendants. He confirmed this covenant with Jacob. He promised to give His people the land of Canaan as their inheritance at a time when the land belonged to other nations. The Lord God protected His people. They were small and without a home but God kept them as they wandered from one nation to another. He gave them victory over stronger kings who could have oppressed and overtaken them (verse 14, 15).

God called down famine on the land and destroyed the supply of food so that His own people were forced to go into exile. He allowed Joseph to go before them as a slave, sold by his own brothers. Joseph's feet were bruised by the shackles put around his ankles. His neck was put in irons. All this seemed hard to understand, but unknown to His people, this cruel act would prove to be their deliverance. The psalmist reminds us in verse 19 that all this was prophesied before it came to pass. God would be true to His word.

In time, Joseph was released from prison and became the ruler of the land. Joseph was put in charge of everything the king of Egypt possessed and given responsibility over the princes and elders of the land. Joseph was ruler in the land of Egypt when the Israelites came to live there because of the famine. Under his administration, Israel prospered and became too numerous for Egypt.

In time the Egyptians would despise God's people. They would make them slaves and subject them to cruel and harsh labour. Again God sent a servant to their aid. Moses and Aaron were chosen to be the deliverers of God's people. Through powerful acts and miraculous signs, they demonstrated the power of the Lord and His faithful watchful care over His people.

God sent darkness over the land of Egypt. He turned their water into blood. He caused the fish of their waters to die. He sent a plague of frogs throughout the land. Swarms of flies and gnats filled the land and troubled the people. Rain, hail and lightning devastated Egypt. Vines and fig trees were shattered. Locusts and grasshoppers devoured the green vegetation. The firstborn of every home perished, crushing the spirits of the inhabitants of Egypt. In the end, Israel left Egypt, "laden with silver and gold," the spoil of God's battle with Egypt on their behalf. Egypt offered little resistance to the fleeing Israelites loaded down with their wealth. They were glad to see them go.

It would have been difficult for Joseph, bound in shackles, heading to Egypt as a slave, to see the faithfulness of a covenant keeping God. It would have been difficult for Israel, beaten by the cruel Egyptian whip, to understand God's wonderful faithfulness. Only as we look back in time can we see God's grace and mercy toward His people. What appears to be a trial is in reality the hand of a loving

God preparing us for greater victory. Through the slavery of Joseph, God provided a way for Israel to be blessed and enriched in Egypt. Through the plagues that ravaged Egypt, God provided a means of escape. He was faithful to His people.

God kept His people as they wandered in the wilderness. When Egypt came after them, He spread out a cloud to separate them from His people. That cloud and fire also directed His people through the wilderness. When Israel asked for quail, the Lord showered them down from heaven so that they were filled and satisfied. When they were thirsty, the Lord opened a rock so that water gushed out like a river, satisfying their thirst.

God did all these things because He was a covenant keeping God who remembered the promises He made to Abraham. God brought His people out of the land of their bondage with shouts of rejoicing and joy (verse 43). He gave them the land He had promised to them. They inherited a land for which they had not worked. All that God asked was that they keep His precepts and walk in His ways. He wanted them to be a light. He wanted them to shine with His beauty in a dark world. He wanted them to be His people, living and rejoicing in His blessings.

God delights to reach out to His people. Though at times we must pass through trials and difficulties, the Lord keeps His people. He provides for them in their time of need and even before they enter into their suffering, prepares a way out for them. He is a God who delights in relationship with His people. He delights to shower His blessing on us. All He asks is that we enjoy those blessings and surrender to Him and His ways. He is a covenant God, a God of unbreakable commitment. How we need to thank Him that we who know Him can be assured of His wonderful love

and mercy. May God give us hearts to live in His grace and surrender to His purposes.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to call out to the Lord? What comfort do you find in the fact that you can call out to the Lord God?
- What has God done for you personally this last week? Have you had opportunities to share these good things with others?
- What does it mean to glory or boast in the Lord? What cause do you have to boast about the Lord and His work in your life today?
- What comfort do you take from the fact that God is a covenant keeping God? Why would God want to enter a covenant relationship with us?
- What does this psalm teach us about the way that God can use even what appears to be trials to accomplish good in the lives of His people.

For Prayer:

- What trials are you facing today? Take a moment to thank the Lord that He is a covenant keeping God and will keep you through those trials.
- Take a moment to "glory in the Lord." Consider His wonderful deeds and character. Praise Him for who He is and what He has done.
- Thank the Lord for a time when He used what appeared to be suffering and trial to accomplish good in your life.

OBEDIENCE, PROSPERITY, JOY AND THANKFULNESS

Read Psalm 106:1-48

In Psalm 106 the psalmist reflects on the grace, mercy and love of God toward His people. He is very conscious of the fact that these people had often rebelled against God and His ways but God still reached out to them in grace and forgiveness. Psalm 106 is a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving to a God of mercy, grace and forgiveness.

The psalmist begins with a word of praise to God and His goodness. He recognized that the Lord God was good. There was no evil in Him. Everything He did was perfect and holy. We can take great comfort in the fact that our God is unaffected by sin and evil.

Notice in verse 1 that the Lord God is also a God of love. The psalmist reminded his readers here that the love of the Lord lasted forever. God's love would never cease. In particular we see that the love of the Lord remained even when God's people had turned their backs on Him. Not

even the rebellion of His people could keep God from loving them.

In verse 2 the psalmist reflected on the mighty acts of the Lord. As he examined the history of His people there were many examples of God's powerful acts. God divided waters, brought food from heaven and destroyed His enemies. No other god was as powerful as the Lord God of Israel. The psalmist realized that no human tongue could ever fully describe the wonder of the mighty works of God.

The awesome power, goodness and love of God were such that our only legitimate response was to live in obedience and respect for Him and His ways. In verse 3 the psalmist told his readers that those who maintained justice and did what was right were blessed. They were blessed because they were living in harmony with God and His ways. That was not the case, however, for those who turned from God. We will see in this psalm that the people of God wandered from the Lord. There are those who say that because God is good and His love is forever then they can live the life they want to live. What the psalmist is telling us here is that while there is forgiveness from God, true blessing can only be found in obedience.

The psalmist wanted to know the blessing and favour of God that came from obedience to His purposes. In verse 4 he asked the Lord to remember him when He showed favour to His people. He wanted to experience and know the salvation and victory of the Lord. He wanted to experience the personal touch of the Lord. He wanted to live in the prosperity of those who belonged to the Lord and share in their joy and thanksgiving.

Notice the three things that the psalmist said belonged to the "chosen ones" of God. First, they enjoyed prosperity.

The word prosperity in our day seems to refer to riches. The word in the Hebrew context is much broader than this. It refers to the wellbeing of the whole person. He speaks here about the beauty, gladness, and favour that God gives to those who belong to Him. The chosen ones of God are blessed in many ways. Material blessing is only a small part of the prosperity that God gives. The prosperity of the chosen ones of God is also spiritual, emotional and practical. As children of God, we are blessed abundantly in every way.

Secondly, the chosen ones of God are a joyous people. The psalmist wants to share in the joy of God's chosen ones. God's people have much for which to thank Him. They have received the favour of God and are walking in the midst of His marvellous blessing. For this they are filled with joy. It is the desire of God that His children walk in joy.

Third, notice that the chosen ones of God are a thankful people (verse 5). They do not take what God has done for granted. They do not deserve the favour of God but they are experiencing it nonetheless. For this they are truly thankful.

After reminding his readers of the blessings of God and the characteristics of a "chosen one," the psalmist turns his attention to the history of his people. God's people did not always demonstrate the characteristics of the chosen people of God. In fact they had turned against God and rebelled against His purposes. Like their fathers and mothers before them, God's people were constantly walking in rebellion against their Creator and Lord.

In verse 7 the psalmist reminded his readers that their fathers and mothers did not take the time to reflect on God's wonderful miracles when they were in Egypt. God's people

were held as slaves in Egypt. The Lord God set them free from their bondage and slavery. Through mighty deeds and miracles, He brought the nation of Egypt to its knees. God's people were marvellously delivered from the hands of their oppressors. God's people did not remember His kindness for long. Just after leaving the land of their bondage, they arrived at the Rea Sea. Here the Egyptian army came after them. Seeing the army racing toward them, the people of God began to grumble and complain. They thought that they were going to perish at the hands of Egypt. They failed to remember how the Lord had set them free. They doubted that God could do anything about their problem now. We so easily begin to doubt God's purposes. This is what Israel did just after being delivered from their bondage. In just a few short days, Israel began to grumble and doubt the power of their God to save them.

Despite their grumbling and doubts, the Lord God saved His people from their enemies. In verses 8-9 the psalmist alluded to the way in which God parted the seas to let His people walk across on dry land. He rebuked the seas and they covered the pursuing Egyptian army, destroying them completely. Notice that this victory did not come as a result of great faith and obedience on the part of God's chosen ones. God's people experienced victory only because of His grace and mercy. They did not deserve that He should show them victory. They had no faith. They were grumbling and complaining against God. Despite their failures, God still defeated their enemies.

God then led His people through the desert. It would have been so easy for God to leave His people in their rebellion to perish at the Red Sea. God's grace and mercy were immense, however, and so He continued to bless and lead them.

God's hand was on His people through the wilderness. At the Red Sea, God saved His people from the approaching Egyptian army. The waters covered their enemy and not a single one survived. For a moment, this renewed Israel's confidence in God. At the Red Sea, God's people sang praise to Him for victory over their enemies.

That renewed confidence in God and His work did not last very long. In verse 13 God's people soon forgot what He had done. In the desert they gave into their cravings and put God to the test. Instead of waiting for God and His guidance, they took matters into their own hands. They grumbled and complained against God. God gave them over to disease to teach them a lesson (verse 15).

God's people did not wait for His counsel. There have been many times in my life when the pressures of life have weighed on me and I felt I needed to take matters into my own hands instead of waiting for the Lord and His wisdom. I have often learned the hard way that I should have waited and not been so quick to step out in my own understanding. In time of trouble the Lord calls us to wait for His counsel and trust in His leading. God's people did not do this.

In verse 16 the psalmist reminds his people of how their fathers and mothers grew envious of Moses and Aaron. They questioned why Moses and Aaron were chosen by God. They felt that they were as good as their leaders and began to be jealous of their calling. They rebelled against Moses and Aaron and grumbled against the purpose of God for them. In His anger, the Lord struck those individuals. He opened the earth and it swallowed the complainers. God consumed these wicked men and their followers.

God's people also rebelled against Him at Horeb when they made a golden calf and worshiped it instead of God.

In doing so, the psalmist tells us that they exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull that ate grass. Their God had delivered them from Egypt but they so despised Him that they chose to worship an image of a bull rather than their Deliverer. What an insult this was to the Lord God!

God was so angry with His people for this insulting and blasphemous act that He determined to destroy them. Moses pleaded with God for mercy. He stood in the gap between a holy God and His sinful people. Moses prayed that God would deliver His people and God listened and forgave them.

When Moses sent servants to spy out the land that God had promised, on hearing of the walled cities and strong armies in the land, they told Moses that they wanted to return to Egypt. They forgot the power and deliverance of the Lord their God. They refused to believe that God would give them this land as He promised. They believed instead that their enemies would overcome them. They grumbled and complained against God and His ways. Because of their continued doubt, God determined that all who left Egypt would fall in the desert and not see the land He had promised.

God's chosen ones worshipped Baal and ate sacrifices to pagan and lifeless gods. They provoked the Lord to anger. Numbers 25 recounts the story of how God's people resorted to Baal worship. Baal worship involved the practice of sexual immorality. Because of these sinful practices, a plague broke out against the people of Israel. As they wept over their sins, an Israelite man took a Midianite woman into his tent (obviously to have sexual relations with her). Phinehas went over to the tent and killed both the man and the woman for their blasphemous and sinful behaviour.

The result was that that plague broke and God's blessing was restored to His people.

Later by the waters of Meribah, Israel again angered God by grumbling and complaining because of a lack of water. God's people had seen so much of God's miraculous works but they were still not able to trust Him. They could not learn from the past. They could not believe that God could do what He had done in the past. They complained to Moses about their need. They rebelled against the Spirit of God. Even Moses fell into sin at this time when he lashed out with angry words against his people for their rebellion.

When they entered the land God had promised them, Israel refused to destroy the sinful inhabitants of the land as He had commanded them. Instead, they allowed them to remain with all their evil practices. They began to mingle with them and adopt their evil customs. They were to be a holy people but they refused to walk in the ways of the Lord. Instead, they began to worship the idols of the nations. The people of the land became a snare to them and turned them away from their God. Israel began to follow the detestable practices of these nations. They sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons. They shed the blood of their innocent children, offering them as sacrifices to the idols of Canaan. They defiled the land with this innocent blood. They prostituted themselves both physically and spiritually. In doing this, they despised the inheritance the Lord had given them. They desecrated the land with their evil, showing no respect for God and His gift to them.

Because they despised the gift He had given them, God took it from them. He gave them over to other nations who oppressed them. They wanted to be like the other nations.

God handed them over to the nations they wanted to be like. Those nations oppressed and ruled over them.

God did not abandon His people. Many times He delivered them from the hands of their enemies. When they cried out to Him, His heart was touched and He set them free. Over and over again, however, God's people would return to evil. Their hearts were bent on rebellion.

They wasted away in their sin and rebellion. The prosperity, joy and thankfulness were stripped from them. Instead, they wasted away under sin and rebellion. There was no future in sin but God's people seem to be attracted to it and would not remain true to their God.

In verse 44 the psalmist reminds us that God took note of the distress of His people and heard their cry. He remembered His covenant with them and, out of love for them, He reached out to deliver. He caused them to be pitied by all who held them so that they were merciful to them. They were released from the grip of their enemies. They did not deserve such compassion but they experienced it just the same.

As the psalmist concludes, he called on the Lord to save His people and gather them from the nations so that they could give thanks to His holy name. There is great courage on the part of the psalmist here. He knows how rebellious his people have been and how they have tried the patience of the Lord. He still does not hesitate to come to the Lord asking yet for more forgiveness and grace. He understood that while the anger and wrath of God were very real so was His patience, mercy and forgiveness. He prays that God would restore the prosperity, joy and thankfulness of His people.

The challenge of this psalm is for us as well. The psalmist reminds us that blessing awaits those who fear God and walk in His truth. While God was merciful to His people, they often did not walk in the fullness of God's blessing. As His people today we are often in the same situation. We too have tried the patience of our God. We have often wandered from His purpose. How we need to thank Him that He is a loving and forgiving God. He calls us back to Himself to walk in the fullness of His blessing, joy and thankfulness. May this be our experience.

For Consideration:

- What comfort do you find in the fact that the love of the Lord is forever?
- Can we live as we please because we know that the love of the Lord is forever? What does the psalmist teach us about living in obedience?
- What "prosperity" has the Lord brought you since you have come to Him? What blessings have you experienced in Him?
- Do you have a joyful and thankful heart as a believer?
- Have you ever forgotten the faithfulness and power of God? Why is it so hard to remember these things in our trials?
- What do we learn in this psalm about the sin of grumbling and complaining?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His wonderful love that lasts forever.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His blessing and favour in your life.
- Ask the Lord to fill you with joy and thanksgiving as you walk in obedience to His purpose.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have grumbled and complained about His ways and purposes for your life.
- Ask God to give you greater confidence and trust in Him in your time of need.

GOODNESS AND LOVE

Read Psalm 107:1-43

The challenge of the psalmist in Psalm 107 is for the believer who has experienced the wonderful blessings of the Lord in his or her life. He calls us to examine the blessings of the Lord and give thanks to Him. The Lord Jesus told a story in Luke 17 of ten lepers who had been healed. Only one of them returned to thank Him for his healing. In recent years I have become more conscious of the fact that we ask for much but give thanks for little. The psalmist is calling us to be a people of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord for His wonderful blessings.

As he begins, the psalmist calls his people to praise and thank the Lord for His goodness and love. He reminds them that the love of the Lord endures forever. Nothing would change the love of God for them.

For the psalmist it was important that the redeemed praise and thank the Lord (verse 2). Every day we wake this ought to be our prayer: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" (verse 1). When trials and tribulations come our way

our song should be: "His love endures forever." It ought to be our joy and delight to reflect on His goodness and give Him praise.

God had done much for His people. He had delivered them from the hands of their enemies. God's people had been scattered to the far corners of the earth because of their sin but God gathered them from those distant lands. They returned from the east, west, north and south and He gave them the land He had promised them. They did not deserve such mercy but they received it from His hands.

Some of those who were scattered found no place to call their home. Instead, they wandered in desert wastelands finding no place to settle. These individuals were hungry and thirsty. Their lives were fading away. All this happened because they had turned their back on God. In their helplessness they cried out to the Lord. He saw them in their distress and came to their aid. He led them to a city in which they could settle. There they would have land and a place of shelter. There in that city they could raise their families and be secure.

The psalmist calls these individuals to raise a cry of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for His unfailing love and wonderful deeds. He was a God who satisfied the thirsty and filled the hungry with good things. He deserved their praise.

There were others who were kept in prisons of deep darkness and gloom. These individuals suffered in iron chains. Their freedom was stripped from them as their enemies held them in captivity. Verse 11 makes it clear that these particular individuals were guilty and deserved their punishment. They had "rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High." They were being

punished for their sin. These individuals were subjected to bitter labour. They stumbled and fell under the load and there was no one to help them (verse 12). In their distress, they cried out to the Lord. Despite their rebellion, the Lord God came to them. He saved them from their distress. He brought them out of the darkness of their prison cells and broke their chains. He showed them mercy and love.

Again in verse 15 the psalmist called these individuals to give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love. This was a love that remained sure despite their rebellion and sin. They were to give thanks to the Lord because He was a God who broke down strong gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. He was able to deliver His people from the strongest prison. He would do this even though they were a rebellious and sinful people. His love for them would remain.

There was another group of people in the land. These individuals, according to verse 17, had become fools through their rebellious ways. They were not cast into prison but they were still prisoners. As fools they despised wisdom. The wisdom spoken of here is the wisdom of God. These individuals wanted to do their own thing. They were rebellious in their ways and deeds. God delivered them over to their rebellion. Verse 17 tells us that they suffered affliction because of their iniquities. We are not told what happened to these people but we are given a hint in verse 18. Here the psalmist tells us that they loathed all food and drew near to the gates of death. Could it be that these individuals were struck with sickness and disease? They were prisoners to their disease and sickness. This too was a punishment from God because of their evil and rebellious ways. They brought this sickness on themselves. They wasted away because of the effects of sin in their lives. In

their distress, these people too cried out to the Lord and He heard their cry.

He reached out to them also and healed them of their sickness. He rescued them from the grave and restored their health.

The psalmist called these individuals also to give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and wonderful deeds (verse 20). They were to bring a sacrifice of thanks to the Lord their God and tell of His works with their songs of joy (verse 22).

The next group the psalmist speaks to buried themselves in wealth and earthly prosperity. In verse 23 these individuals went out to sea in ships. The psalmist tells us in verse 23 that they were merchants on the mighty waters. They too were rebelling against the Lord and His ways. They too were caught up in prison cells of materialism and greed. Their prosperity was not a blessing but a curse for them because it took them away from their God.

The Lord revealed Himself to these merchants on the sea. They saw His "wonderful deeds in the deep." They were without excuse because God spoke to them in the tempests and the waves that crashed against their ships. Like Jonah the prophet, God was trying to get the attention of these wanderers. God was in the storms of the sea. He pursued them in their wandering. In the waves of the storm their ships mounted to the heavens and went down to the depths. Their courage melted as they feared for their lives.

Like drunken men they staggered and reeled on the decks of their ships. They were brought to the end of themselves and they did not know what to do. Their wealth and prosperity could not help. They had wandered from the one

true God. They had bowed down to the god of materialism and wealth. Now they saw their sin and the futility of their ways. They too cried out to the Lord in their distress and God answered.

God stilled the storm "to a whisper." He hushed the waves of the rebellious sea. The stress and turmoil gave way to calm and peaceful seas. They were glad in this calm. They found a peace and security that material possessions could not give. Their peace and security was not in wealth and prosperity but in the knowledge of forgiveness and a restored relationship with their God. They did not deserve that God should fill them with such peace and calm. They had turned from Him to worship their prosperity and wealth. God pursued them and brought them back. For this reason the psalmist called these merchants to give thanks to the Lord. They were to exalt Him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. The fact that they are associated with the elders (leaders) of the land shows us that these individuals were influential in the community.

In verse 33-34 the psalmist reminded His people that the God of Israel was a God who turned rivers into deserts and flowing springs into thirsty ground. He could take fruitful land and make it like a salted waste. He would do this because of sin and evil. While the God of Israel was the source of all blessing, He could quickly remove those blessings if His people persisted in their sin.

On the other hand, this same God turned deserts into pools of water and parched ground into flowing springs. He gave the hungry life and a city where they could settle. Because of His blessing their vineyards produced fruitful harvests. They increased in number as the Lord gave them

many children. Even their herds did not diminish in size. God was the source of their blessing.

Instead of remaining in His blessing, however, God's people wandered from Him. They turned their backs on Him and chose to live their own way. This resulted in a decrease of their numbers. From the context of this psalm they were scattered, imprisoned, struck with sickness and disease and fell prey to materialism and greed. In their punishment, they were humbled. Calamity and sorrow struck them. They were oppressed and defeated and their sorrow increased. Many of them were forced to wander in "trackless wastes" (verse 40). In other words, they were lost and without direction. This was the result of their rebellion against God.

God did not leave them in their mess. He lifted them out of their affliction. He met them in their struggle. In His mercy, He again increased their families. He restored His blessing on unworthy and rebellious sinners.

As he concludes, the psalmist told his readers that the upright would see the things he was telling them and rejoice but the wicked would shut their mouths. It is not that the wicked did not see these things. They saw and understood what the psalmist was telling them. The difference between the upright and the wicked had to do with their response to the truth the psalmist was declaring. The upright rejoiced. The wicked shut their mouths. In other words, the wicked refused to give thanks and praise to the Lord. They closed their mouths when they should have opened them in praise and thanksgiving. The refusal to praise and thank the Lord is the sin of the wicked. The final words of the psalmist challenge us:

"Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD" (verse 43).

For Consideration:

- What does this psalm teach us about the importance of thankfulness? What does it teach us about the sin of not being thankful?
- Can you give thanks even when things are not going as you thought they should?
- What does this psalm teach us about the forgiveness and patience of God?
- What do we learn in this psalm about the discipline of God and His mercy in discipline?
- Can we find true security and peace in the things of this world? What does this psalm have to teach us about true peace and security?
- Have you ever walked away from God and His blessings? Why is this so easy to do?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you more of an attitude of thanksgiving and praise when things don't seem to be going your way.
- Ask God to give you grace to remain under the shadow of His blessings. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have walked away from those blessings.
- Ask God to forgive you for times you were not thankful and filled with praise to Him for His goodness toward you.

A CRY FOR HELP

Read Psalm 108:1-109:31

Believers sometimes face very difficult struggles in life. Those struggles can overwhelm them. In these next two psalms the psalmist openly shares his heart and thoughts in a difficult time of struggle.

The psalmist begins by reminding God that his heart was steadfast (108:1). While there were difficulties and struggles in life for the psalmist, he remained faithful to the Lord and His purposes. This is what the Lord is calling all of us to do. He is calling us to be patient in suffering and trial. He is calling us to wait on Him and His purposes. He is calling us to be faithful no matter what might happen to us.

Because he trusted the Lord and His loving-kindness the psalmist could remain steadfast. It was from this heart of confidence in God that he could sing and make music even in times of trouble and suffering. In Psalm 108:2 he called for the harp and the lyre to awake and bring forth their music. He commits himself, as a trusting servant of the Lord,

to awake early to praise and thank Him for His goodness and love.

Not only would he praise the Lord personally but the psalmist also committed himself to praising the Lord among the nations. He wanted the world to know the forgiveness and blessing of the Lord. His experience of God was too good to keep to himself. The whole world had to know.

Notice in particular what caused the psalmist to rejoice with thanksgiving. He told his readers that the love of the Lord was higher than the heavens and His faithfulness reached the sky (108:4). In other words, if you were to pile up the expressions of God's love and faithfulness to His people they would reach the sky. They could not be counted.

For such love and mercy, the psalmist's heart was to see the Lord be exalted above the heavens (108:5). That is to say, he wanted the Lord's name to be praised by all heavenly beings for such grace and mercy shown on earth. Notice also that his desire was to see God's glory all over the earth (108:5). He wanted the Lord to manifest His presence in power on the earth so that the world would know He was God and bow down in adoration and worship.

In Psalm 108:6 the psalmist called out to the Lord to save and help them as a nation. His cry to the Lord was that those who loved Him would be delivered. In saying this, the psalmist is reminding us that even those who love the Lord have to face struggles in this life. Though they faced struggles, they could trust in the Lord God. He was a sovereign God over all nations. Nothing was too difficult for Him.

Notice in Psalm 108:7-9 that the Lord was a great God over all. He spoke from His sanctuary in heaven. There was no higher court. What was spoken from this court had authority not only in heaven but on earth as well. Every nation was subject to the decrees coming from the sanctuary of heaven.

From His sanctuary in heaven the Lord parcelled out the region of Shechem. He measured off the Valley of Succoth (108:7). He determined their influence and the extent of their borders. How often we feel that we are in control of what takes place on this earth. The reality of the matter, however, is that the Lord determines the course of the nations. He reigns over all nations. Gilead and Manasseh belonged to Him. He chose Ephraim to be His helmet. He called Judah to be His sceptre. He honoured these nations (108:8). Moab, however, was His washbasin. God tossed His sandal at Edom and shouted triumph over Philistia (108:9). The tossing of the sandal was an insult to the nations. He lifts up some nations and extends His blessing to them. He also brings nations down.

This was the type of God who went with the psalmist through his struggles. This was a powerful and awesome God whose power could not be overturned. What a comfort it was to have such a God beside him as he faced the struggles of each day.

Notice in Psalm 108:11 that, at this time, God's people were not experiencing the blessing of the Lord. God seemed to have turned His back on them as a people. The presence of God no longer seemed to go out with their armies. The psalmist pleaded with God to bring him to the fortified city and lead him to Edom. Edom was the enemy of God's people. The psalmist realized that only God could give him victory over his enemies. He cried out to God to

give him that victory. All human aid was worthless. Though at the time, the psalmist did not see the hand of the Lord at work, he would not cease to praise Him and put his confidence in Him. He knew that all victory came from the Lord.

As we move into Psalm 109 the psalmist pleads with the Lord not to remain silent. He was not seeing evidence of the powerful hand of God at work but he was confident that God would come to his aid.

As he pleaded with God to take action, the psalmist reminded Him of what the enemies were doing. He told the Lord how they had been speaking out against him (109:2). These enemies were deceitful men who opened their mouths to slander him. They spoke with lying tongues (109:2). They attacked the psalmist with their words without cause. They acted out of pure hatred toward him. They did this despite the fact that he had shown nothing but friendship toward them. Despite the horrible things that were being said, the psalmist found his strength and confidence in God. As a “man of prayer” he would bring his requests to God and trust in Him (109:4).

It is of some importance here that we mention that the apostle Peter quotes Psalm 109 in Acts 16:20. He mentions it in the context of speaking about the betrayal of Judas. This has led some commentators to believe that this psalm spoke prophetically of the time when Judas would betray the Lord Jesus. At least we can see the similarity here. While Jesus had been a friend to Judas, Judas still spoke out against Him and betrayed that confidence.

In Psalm 109:6 the psalmist begins a lengthy condemnation of his enemies. Before examining this it is important that we say a few things about this section of Psalm 109.

First, we need to see that the words of the psalmist in these verses are a reflection of what has been happening to him. He has been suffering at the hands of his enemies. He asks God to do to the enemy what they have been doing to His people.

Second, the reflections of these verses are the reflections of a hurting man. These words are not intended to give us doctrinal or practical teaching about how we should pray. The New Testament clearly teaches us that we need to bless our enemy and seek their good (Luke 6:27-28). What we see in these verses is an open expression of the thoughts and feeling of a man in tremendous suffering. We can all identify with these feelings though they are not to be encouraged.

Thirdly, we need to take the words of the psalmist and understand them in terms of the struggle between good and evil. The psalmist is reflecting the hatred of God for evil. He is calling for a triumph of good over evil. Having said this, we now need to examine the thoughts of the psalmist toward those who were accusing him and causing misery in his life.

In Psalm 109:6-7 the psalmist asked the Lord to appoint an evil man to oppose his enemies and to let an accuser stand at his right hand. This is what had been happening to the psalmist. He had been falsely accused and condemned by wicked men. He is asking God to turn the tables on those who were accusing him. He is asking that God would show his enemies what it was like to be falsely accused and denied justice.

He goes on in Psalm 109:8 to ask God that the days of such wicked people would be few. He is asking that God bring the life of evil doers to an abrupt end. He asked that

their place of leadership would be given to another and that they would be fatherless. The idea here is that their children would not be able to carry on their evil practices. He is asking God to stop evil and the passing on of evil practices from one generation to another.

In Psalm 109:10-11, the psalmist asked God to make the children of evil people wanderers and beggars. He wanted them to be driven from their ruined homes with creditors plundering the fruit of their hard labours. Again this is what these men were doing to God's people. They were devouring them and stripping them of everything they had. The psalmist prayed that God would turn this sword against them so that they would experience first-hand what they had been doing to others.

In his time of trial, the psalmist obviously felt alone. No one came to him in his trouble. No one extended an open hand of kindness. No one took pity on him and his children in their need. He asked again that God would let his enemies know what it was like to be friendless in a time of need (109:12).

Because of the terrible deeds done against the righteous, the psalmist asked God to cut off the descendants of the wicked. He wanted the names of these evil people to perish forever. He wanted no remembrance of their presence to be passed on to the next generation. He wanted all their evil descendants to be cut off so that their evil deeds would cease.

In Psalm 109:14 the psalmist asked the Lord to remember the evil deeds of these wicked people. He pleaded with God to deal with sin. It could not go unpunished.

These individuals gave no thought of kindness to those in need. In fact the psalmist tells us that they hounded the poor, needy and brokenhearted to death (109:16). They found great pleasure in cursing and refused any blessing to those in need (109:17). They wore cursing like a garment (109:18). Cursing became part of them and their actions. The psalmist asked the Lord to curse these individuals and their evil ways. He calls on God to repay this evil by punishing the evil doer.

The psalmist was confident that God was a God of justice (109:21). He was confident that God would not allow evil to triumph forever. As a sovereign God He would deal with evil and restore blessing to His people. The psalmist is confident in the love and goodness of God. Because God was good, He would deal with sin and evil. God knew the psalmist's pain. He knew that his heart had been wounded by evil men. God knew that he was fading away like an evening shadow and that his knees were giving away from fasting and pleading with God (109:24). God was not blind to the fact that His servant was the object of the scorn (109:25).

The psalmist cried out to God for help (109:26). He called on His love. He felt confident, despite the trials around him, that God still loved him. He pleaded with God for justice. He asked God to raise His hand against his enemies

These enemies cursed the righteous but God would bless them in His time (109:28). Their end was coming. They would be put to shame. God's servants would have cause to rejoice. Their accusers would be clothed in disgrace and wrapped in shame (109:29). God's people would praise and lift up His name (109:30). God would not abandon His children. He would stand at their right hand and save them from the hands of their enemy.

There was terrible injustice around the psalmist. Though he loved the Lord God, he still experienced the mocking accusations of the enemy. There were times when he felt overwhelmed by the evil that surrounded him. Sometimes God seemed to be distant. In these times, the psalmist clung to what he knew about the Lord. He knew Him to be a God of love and goodness. He knew Him to be a God of justice. Though he could not see or understand the ways and purposes of God, he trusted Him completely. There are many times when we will not understand what God is doing but we can be confident in His purposes. He will never fail. This is the confidence of the psalmist in this time of crisis. May it be our confidence as well.

For Consideration:

- Will we ever be completely free from struggle and pain in a sinful world?
- Because we struggle in this world, does this mean that God is not in control? Explain.
- What does the psalmist mean when he tells us that the love and mercy of God are higher than the heavens? Has this been your experience? Take a moment to list a few examples of God's mercy and love in your life.
- Why is it so easy to forget the greatness of God's love and mercy in our time of struggle?
- What does the psalmist teach us about the sovereignty of God over nations and people? What courage does this give you in time of need?
- What should be our cry against sin and evil in our society?

- What confidence does the psalmist have in the midst of his struggle? What confidence should we have?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while we will never be completely free from pain and suffering in this sinful world, God is still sovereign and good.
- Thank the Lord that His mercy and love are higher than the heavens.
- Take a moment to rest in the knowledge that God is sovereign over nations and peoples. Offer up praise and thanksgiving to Him for this.
- Ask God to deal with sin and evil in your society. Ask Him to break its hold and to silence those who promote it.

THE PROMISE OF VICTORY

Read Psalm 110:1-111:10

Psalm 110 is a psalm of victory. In it the psalmist David celebrates the promises of God for victory over his enemies.

David begins with the phrase "The LORD says to my Lord." It is important that we note here the word "Lord." While the word is repeated twice it is not the same Hebrew word. The first occurrence of the word LORD is in reference to Jehovah. Most English translations of the Bible translate the word Jehovah by the word LORD or GOD in uppercase letters. The second use of the word here is in lower case letters and is often used to speak of a master or a king. It is important that we distinguish these two words. We could possibly translate the phrase to say: "Jehovah, the God of Israel said to the king."

Notice what Jehovah said to the king in Psalm 110:1. He told him to sit at His right hand until He made his enemies a footstool for his feet. The picture here is of the Lord God of Israel coming to the aid of the king. The Lord God invited

the king to sit at His right hand. The right hand was a place of honour and communion. In the midst of battle this is the best place we could possibly be (in the presence of the Lord, in communion with Him).

Notice also that God's desire was to bring victory to the king over his enemies. What is important for us to see here is that it is not the king who would obtain this victory but the Lord God. God wants to give this victory to the king.

There is one more thing we need to see in this invitation. The invitation is to come and sit. It is true that the Lord sometimes calls us to be busy and occupied. The invitation here, however, is to sit and let the Lord bring the victory. Sometimes it is much easier to do battle than it is to sit and wait for God. What is clear from this is that the battle was the Lord's and He alone would bring the victory the king needed.

In Psalm 110:2 the Lord God promised He would extend the king's sceptre from Zion. The sceptre was a symbol of the king's authority. What God is saying is that He wanted to extend the authority of the king. He wanted him to rule over his enemies. It is not the desire of God to diminish or suppress us as His people. He wants us to be victorious. He wants to extend our authority in the areas where He has given us responsibility. His desire is to conquer His enemies through us. Notice that the sceptre is described as a "mighty" sceptre. Even though the sceptre is already mighty it is the delight of the Lord to extend it. God may be using you as a sceptre in a wonderful way right now. This verse tells us that He still wants to "extend" your sceptre of authority. Don't be content with less than the Lord has for you. Allow Him to extend your authority.

The work of conquering is not a work done in isolation from others. In Psalm 110:3 the Lord God told His servant the king that He would give him willing troops on his day of battle. He would not have to face the battle alone. God would raise a team of co-workers to stand with him when he stepped out to do battle with the enemy.

Notice that those troops would be "arrayed in holy majesty from the dawn" and with the "dew of youth." The King James Version of the Bible translates "holy majesty" as "the beauty of holiness." The idea is that the troops standing with the king in this battle are clothed with the Lord God and His strength. They are a holy and majestic people who do battle in the power of the Lord. The reference to the "dawn" and the "dew of youth" tell us that these soldiers and co-workers are filled with fresh vigour, youthful zeal and strength. They are willing and able warriors for the kingdom.

David reminds us in Psalm 110:4 that the Lord God had sworn and would never change His mind. What He promised would come to pass. Victory was secured and could never be taken from the king.

Reference is made in Psalm 110:4 to Melchizedek. This reference is in the context of the Lord swearing and never changing His mind. The psalmist could have absolute confidence in the Lord God and His promises because He was priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was a priest/king in Jerusalem during the days of Abraham (Hebrews 7:1). He met Abraham in Genesis 14:18. On meeting him, Abraham gave him a tithe of all he had. What seems to be clear from the context of both Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7 is that Melchizedek was a believer in the Lord God of Israel and served him as priest

and king in Jerusalem before Jerusalem even belonged to Israel. It is unclear how Melchizedek came to know the Lord God or even how he served the Lord as priest, but it is clear that the Lord honoured his priesthood even though it was not part of the established Aaronic priesthood of Israel.

Melchizedek became a symbol of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus who also served as a priest/king apart from the recognized priesthood of Aaron and his descendants. This priesthood came to be recognized as being of higher authority than even the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants (see Hebrews 7:11-19).

What the psalmist is telling us here is that the promises of God were established on a sure foundation. They were promised by one whose authority was higher than that of Aaron. These promises were based on the promises of a priest/king of the order of Melchizedek.

In Psalm 110:5 the king takes confidence in the promises of the Lord. "The Lord is at your right hand, He will crush kings on the day of his wrath," he says. The word Lord here is not the word for Jehovah God. It should be seen to refer to the king. It was the king who had been invited to sit at the right hand of the Lord God. Because he was in that place of honour, he could stand against his enemies. He would move out in the victory the Lord gave. He would be God's instrument to judge the nations for their evil.

This battle for righteousness would not be easy. God promised victory in battle, not freedom from battle. Even in the heat of battle, however, the Lord God would bring refreshing. In Psalm 110:7 the psalmist told his readers that he would drink from a brook beside the way and lift up his head. The picture here is of the king, weary from battle,

drinking and finding refreshment from a little brook the Lord God provided for him in his time of need.

There have been many times when I personally have needed that brook. Sometimes it comes in the form of a letter or email from someone who simply wants to encourage me. Sometimes it comes in the form of rest after a time of intense battle. Sometimes it comes in the form of provision for a need or from a passage of the Word of God that speaks to the struggle being faced. What is important is that we understand that God will provide those "brooks" for His weary servants in their time of need. They will lift up their weary head and be refreshed. What confidence this gives us to move out in battle. God will give us victory. He will supply the needed co-workers and resources and when we are weary He will refresh and renew.

It is in this context that we will consider Psalm 111. The psalmist tells his readers that he would extol the Lord with all his heart in the council or assembly of the upright (111:1). He had every reason to praise and thank the Lord his God. He wanted the righteous to know the goodness of God. He wanted his brothers and sisters to know his joy.

God's works were great and deserved to be pondered by all who delight in them (111:2). In saying this, the psalmist challenges those who had experienced the blessing of the Lord to take the time to "ponder" those works. As they pondered the works of God, their hearts would well up in praise and thanksgiving. The deeds of the Lord were majestic (111:3). They were deeds that made those who pondered them bow in humble adoration.

Everything God did was glorious and majestic. His righteousness endured forever (111:3). Everything He did was good and pure. He was a gracious and compassionate

God who cared for those who belonged to Him (111:5). He provided food for those who feared Him. He would never forget His covenant people (111:5). He revealed His power to them by giving them victory over their enemies and giving them the land as their inheritance (111:6).

God's works were faithful and just (111:7). He acted in faithfulness toward His people. His precepts (commands and purposes) were trustworthy. He provided salvation and redemption for His people (111:9). The covenant He made with them would never be revoked. He would always care for them and keep them. His name was holy and awesome (111:9). All who feared the Lord (reverenced and honoured in word and deed) were wise. In fact, one could not even begin to understand true wisdom until they begin with an understanding of God and His purposes. Those who followed His ways had true understanding.

In a very real way, Psalm 110 sets the background for Psalm 111. God invited His servant to sit as His right hand while He gave him victory. He promised to empower, refresh and establish the work of His servant's hands. This was cause for great praise and rejoicing.

For Consideration:

- What does Psalm 110 tell us about the delight of God to honour and give His servants victory? Are you seated in that place of honour and victory right now?
- Is it possible to be seeking victory and honour in your own strength and effort? Explain.

- It was the desire of the Lord God to extend the king's sceptre of authority. Does God want to extend your sceptre of authority? Explain
- What do we learn in these psalms about the importance of co-workers in the battle for the kingdom? Who are your co-workers?
- What does it mean to "ponder" the deeds of the Lord? Take a moment to consider some of the works of the Lord in your life over the last while.

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He desires to give us victory.
- Ask the Lord to extend your sceptre of authority. Ask Him to give you faith to move out in increased authority.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the co-workers He has provided. Thank Him for their encouragement and support.
- Has the Lord provided you with a refreshing "brook" in the midst of your battle? Thank the Lord for those moments of refreshment.

THE BLESSING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Read Psalm 112:1-114:8

We have seen through the book of Psalms that even the righteous suffer. In fact, they often become the target of the enemy's arrows. We should not think that the life of the believer is always difficult, however. God has also called us to live in victory and blessing. In Psalm 112 the psalmist takes a moment to consider the blessings of the righteous.

Psalm 112:1 begins by telling the reader that the person who finds great delight in the commands of the Lord is blessed. The psalmist explains what he means by this in the verses that follow.

He tells us that the children of the one who delights in the commandments of the Lord will be mighty in the land. Generations that followed those who delighted in the commands of the Lord would be blessed (112:2). The general idea is that when a child is raised in the way of truth and righteousness he or she will understand how to live a life

under the blessing of God. The Lord God blesses those who honour Him. When parents set an example and pass on their faith to the next generation, their children have the tools necessary to walk under the blessing of God in their lives as well. While not all children would choose to live under the purpose and plan of God, the general principle is that those who love the Lord and raise their children to love and honour the Lord are raising them under the blessing of the Lord and preparing the way for them to live under that blessing.

The psalmist goes on to say that wealth and riches are in the house of the person who loves the Lord and His commandments, and His righteousness endures forever (112:3). There are those who would say that this proves that all Christians should be wealthy and prosperous. There are significant problems with this doctrine. The first is that the Lord Jesus was not wealthy in the things of this world. In Luke 9:58 Jesus, speaking of himself said:

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

The psalmist, looking around him in the world of his day would have seen countless believers who loved the Lord but who also struggled with poverty. There are two things we need to say about Psalm 112:3 and the wealth and riches of those who love the Lord.

First, the general principle is this: If we love the Lord and honour His commandments, we will be living in a way that will wisely make use of all the blessings God has given. Some people will always have more than others. Those who love the Lord and follow His commandments, however, find in His word the wisdom they need to make the

best use of what God has given them. Those who love the commandments of the Lord will be good stewards of their resources. They are better able to provide for their families and personal needs because they are not wasting what God has given.

Second, we should not limit wealth and riches to money. The Bible sees wealth and riches in a far more holistic sense. Riches can be spiritual, emotional, physical or material. To limit riches and wealth to money is to miss what God is saying. Those who know the Lord and live according to His commandments enjoy wealth and riches. Though they may not have as much money and material possessions as those around them, they are blessed abundantly in spiritual, emotional and physical ways.

In Psalm 112:4 the psalmist tells us that those who love the Lord and His commands will experience the light of dawn even in darkness. In saying this, the psalmist is aware that there will be days of darkness for the righteous. There will be struggles and difficulties for those who belong to the Lord but the promise is that the dawn will break for them. In other words, the Lord will come to their aid (112:5). They can have the assurance of His comfort and presence in the midst of their pain and trial. Because the Lord God is with them they will never be shaken (112:6). In the Lord's strength, they are able to stand firm.

Psalm 112:7 tells us that those who love the Lord do not have to fear bad news because their heart is steadfast and trusting the Lord. This does not mean that the righteous will never hear bad news. We hear bad news every day. There is a difference between hearing bad news and fearing bad news. Though bad news may come to the righteous, they do not need to fear. They place their confidence in the Lord God. They know that no matter what happens

in life they can trust in their Lord. Their heart is secure. Though the enemy surrounds them, they know that, with the Lord on their side they will triumph over their foes (112:8).

Because the righteous have been generous with what they have, they will be honoured. It is the heart of God to bless. This is also the heart of the righteous. God will honour the righteous for their compassion to those in need.

While the person who loves and honours the Lord God will be blessed, this is not the case with those who turn their back on Him. These individuals will be vexed. There will be gnashing of teeth. They will waste away. Their desires will come to nothing (112:10). Though they might be rich in worldly pleasures and possessions, all of this will amount to nothing in the end.

Psalm 112 reminds us that the blessing of the Lord is on those who love Him. This does not mean that they will never have to face pain and trials in this life. There will be times when they will be surrounded by darkness but even in those times the Lord God will be their support and comfort. It is true that the wicked may prosper in this life but that prosperity will not last. It is temporary and will fade away like grass. True and lasting blessing is only found in the Lord and in obedience to His commands.

As we continue on this theme of God's blessing in the life of the believer, Psalm 113 challenges us to offer praise to the Lord. We are encouraged to praise Him for His goodness and blessing. There is cause for the believer to praise the Lord from the rising of the sun in the morning to its setting in the evening (113:3). Each day is filled with reason to offer the Lord God our highest praise and thanksgiving.

There is no God like the Lord God of Israel. He is exalted over all the nations (113:4). That is to say, He is the sovereign ruler of all nations. To Him every nation must ultimately bow and offer praise. His glory is above the heavens (113:4). In other words, His glory fills the earth and heavens. It is everywhere and obvious to all.

The God of Israel sits enthroned on high (113:5). He is the King over all kings. There is no throne higher than His. There is no greater authority.

While our God is big and glorious, notice what the psalmist tells us in Psalm 113:6-9. The God of Israel stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth. In other words, He is interested in what is happening on the earth. He takes the time to consider humanity. More than this however, He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, setting them with princes (113:7-8). He has compassion on the barren woman and sees her grief in childlessness. He touches her womb and blesses her with children (113:9).

The God of Israel reaches down to His people. He sees their pain and reaches out to comfort and encourage them in their need. He is the source of great blessing and is deserving of our highest praise and thanksgiving.

In Psalm 114 the psalmist gave his people a practical example of the blessing of the Lord in the lives of His people. He reminded them that the Lord God rescued His people from the land of Egypt and from their exile in foreign lands. He did this by making Judah His sanctuary and Israel His dominion (114:2). In other words, He didn't bless them from a distance, He chose to come into their presence and make His blessing known personally.

The presence of the Lord is described in Psalm 114:3-8 as an awesome presence. The seas saw that presence of God and fled (114:3). Psalm 114:5 makes particular reference to the Jordan River. The imagery may refer to the parting of the waters of the Jordan as the people of Israel crossed into the land God had promised them (Joshua 4). These waters fled in obedience to the word of the Lord.

In Psalm 114:4 the mountains skipped like rams and the hills like lambs. The picture is of rams on the mountain seen from a distance. When the onlooker looked at the mountain filled with rams it seemed like it was moving or shaking as the rams skipped and danced in the distance. The presence of the Lord God in the midst of Israel was not a presence to be taken lightly. It was an awesome presence. The seas parted at His approach. The mountains quaked and trembled. This was a presence that could turn rock into a pool of water (114:8). This may be a reference to how the Lord brought water from the rock to quench the thirst of His people in the desert (see Exodus 17:6).

What we need to understand is that this wonderful and awesome God delighted to make His sanctuary in the midst of His people. This was the God who stooped down to see the need of the poor and lonely. This was a God who delighted to reveal Himself to those who obeyed His commands and followed His ways. There is no God like Him. There is no true and lasting blessing apart from Him.

For Consideration:

- Does being blessed mean that there will never be any struggle in life? Can we be blessed and still struggle?
- What is true wealth? Can we limit wealth only to material things? What other types of wealth and riches are there?
- The psalmist promises that those who love the Lord God will know light even in the midst of darkness. Have you ever experienced this light in darkness? Explain.
- What is the difference between hearing bad news and fearing bad news? Why do believers not need to fear bad news?
- Psalm 114 speaks of the wonderful blessing of the presence of the Lord. Do you know the presence of the Lord in your life? How has this been a blessing to you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even though we face trials in this life, we can still live in the reality of His blessing.
- Thank the Lord for His concern for you personally. Take a moment to consider some of the blessings He has given you. Thank Him for those blessings.
- Thank the Lord that no matter what happens in life we do not need to fear because God is with us.
- Do you know someone who is getting caught up in the world's idea of riches and prosperity? Take a moment to pray that God would open their eyes to the truth of God's fuller blessing.

THE GOD'S OF THE NATIONS

Read Psalm 115:1-116:19

In Psalm 115 and 116 the psalmist reflects on the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord God of Israel. He does so by comparing Him to the gods of the nations around him.

As he begins in Psalm 115, the psalmist recognizes that all glory and honour belong to the Lord God. Notice in particular that the psalmist tells us that glory does not belong to us. In our day, we have seen many great human accomplishments. It is all too easy to give glory to human beings for these wonderful achievements. None of these achievements, however, are deserving of glory. Where would we be without the Lord God? Which of these achievements can we ever say truly belong to us? We are totally dependent on God for every breath we breathe. He alone is our source of strength and wisdom. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. Glory does not belong to human beings, but to the One who has given them life and breath.

Notice in Psalm 115:1 that the Lord God deserves all the glory because of His love and faithfulness. It is because of His love and faithfulness that we receive each breath we breathe. It is because of His love and faithfulness that we are not abandoned to perish.

Not everyone saw things this way. There were unbelievers who asked the question: "Where is your God?" They did not see their dependence on God. They did not realize that everything they did was because of His faithful love. Every beat of their heart ought to have shown them the presence of a loving and faithful God.

While there were admittedly times when it was difficult to understand the ways of the Lord God, the psalmist reminded the unbeliever that God was in heaven and did what He pleased (115:3). The psalmist does not limit God to heaven. We know that God is present everywhere. What the psalmist is telling us is that God was seated on His heavenly throne. He was above human beings. He issued His decrees from heaven and carried them out on the earth. He did what He pleased. He was Lord over all. There was no throne or authority higher than His. No one could tell Him what to do or question His authority.

In Psalm 115:4 the psalmist turns his attention for a moment to the gods of the nations. He reminds the unbeliever of their own gods. These gods were idols made of silver and gold. They were created by those they worshipped. This in itself should have been an indication of the uselessness of these gods. If they were created by human beings they were by nature less than human.

These idols of gold and silver had mouths but they could not speak. They had eyes but they could not see. They had ears but they could not hear and noses but they could

not smell. Their hands could not feel nor could they walk with their feet (115:5-7). These gods were lifeless. They were powerless to speak, touch, feel or even think. These were the gods the nations worshipped.

In Psalm 115:8 the psalmist made it clear that those who made these gods would be like them. In other words, just like these idols were incapable of thinking and feeling, so were their creators. Like their idols, they were foolish and powerless. Their trust in these idols was as foolish as the idols themselves.

In contrast to these lifeless idols, the psalmist turns his attention back to the God of Israel (115:9). He reminds his readers that Israel's trust was in the Lord God. Unlike the lifeless gods of the nations, the God of Israel was a shield for His people (115:9). He calls his people to trust in their Lord as their help and shield. He was a living God who could help them in their time of need.

In Psalm 115:12 the psalmist reminded all who trusted in the Lord that He remembered His people and would bless them. Unlike the gods of the nations, the Lord God of Israel responded to His people's cries. He remembered them in their need. He delighted to bless them and considered them to be His children. He treated all who loved and feared Him alike. The believer living in poverty and suffering was treated the same as the rich and prosperous.

The psalmist concludes Psalm 115 by blessing all who feared the Lord (115:14-16). He calls on the Lord to bless them with many children (115:14). He calls on the Maker of heaven and earth to extend His favour on His people (115:15). He reminds them that while the highest heavens belonged to the Lord, He gave the earth to human beings (115:16). The whole earth was a gift from God to His

people. Everything we see around us. All the beauty and complexity of this universe is an indication of the love and favour of the God of Israel toward His people. He is a wonderful God who, unlike the nations, is able to give good gifts to His people. For this, He is deserving of our deepest praise and adoration. The dead cannot praise Him in the grave (115:17). It is up to us to lift up His name. It is the living who experience the blessings of God. As those who know and experience His blessings, we need to praise and thank Him with all our heart. He is a loving and faithful God. All that love and faithfulness are directed toward us as His people. For this we need to praise His name forever.

Having compared the gods of the nations to the God of Israel, the psalmist reminded his people that while the gods of the nations were worthless idols, the God of Israel was a faithful and loving God who was deeply concerned for His people. In Psalm 116 the psalmist gives us an example of this wonderful faithfulness of the living God of Israel toward him personally.

The psalmist told his readers that he loved the Lord God because He heard his cry for mercy (116:1). God was not deaf to that cry for help in time of need. God listened to His servant and answered him. Because of this, the psalmist's faith was renewed. He told his readers that because God heard his voice, he would call on Him as long as he lived (116:2). In other words, he would trust in Him in his time of need. He knew now that God answered prayers. Unlike the gods of the nations, the God of Israel was alive and compassionate. The idols of the nations had ears but they could not hear. The God of Israel, not only heard but He responded in love and mercy.

The psalmist told his listeners that the cords of death had entangled him. He felt the anguish of the grave and was

filled with sorrow and trouble (116:3). Even the believer must live in this world of suffering and sorrow. The psalmist knew what it was like to feel pain and grief. In that time he called out to the Lord "O LORD, save me!" (116:4). God answered him in love and graciousness.

In Psalm 116:5 the psalmist told his people that the Lord God was a gracious God, righteous and full of compassion. Notice that he said this in the context of suffering and grief. The psalmist does not blame God for the pain and suffering in the world. Instead, he praises Him for the way He protected and kept him. He proclaimed God as a God who protected the simple. He declared to all who would listen that God had saved him in his time of need (116:6).

It is all too easy to only focus on the problems and suffering in this world. Sin has had its effect. God is not the author of sin. We brought sin into this world by our rebellion against God and His ways. That sin is now raging like a fire all over the earth. We see its effects in human lives and the decisions made by human beings. We see its effects on our environment and in our politics. Everything has been affected by sin. We brought this on ourselves. God offers a solution to us through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He also extends His hand of mercy and loving-kindness to us as we deal with the effects of sin around us. The day is coming when all this will be over. Sin will be destroyed. In the meantime, the psalmist worshipped the Lord God for the strength and victory He gave.

In Psalm 116:7 the psalmist told his readers that they could be at rest. They could be at rest because the God of Israel, unlike the gods of the nations, was a loving and faithful God who was good to those who loved Him.

God had delivered the psalmist's soul from death. He had removed the tears from his eyes and stopped his feet from trembling (116:8). The psalmist faced suffering and pain but God kept him through it.

The faith of the psalmist can be seen in Psalm 116:10-11. Here he tells us that because he believed, he voiced his affliction to God. Because he believed he came to God with his pain and suffering. He knew that God would listen to his cry for help. He told God what he was feeling: "I am greatly afflicted" (116:10). Notice in Psalm 116:11 that he also recognized that God alone could be trusted in this matter of his anguish. "All men are liars," he said. In other words, there is no hope in human beings. They could not offer the comfort and aid he needed. They make great claims to help but ultimately all help comes from God. He alone can provide what is necessary. He alone can save the soul.

Having experienced the wonderful help of the Lord God, the psalmist asked himself the question in Psalm 116:12: "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?" He realized that this goodness deserved something in return. He was not ungrateful to God for this mercy. He wanted to do something to thank Him for His kindness. Notice the commitment of the psalmist in the concluding verses of this psalm.

In Psalm 116:13 he tells his readers that because of what God had done for him, he would lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. The salvation the Lord brought to His people is compared to a cup of wine. That cup is lifted up in a token of thanksgiving to the Lord. The psalmist proclaimed the salvation of the Lord by lifting it up for all to see and in a token of thanksgiving drank of that cup, rejoicing and celebrating the fruit of his salvation.

Some time ago the Lord showed me that one of the greatest ways to express our thanks to Him is to enjoy the gifts He has given. Imagine for a moment that you purchased a gift for a family member or friend. Imagine that that friend never used the gift you gave them. How would that make you feel as the giver of the gift? When you see the gift being used with joy, your heart rejoices. In lifting up the cup of salvation the psalmist is doing two things. First, he is declaring to all the wonderful news of his salvation. He lifts the cup up so that all can see it. Second, he then takes the cup and drinks with joy its contents. This too is an act of thanksgiving.

Another response to God can be seen in Psalm 116:14, 18-19. Here the psalmist declared that he would fulfil his vows to the Lord in the presence of his people. In Psalm 116:19 he particularly mentions that he would do so in the courts of the house of the Lord. This leads us to believe that the vows spoken of here relate to vows of praise, offerings and obedience. Because God had been faithful to him, the least the psalmist could do was to be faithful to Him in return. He would honour the Lord by praising Him, obeying him and offering what He owed Him. He would not be negligent in his duties.

The psalmist made this commitment to lift up the cup of salvation and fulfil his vows because he realized that the death of a saint was precious in the eyes of the Lord (116:15). That is to say, the Lord takes the death of His children seriously. He cares for each of them deeply. In the psalmist's situation, God had spared him from an untimely death. He owed God his life. His commitment in return was to walk in faithfulness and fulfil all vows he had made to this wonderful God.

In Psalm 116:16 the psalmist recommitted himself to being the servant of the Lord. He offers himself to Him freely in return for His loving faithfulness. God had freed Him from his chains. It was his great desire now to live all his life as a servant of the God who saved him in his hour of need.

Finally in Psalm 116:17, the psalmist made a commitment to sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord. He would not be negligent in thanking the Lord for His mercy and grace. In recent months I have been surprised to see how many times I have failed to thank the Lord for the many answers to prayer. The psalmist wanted to be sure that God received thanksgiving for the works He had done. His heart was filled with gratitude to God for His goodness.

We cannot help but see the contrast in Psalm 115 and Psalm 116. The gods of the nations were mere lifeless idols. They could not speak or think. They were powerless and incapable of helping or caring for those who created them. The Lord God of Israel, on the other hand, was the Creator God who loved His children deeply and came to their aid. The psalmist is touched by the personal nature of God. His heart is filled with praise and thanksgiving to a God who loved him so deeply. He committed his life to praising and thanking Him for such goodness.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself boasting of your achievements in life? Why does all glory belong to God?
- What idols do we create today? How do they compare to the God of Israel?

- What comfort do you find in the fact that the Lord God is personally concerned for you?
- What is the source of evil and suffering in this world? Why is it so easy to focus on this suffering and not on the God who delivers and protects us through that suffering?
- The response of the psalmist in Psalm 116 toward God was to lift up the cup of salvation, fulfil his vows, submit to God as a servant and offer sacrifices of thanksgiving. What has been your lifelong response to the deliverance and salvation of the Lord?

For Prayer:

- How has the Lord delivered you? Take a moment to thank Him for some personal deliverance or loving-kindness.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have blamed Him for evil and sin. Ask Him to help you to see His care and protection. Thank Him that He has already conquered sin.
- Ask God to give you more of the heart of the psalmist in response to the many demonstrations of His loving-kindness toward you personally.

THE SALVATION OF THE LORD

Read Psalm 117:1-118:29

Psalms 117-118 are reflections on the wonderful salvation of the Lord God. Here the psalmist recounts how the Lord saved him from his enemies. There are also hints of a much greater salvation that would be brought by the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he began in Psalm 117, the psalmist declared his desire that the Lord God be praised for His love and faithfulness. Notice that the desire of the psalmist was that the nations praise the Lord. The Lord God deserved praise and admiration throughout the entire world. Even those who did not know Him were called to praise Him. They too had experienced the blessings of God in their lives. The shining sun and the beating heart proved that the Lord God had also blessed the nations and was worthy of their praise.

God's love and faithfulness was seen even in those who did not love Him. Day after day His faithfulness was clearly seen. This was a marvellous thing for the psalmist.

While in Psalm 117 the psalmist called all nations to praise the Lord, he particularly challenged his own people to do the same in Psalm 118. Certainly if the nations had reason to praise the God of Israel, then Israel had even more reason.

Israel is challenged to say: "His love endures forever" (118:2) Israel, though they were God's chosen people, had often fallen short of His standard. They tempted the Lord and rebelled against Him. They did this despite the covenant relationship that existed between her and her God. God considered her as his wife. Israel was unfaithful to her vows and sought other lovers. God did not give up on her. His love remained despite her unfaithfulness. The psalmist reminds his people that God's love endured forever.

The house of Aaron was to say: "His love endures forever" (118:3). The house of Aaron represented the priests. They were chosen from all of the people of God to be His servants. As His chosen servants, they were to lead the way in declaring the faithfulness of the Lord.

All who feared the Lord were to declare His unfailing love (118:4). Here the psalmist challenged all who had any reverence of God's holiness and glory to recognize His love and declare it.

In Psalm 118:5 the psalmist became more personal. He speaks here of a particular time in his life when he was in anguish. We are not told what the circumstances of this anguish were. What we need to understand, however, is that in this time of anguish the psalmist cried out to the

Lord God and He set him free. God heard that cry of anguish. The psalmist does not take this for granted. There are times in our lives when we feel that God is obligated to do something about our pain and anguish. We grumble and complain because God does not come to our aid as fast as we want. The psalmist rejoiced in the fact that God would even come to his aid. He understood who he was as a sinner. He understood that God was an awesome God in heaven. He marvelled at the fact that such a big and awesome God should come to help men and women in their need. His heart was filled with praise and thanksgiving that God should hear the tiny cry of his heart and come to him personally.

Some time ago while at a conference, the Lord used a pastor to help me through some deep issues in my life. As we prayed together, the Lord began to do a powerful work in me. At the end of a couple of hours of wrestling in prayer, we concluded our time together. This pastor recounted to me later that as he left the room where we had been praying and went out into the starlit night. As he looked up into the sky he felt the Lord say to him: "Bill, do you understand what happened tonight. I reached down from above all these stars to touch Wayne's life." He was struck powerfully by that thought. God was bigger than the heavens themselves. The stars were His creation yet He reached down to touch me personally. How this ought to fill us with awe and wonder. How our hearts ought to overflow with praise and thanksgiving that such a big God should hear our anguished cry and reach out to us.

The psalmist declared in Psalm 118:6 that the Lord was with him. Not only did God reach down to touch him in his anguish but He also remained with him. He did not come, heal and leave. When He came, He came to stay. The psalmist had the confidence that the Lord God was at his

side. This gave him tremendous confidence. If God Almighty was at his side, what could mere man do to him (118:6)? He was safe and secure. The God of Israel was his helper (118:7). He knew that victory was secure. He would look in triumph over his enemies.

The confidence of the psalmist was not in human beings. In Psalm 118: 8 he told his readers that it was better to take refuge in the Lord God than to trust in man. In the psalmist's day there were mighty men on the earth. Some of these men were princes and had whole armies under their command. The psalmist is not deceived by this false sense of confidence. He does not trust in princes and their armies. Who were they compared to the God of Israel who was at his side. Though he could not see the God of Israel with his eyes, he believed in Him and placed his confidence in Him.

With the Lord God as his helper, there were no enemies who could overcome him. Notice in Psalm 118:10 that although whole nations surrounded him, the psalmist was not afraid. In the name of the Lord he would cut them off. Though they surrounded him on every side and swarmed him like bees he did not fear (118:12). He would still cut them off in the name of the Lord. He would push back all his enemies, no matter how powerful they were because with God at his side, there was nothing too powerful for him to overcome. What tremendous confidence the psalmist has in his God. Certainly we need to see a stirring up of this confidence in our own lives and hearts.

The psalmist explodes in praise and thanksgiving for such a wonderful God. He was his strength and song (118:14). It was through Him that he was able to conquer his enemies. God was his salvation (118:15). God had done mighty things in him and through him (118:15). Shouts of

joy and victory sounded from the tents of righteousness as those who loved and served the Lord experienced His wonderful victory and shouted His praise. That same victory is ours today. God has not changed. He still reaches down from the heavens to His people. He still remains at their side to offer victory. His right hand is still lifted high. It is still doing mighty things on behalf of His people (118:16).

Because the Lord was with him and His hand was doing mighty things, the psalmist had great confidence. It is true that the enemy was coming against him but he would have victory. He would not perish at the hands of the enemy but live to declare His praise (118:17).

The life of the believer is not free of trouble. There are times when the enemy will come in like a flood and overwhelm. The psalmist knew his share of opposition. As a soldier in the army, he faced many battles. God was mighty and powerful to save but he still had to face the enemy. There were times when the Lord allowed him to be chastened severely but in all those times he was given victory (118:18).

We would all like to live our lives without any problems or trials. God does not set us free from difficulties in life. He often allows us to face those difficulties. He has chosen to use us in the battle. Victory comes as we step out in His strength to fight. In the course of the battle, many of us will be struck by the enemy's arrow. Some of us will have to fight the enemy face to face. The battle will be hard but the victory is secure. The enemy cannot win.

God uses the battle to strengthen and mature His servants. Through the battle God chastens and refines us. Those who face the battle and remain faithful will never be the same. They will be sharpened in their gifts and faith.

They will be equipped for greater works. Their faith and confidence will be increased. God will use whatever they face in the battle for their good.

For this wonderful thought, the psalmist again explodes in praise of the Lord God. Open the gates of righteousness so that I may enter and give thanks to the Lord, he says in Psalm 118:19. It is the delight of the psalmist to enter the place where God's people gathered for worship. Here in this place he would publicly declare the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord toward him (Psalm 118:19-21).

Psalm 118:22-26 were quoted by the Lord Jesus to speak of Himself (see Matthew 21:42). In the immediate context the psalmist spoke of his own victory. He compared himself and his people to a rejected stone. The imagery here is one of a building under construction. As the builder examines the stones he is using for the construction, he pushes aside one particular stone and rejects it as being unsuitable for his purposes. That very stone, in time, however, becomes the capstone. The capstone was the final stone in the building. It occupied a place of honour because it signified the completion of the construction project.

What the psalmist is telling us is that those that are pushed aside and rejected in this world as being unworthy, are at times the very people God will use to bring about the completion of His kingdom work. The Lord Jesus used this to speak of Himself. He did not come as people had expected. The majority of people turned Him aside and rejected Him as their Messiah. He was a rejected stone but He became the capstone signifying the completion of God's redeeming work.

Psalm 118:24-27 speak of the salvation of the Lord. The psalmist reminded his people that the Lord had prepared a day of wonderful victory. They had experienced His salvation from their enemy. For this they were to rejoice and be glad. They were to continue to walk in that salvation, rejoicing and being glad for what their God had done. Notice that this salvation was to bring them joy that they were to continue to rejoice in. God wants us to be a rejoicing and glad people. He delights in the joyful and grateful praises of His people for their salvation.

Notice in Psalm 118:26 that the psalmist told his readers that the one who came in the name of the Lord was blessed. He is speaking here about those who belong to the Lord and walk in His name. These people are soldiers in the army of God. Wherever they go they represent the Lord and His cause. They walk in His strength and power. They represent His cause. These individuals experience the victory of the Lord wherever they go. They walk in His power and grace.

John used this verse to speak of the Lord Jesus as He came into Jerusalem on a donkey (John 12:13). The people along the way shouted out this verse. They used it to announce the coming of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem. They declared Him to be the one to bring victory. He was blessed by His Father to be the Deliverer of His people from their sin and bondage.

"The LORD is God, and he has made His light shine upon us," the psalmist said in Psalm 118:27. In particular, those who know the Lord Jesus today know His light shining in them. They know the special favour of the Lord God on our lives and walk in assurance of victory. They are a special people.

In light of this wonderful hope the psalmist called his people to join him with boughs in hand (New International Version) in festal procession to the horns of the altar. The idea here is that they were to go to the altar of the Lord with great joy and celebration. They were to bring their thanksgiving offering as a token of gratitude for what their God had done for them. They were to be a thankful people because the Lord their God loved and defended them. Are we a thankful people today?

For Consideration:

- For what do unbelievers have to thank the Lord? Why should they praise the Lord?
- How has the Lord demonstrated His unfailing love to you?
- What is the difference between God coming to rescue us and God remaining with us? What evidence is there that God has remained with you?
- Why is it easier to trust humans we see than a God we cannot see?
- What victories has the Lord given you?
- What does God accomplish in us through the struggles? Does victory mean that God will take away all struggles?
- What does the psalmist teach us here about the "rejected stone?" What comfort do you take in this personally?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to open the eyes of the unbelievers you have contact with to see how they need to praise and thank the Lord.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for evidence of victory and unfailing love in your life.
- Thank the Lord that He never leaves you but walks daily by your side.
- Ask the Lord to give you more courage and confidence in Him. Ask Him to show you how you can walk more boldly for Him.
- Thank the Lord that He uses "rejected stones."

HOLDING FAST

Read Psalm 119:1-40

Psalm 119 is the longest of all the psalms. It is divided into 22 sections with each section corresponding to a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It reflects creativity on the part of the psalmist who took the time to arrange it in this way. Its focus is on the blessing and happiness of living in obedience to the Law of God.

The theme of the whole psalm is found in the opening verses. Here the psalmist tells us that the person who walks according to the law of the Lord is blessed. It is important that we understand what the psalmist means by blessed. He is not limiting the blessing to physical or material blessing. The Lord Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the will of His Father, yet never owned a home or was never rich in the things of this world. Nor does the word blessing mean that we will never suffer physical affliction or pain. The apostle Paul lived his life with a thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). We can be blessed and have very little in this world. We can be blessed and suffer affliction in our body. In saying this, however, we need to realize that prosperity and health are truly part of the

blessing that God provides but we should not limit the psalmist's meaning to this.

Having said this, the psalmist is quite clear in verses 1 and 2 that there is a blessing in obeying the Word of the Lord. Those who seek the Lord and His ways with all their heart will experience His blessing in their lives.

Verse 3 tells us that those who walk in the ways of the Lord do no wrong. We should not see here that perfection is possible on this earth. What the psalmist is telling us is that the law of God is God's perfect standard. We know that there was no human being lived a perfect life apart from the Lord Jesus. No one could keep the law perfectly. The law, however, was a perfect guide to life in fellowship with God. To keep it fully is to walk in perfect harmony with the purpose of God.

Notice from verse 4 that God gave His laws so that they would be fully obeyed. The psalmist recognized his failure to keep that law perfectly (verse 5). His heart's desire, however, was to be steadfast and faithful. He knew that as long as he considered the commands of the Lord in all his ways and lived in obedience to His precepts, he would not be put to shame. He could stand before the Lord without fear.

Notice in verse 7 that the psalmist understood that obedience to the law of God was a lifelong process. He told the Lord that he would praise Him as he learned His righteous laws. He realized that there was more and more to learn from the law of God. He expected to grow in his obedience day after day. I have found personally that God has moved me to deeper levels of obedience to His commands. The more we grow, the more we are called to deeper obedience. The more we are in fellowship with God, the more

He reveals to us how His law applies to various situations in life. The psalmist expected fully to learn more of God's requirements as he grew in his understanding of God and His ways. Obedience would not always be easy. The psalmist would be called on at times to surrender areas of his life that he did not want to surrender. He commits himself to live in obedience nonetheless. He also commits himself to an attitude of praise and thanksgiving as God led him into deeper obedience.

As the psalmist commits himself to obey, he prays in verse 8 that the Lord God would not forsake him in this process of growing in obedience. He wants to know the presence of the Lord as he learns. I like to see the illustration of a young child learning to walk here. Those first steps are difficult. There are times when the child falls and becomes discouraged. Learning to be obedient is like this. We will fall short of God's standard. We may sometimes become discouraged and wonder if victory is ever really possible. How we need to know the presence of the Lord in these times. His strength and encouragement alone can give us grace to overcome and persevere to victory. The psalmist pleads with God here not to forsake him in his failures as he learns to walk in full obedience.

As we move on to verse 9 the psalmist recognized that the only way a young man could keep his heart clean before God was to live according to His word. He wanted to be that young man with a pure heart. His prayer to God was that He would not let him stray from His commands. The psalmist understood his tendency as a young man. He knew that his heart would be tempted to stray from God. He pleaded with God to keep him from straying. Even when he wanted to stray he asked God to forbid him from doing so (verse 10). His heart wanted to be obedient but

his body and mind were weak. He asks God to overrule the desires of his flesh and mind.

While the psalmist understands his weakness, he still does his part to keep from straying. Notice in verse 11 that he hid God's word in his heart so that he would not sin against Him. Notice that he does not just take that word into his mind. The psalmist is speaking about much more than memorizing facts and details. To take something into one's heart is to make it one's own personal desire. There is a world of difference between knowing facts and taking those facts into our heart. The psalmist hid the word of God in his heart. He opened his heart to God's teaching. He allowed God to change his attitude and break whatever it took.

Not only would the psalmist make the laws of the Lord his own personal desire and heart cry, but verse 13 tells us that he also committed himself to recounting those laws to others. He was not content to keep God's laws himself and let others live as they pleased. His desire was that the whole world live in obedience to the law of the Lord. He wanted others to live in the blessing of obedience. He wanted the Lord to be glorified and honoured, not only in his own life, but also the life of his community.

The commitment of the psalmist was to rejoice in following the statutes of the Lord as much as someone would rejoice in great riches (verse 14). In other words, he would make the pursuit of obedience to God his greatest desire. It would become more precious to him than all the riches of the world. This would require discipline on his part. He would have to die to the temptations in life. He would have to sacrifice everything that would keep him from setting his heart and mind fully on obedience to God and His ways.

In verse 15 the psalmist further commits himself to meditate on the precepts of the Lord and to consider His ways. This required study and reflection. To meditate is more than reading. To meditate is to consider how the truth of the law applied to real life. The heart of the psalmist was to discover how he could apply the truth of the law of God to his daily routine. To do this he committed himself to reflect on that word regularly and consider its application.

The psalmist would not neglect the word of the Lord (verse 16). He would not turn his back on it or put it on a shelf. Instead, he would open it and apply it. He would make it a part of his regular routine in life. He would read it, consider it, meditate on it and apply it to everyday life. The law of God was to be lived out every day. He would not neglect to do this.

In verse 17 the psalmist asked God to do good to him and he would live in obedience to His word. At first glance we might think that obedience to God depended on how God treated him. This is not the case. The psalmist is recognizing his absolute need of God for every good thing, even for his very life. He is recognizing that without the blessing of God in his life, he would not have the ability to do what God required. He needed the strength of God if he were to live in obedience. Bless me with the strength, wisdom and faithfulness I need and I will live in obedience to your will, for without your goodness I would surely fail. This seems to be the intent of the Psalmist in this request.

Notice also that the psalmist recognized his need for God's work to open his eyes to see the wonderful things of His law. He does not pretend to be able to grasp these powerful truths by his own understanding. He is aware of his need of God's wisdom to understand. He prays that God would open his eyes to see the truth of His law (verse 18).

He pleads with God not to hide His commands from him for he was a stranger on earth. In saying that he was a stranger to earth, the psalmist is telling God that his heart and commitment were not to the ways of this earth. His desire was to live according to the principles of heaven. For this reason, he pleaded with God to show him heavenly truths. These truths could not be revealed by mere humans whose ways were of this earth. He needed God to show him His higher ways. He looks to God for instruction and guidance into this truth. Notice how he told God in verse 20 that his soul was consumed with longing for the law of the Lord.

In verse 21 the psalmist recognized that there was a curse on those who strayed from the commands of the Lord or who were too proud to accept the ways of God. He does not want to fall under that curse. His desire was to live under the constant blessing of God through obedience.

The psalmist realized that obeying the law of the Lord would not always be easy. There would be those who slandered and mocked him for his commitment. The ways of God will not always be accepted by the world. Even though he was slandered, the psalmist committed himself to live in faithful obedience to God's laws (verse 22). Though he was slandered, he would continue to meditate on them (verse 23). God's law would be his delight and counsellor (verse 24). He would reject all other counsel to follow the decrees of the Lord his God. While this commitment would lead to misunderstanding, trials and struggle, the psalmist pleaded with God to preserve his life and to keep him as he had promised in His word (verse 25).

In verse 26 the psalmist reminded his readers that when he recounted his ways to the Lord, the Lord answered him. Living in obedience to the Lord was not easy but when he

was laid low in the dust, the Lord answered him (verses 25-26). God saw his pain and suffering.

In times of trial and struggle we are often challenged in our obedience. When the pressure bears down on us we often are tempted to give in or turn from the clear teaching of the Lord. The cry of the psalmist in these times was that God would teach him in a deeper way to follow his decrees (verses 27-28). Hebrews 5:8 tells us that the Lord Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered. Through trials, God will stretch us in our commitment. He will bring us to a deeper level of obedience. The psalmist understood this and prayed that God would teach him greater obedience through his trials. He prayed in verse 28 that God would give him the strength He promised in His word in his time of sorrow.

In the trials and struggles of this life the psalmist committed himself to keep himself from deceitful ways. He chose instead to follow the way of truth (verse 30) and set his heart on the laws of God. He promised to hold fast to the statutes of the Lord (verse 31). The very fact that he had to hold fast is an indication of the struggle he was experiencing. The enemy will do all he can to keep us from obedience. Way back in the Garden of Eden the focus of Satan was to get Adam and Eve to turn their backs on the command of the Lord. He continues even in our day to do his utmost to keep us from living in absolute obedience. The struggle for obedience will be long and hard. We will all be called on to "hold fast" against the efforts of the enemy.

The psalmist was confident in the strength God provided. He told his readers in verse 32 that he ran in the path of God's commands because God had set him free. This is a picture of victory. Despite the troubles he was experiencing, the psalmist was able to run in the ways of the Lord.

He is not reluctantly dragging himself in the path of the Lord. The Lord has given him wonderful freedom. He runs because God has eased his burden. He runs because God has given him strength and vigour. It is true that the enemy has done much to oppose him but God's strength was greater than the enemy.

The cry of the psalmist in verse 33 is that God would continue to teach him His ways. His commitment is to follow those ways no matter how difficult life might be. He recognized that God would give him more understanding of his ways. His commitment was to live in obedience to that growing understanding.

In verses 35-37 the psalmist prayed that God would direct him in the path of His commandments, turn his heart from selfish gain and his eyes from worthless things. He wanted his whole focus in life to be on the things of God and not on the things of this world. He did not want the things of this world to distract him in his commitment to the Lord and His ways. He knew that this would be a temptation for him so he prayed that God would set his vision on His ways.

We will conclude our reflection of this section of Psalm 119 with the heart cry of the psalmist in verses 38-40. Here he prayed that God would fulfil His promise to him so that He (God) would be feared. He does not tell us what that promise was. It might be His promise to strengthen and keep him. It was only through God's blessing and keeping that the psalmist was able to keep the law of God and in so doing show reverence and honour to the Lord. It was only through obedience that the presence of God would be more clearly revealed on the earth.

He also asked God in verse 39 to take away the disgrace he dreaded. Again we are not told what that disgrace was

but the context would lead us to believe that it might have something to do with his failing to live in obedience to the will and purpose of God or the slander of the enemy.

It is hard to examine this passage and not see the passion of the psalmist for the law of God. His great desire was to live according to the purpose and plan of God. Obedience to God, no matter the cost, was his lifelong desire. We are left to wonder how we measure up to his example.

For Consideration:

- The psalmist tells us in this psalm that there is blessing in obedience. Does this mean that there will be no struggle? Explain.
- What does it mean to learn obedience? Has your obedience grown in depth?
- What does it mean to hide God's word in our heart? What is the difference between putting God's word in our mind and putting it in our heart?
- How does God teach obedience through struggle?
- Compare your desire for absolute obedience with the desire of the psalmist. How does it compare?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you a deeper passion for obedience.
- Ask God for grace to help you overcome the enemy and his temptations. Do you have a particular temptation in your life today? Ask God to give you victory.

- Ask God to teach you greater obedience. Ask Him to reveal areas of your life where He wants you to live in deeper obedience.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to help us to "run" in the path of obedience. Thank Him for the victory that can be ours in Him.

COMFORT IN AFFLICTION

Read Psalm 119:41-80

The psalmist has been reminding us that the walk of the believer with his Lord will not always be an easy one. There will be times when the faith of the believer is tested and tried. The psalmist was no stranger to suffering. He had enemies who stood against him on all sides. Through these difficulties, the psalmist found great comfort in the law of the Lord.

As we begin in verse 41, the psalmist called on the Lord to make His unfailing love and salvation known to him so that he would have an answer to the one who taunted him. This leads us to understand that his enemies were taunting him. We do not know what the enemies were saying but we can understand that they were wondering why his God did not come to his aid. It may be that they were mocking him and his belief in God. Notice that the psalmist did not have an answer for his accusers. God had allowed him to suffer. He did not lose hope, however. He called out to God in his moment of need and asked Him to set him free from the pain he felt so that he could give an answer to his accusers.

In this time of trouble the psalmist pleaded with God not to snatch the word of truth from his mouth because he had come to put all his hope in that word. The fact that the word was in his mouth is an indication that the psalmist considered it to be his food. Like food, the Word of God was what kept him and preserved his life. He would perish without that Word. God's Word gave him hope and reason to live. When the enemies surrounded him he found hope in the promise of the Lord God. This was all he had to face the enemy. He was not sure what he would have done were it not for the promise of the Lord.

There are certainly times in our lives when all we have is the Word of God and His promises. Human reason and circumstances all seem to point us to the fact that we have no hope. In those times, the psalmist clung more tightly to the clear promises of God.

Notice also in verse 44 the commitment of the psalmist to obey the law of God forever. Remember in this context that the psalmist is facing the mocking taunts of the enemy. His human reason is insufficient to carry him through. Things do not make sense for him. Despite this, he commits himself to absolute obedience. Human reason would call him to take matters into his own hands, but in these times of confusion he made it his number one commitment to obey the Lord and live completely in His commands.

In verse 45 the psalmist tells his readers that he would walk in freedom because he had sought God's precepts. There are those who believe that God's laws bind and restrict. The reality of the matter is that we cannot know perfect freedom apart from obedience to the Lord. We were created by God and for His glory. When we live outside of the purpose for which we were created, we will always find

something missing in our life. Only in obedience can we find true freedom.

The psalmist's enemies were taunting him. They were questioning his ways and the ways of his God. This does not cause the psalmist to lose faith. He chose to remain faithful to the Lord and His commands. He believed with all his heart that those commands and promises were true. In verse 46 he reminded his readers that the day was coming when he would speak of the statutes of the Lord before kings. He would not be put to shame. He would boast of those commands and declare them as true before the highest officials of the land. He took great delight in the laws of the Lord. In obeying these commands, he would never be put to shame. He lifted up his hands to the commands of God (verse 48). To lift up one's hands is to praise and honour the object to which we lift our hands. The psalmist's delight was in the commands of the Lord. He committed himself to meditate on them and to obey them.

We need to be clear in this context that we cannot separate the Word of God from God Himself. The psalmist's delight and praise of the word could be taken for idolatry if he did not see God's word to be an extension of God and His character. It was not the law the psalmist worshiped but God who gave this law. It was not in the law alone that he took his delight. He delighted in it because behind that law was the person of the Lord God whose promises were a comfort and delight to him.

In verse 49 the psalmist called on the Lord God to remember His word to His servant. The psalmist knew his share of trials. It was the word of God that gave him hope in the midst of those trials in life. It was this word that was his comfort in suffering (verse 50). God's promises preserved his life and gave him reason to continue.

Arrogant men and women mocked him without restraint (verse 51). They were arrogant because they believed that they did not need the law of the Lord. They were arrogant because they felt they could disregard God and His ways and do whatever they pleased. They mocked those who chose to be faithful to the Lord God and His commands. We do not have to look long before we see such individuals in our day.

Despite this pressure from these arrogant men and women, the psalmist remained faithful to his God. He chose to remember the ancient laws of the Lord. He found comfort in them (verse 52). He would not be negatively influenced by arrogant people to turn from the Lord God and His commands.

It grieved the heart of the psalmist to see how the wicked and arrogant people of his day had turned their hearts from God. Men and women chose to disregard the clear teaching of God. They forsook the statutes of the Lord and did whatever they pleased. This was not the case for the psalmist. The decrees of the Lord were the theme of his song wherever he lodged (verse 54). He did not forget the commands of the Lord. Even in the night when things were dark and no one could see what he was doing, the psalmist remained true to the Lord God. He continued to practice the law of God whether people saw him or not.

In verse 57 the psalmist tells us that God was his portion. The word "portion" in the original language can mean possession or belonging. What the psalmist is saying here is that there was a close connection between him and his God. God had given Himself to the psalmist and the psalmist had given himself to God. They were connected and belonged to each other. There was a covenant relationship

between God and the psalmist. Notice a couple of things here about this relationship.

First, as part of this relationship to God, the psalmist promises to obey the Lord and His word (verse 57). He would live faithfully to Him and His ways. He would not turn to any other god or to any other way.

Second, in verse 58 he chose to seek the Lord God with all his heart. It is one thing to obey the Lord's commands and another to seek the Lord Himself. Both were true in the case of the psalmist. There is passion in the words of the psalmist. He was not a legalist. His goal in life was not just to keep the commandments of God, it was to pursue God Himself and honour Him by walking in obedient fellowship.

It is important that we understand what the psalmist is telling us here. There are many who believe that if they keep God's commandments they are living the life God requires. It is important, however, that we not stop at obedience and faithfulness. Imagine a marriage where both partners are faithful to each other but do not passionately pursue each other. Obedience to the Lord is important but we must not stop there. We must also become a people who actively pursue God and seek Him with all our heart. God must become our passion and desire. This was the heart of the psalmist.

From verse 59 we understand that part of pursuing God involved examining our ways and turning our steps to follow God's purpose. Notice that the Lord requires two things here. First, He asks us to consider our ways. We do this by study and meditation. We are to be a people who give ourselves to understand the Lord and His desire for us. We are to compare our ways to what God requires of

us in His Word. Second, we are to turn our steps to His statutes. It is one thing to consider or study the law of the Lord and another to turn our steps to live in obedience. We must meditate and study the law of God but we must also commit ourselves to obey it. The psalmist reminds us that even if it meant trouble for him, he would not delay in obeying the commands of the Lord. His enemies might bind him with ropes for his commitment to the Lord but the psalmist would never forget the law of the Lord (verse 61). He would obey even if it meant trouble for him.

The delight of the psalmist in the law of God was such that in verse 62 he told his readers that at midnight he arose to give thanks to the Lord for His righteous laws. The picture here is one of a person so excited about the law of God that he could not sleep. He rose in the night with a heart full of thanks and praise for God and His wonderful law.

Notice also in verse 63 that this delight poured over into the relationships he had with those around him. He tells us that he was a friend to all who feared the precepts of the Lord. He found a connection between himself and anyone else who loved the Lord with the same passion he did.

In verse 64 the psalmist declared that the earth was filled with the love of the Lord. He saw evidences of God in His work of creation and in His dealings with men and women. What he saw of the works of the Lord showed him that God was a God of love and compassion. This stirred him even more to seek the Lord and His ways. He wanted to commit himself to serve this wonderful God of love.

In verse 65 the psalmist asked the Lord to do good to him as He had promised in His word. Again remember that in this context the psalmist is being mocked and taunted by

evil doers. He commits himself to the Lord and His goodness. He trusts that what God does will be good.

Notice from verses 66-67 that the psalmist understands that God's judgments were for his good. He asked God to teach him knowledge and good judgment and confessed that, before he was afflicted, he had gone astray, but now he obeyed the word of the Lord. What the psalmist is telling us here is that God used affliction in his life to draw him closer.

In verse 68 the psalmist went on to say that God was good and whatever He did was good. God would use all that happened to him to accomplish good. He did not accuse God of evil. Instead, he recognized God as the source of all good. Even the afflictions he was experiencing were in the hands of a good God who would use them to accomplish great things.

The arrogant people around him did not understand the heart of the psalmist or his desire for God and His ways. They smeared him with lies (verse 69). They mocked him and his ways. The psalmist would not let this distract him from his confidence in God and His goodness. He would continue faithfully with God and His ways. These arrogant individuals were hard and unfeeling (verse 70). They wanted nothing to do with God and mocked, without compassion, those who sought after God.

In verse 71 that psalmist went as far as to say that it was good to be afflicted. What these arrogant and evil individuals intended for harm was used by God to accomplish good. All this trouble only served to draw him closer to God and His ways. It only made the word of God and His promises more precious to him. While in times of ease we may take these promises for granted, in times of trouble they

become our hope and delight. The affliction the psalmist experienced was a tool in the hands of God to show him how wonderfully precious the promises of God really were. For this reason, the psalmist accepted the affliction that came his way.

The psalmist asked God to give him greater understanding of His commands (verse 73). He recognized that God had made him and clearly knew how to teach him His ways. He does not doubt God or His ways. Yes, he was afflicted and suffered at the hands of evil people but God knew what was happening and would use this to accomplish good. The psalmist was willing to face these insults to learn more of the commandments of the Lord and His ways.

It was the heart of the psalmist that those who feared the Lord would rejoice when they saw him (verse 74). The context of the verse is the psalmist's affliction. What he is asking the Lord is that not only would God use the affliction in his life to teach him to delight more in His promises but that he would also use these afflictions to be a witness to men and women of the wonderful work of God in the lives of those who trusted Him. He wanted everyone to know that while God had afflicted him, He had done so in faithfulness (verse 75). God would not turn His back on His servants. In as much as the psalmist delighted in faithfulness to his God, so God delighted in being faithful to him. It was the desire of the psalmist to show the world that God was faithful even in affliction. He wanted his life to be an example of the blessing that faithfulness to God brought.

In his affliction, the psalmist asked God to comfort him with His unfailing love and compassion (verses 76-77). Affliction has a way of drawing us closer to God. Affliction created a need in the psalmist for comfort and consolation. God was the source of that comfort and consolation. His

pain cast him into the arms of a loving and compassionate God. There in those arms he found great consolation and delight.

As we conclude this section of Psalm 119, the psalmist prays for three things in his affliction. First, in verse 78 he asked God that the arrogant people who afflicted him would be put to shame for wronging him without cause. He wanted justice to triumph. He wanted righteousness to prevail and evil to cease. May those who afflict the righteous be put to shame for the evil they have done, is his cry.

The second request of the psalmist in verse 79 is that those who feared God would turn to him (verse 79). The psalmist recognized his need of others. He prayed that God would give him people whose hearts would feel the pain of his affliction and come alongside in support and encouragement.

The third request of the psalmist in verse 80 is that God would give him a blameless heart so that he would not be put to shame. In other words, he is asking God to give him the grace necessary to persevere in this affliction without breaking His law. He is asking God to give him strength and grace to be faithful.

The psalmist struggled. He did not complain about his affliction. In fact, he thanked God for it because it gave him a deeper appreciation for the promises of God; it cast him on the love and compassion of God and drew him closer to Him. His great desire through his affliction is that he would be given strength to honour his God by faithful obedience to Him in every way. May this be our desire as well.

For Consideration:

- Does God always show us the reason for our affliction?
- What role does the Word of God play in our affliction?
- The psalmist tells us that he experienced freedom in obedience to the law of the Lord. How does disobedience lead us into bondage?
- What is the difference between obeying God's law and pursuing God Himself?
- What do we learn here about the goodness of God in our affliction? What does God accomplish through affliction in our lives?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to persevere and be obedient to Him in affliction.
- Thank God for the way He has used affliction in your life to accomplish good.
- Ask God to show you those who are facing affliction right now. Ask Him to show you how you can minister to them in their need.
- Thank the Lord for brothers and sisters who stand with you in your time of affliction.
- Can you thank God for your trials like the psalmist? Take a moment to thank the Lord for what He will do for you in your trial.

I HAVE SET MY HEART

Read Psalm 119:81-120

We have seen throughout Psalm 119 that the psalmist had his share of trials. In those times he found great comfort in the Lord God and His word. Here in this next section of the psalm we will consider the psalmist's commitment to be faithful to the law of God, no matter the cost.

As we begin, the psalmist reminds us of his suffering and pain. In verse 81 he told the Lord that his soul fainted with longing for the salvation of the Lord. The salvation he is seeking here is a salvation from his trials and pain. We have already seen that arrogant people surrounded him and caused him great trouble (see Psalm 119:51, 69). The psalmist felt the pain and ridicule of these insulting words. He took no delight in these trials. He wanted to be free. He longed to live in the freedom of God's children. He looked to the Lord for salvation. He put his hope in the word of God and His promises.

Trusting in God's word is not always easy. There will be times when we will be stretched in our faith. In verse 82

the psalmist knew this stretching of his faith. "My eyes fail, looking for your promise," he said. The picture here is of a person looking out over the horizon for something he is expecting. He strains his eyes looking for fulfilment of that promise. As he waits his eyes grow tired and weary yet he does not give up waiting. "When will you comfort me?" he asked in verse 82. Though he does not know that comfort, he knows it will come.

In verse 83 the psalmist compared himself to a wineskin in the smoke. A wineskin hanging above a smoky fire dries up and becomes dirty with the smoke. This is how the psalmist felt. He was drying up. He bore on his body the marks of the smoke of his trials and affliction. To all appearances the Lord was nowhere to be seen. The arrogant mocked him in his condition. No doubt, he wondered himself where God was and why he had to suffer as he did. Despite this, the psalmist did not forget the decrees of the Lord (verse 83). He would be faithful to those decrees and find in them his comfort and strength.

His commitment to obedience no matter the cost did not lessen the pain of his affliction. Notice in verse 84 how the psalmist cried out to God for justice. "How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors?" These persecutors were arrogant people (verse 85). That is to say they would not be submissive to the law of God. They were their own bosses and rejected all authority. These arrogant individuals dug pits for the psalmist. They made his life difficult. For the time, they seemed to be stronger than him. They were secure and comfortable while he was suffering at their hands. They persecuted him without cause (verse 86). They had almost "wiped him from the earth" (verse 87). Notice, however, the unfailing commitment of the psalmist: "All your commands are trustworthy," he told the Lord in verse 87. He would not turn

from the law of the Lord. He knew he could trust God and so he decided to remain faithful to Him and His word. He would not forsake the precepts of the Lord (verse 87). Having made this commitment to God and His word, he then casts himself on God for His protection and strength. "Preserve my life according to your love, and I will obey the statutes of your mouth" (verse 88).

What is important for us to remember is that all these commitments are made to God in a time of trouble and difficulty. It is easy to make promises to God when things are going well. It is not so easy to make this kind of commitment when everything is going wrong and we feel like the enemy is "wiping us from the earth" (see verse 87).

The psalmist knew that the word of the Lord was eternal and stood firm in the heavens (verse 89). In other words, time would have no effect on the word of God. Nothing would change His unfailing word. That word stood firm in the heavens. It had authority not only on earth but also in heaven. It was unshakeable. What God said would come to pass. Nothing would change or shake His promises. The psalmist knew that no matter what happened around him, God would be true to His word. That faithfulness had been proven from generation to generation (verse 90). It was seen in creation and in history. His sun rose every morning to shine on the righteous and the unrighteous. His rain faithfully watered the earth, allowing it to produce its fruit. Just as God had been faithful in creation so would He be faithful in keeping His promises. This was the confidence of the psalmist in his struggle.

In verse 92 the psalmist makes it clear that if the law of God had not been his delight he would have perished in his affliction. God's promises gave him hope and strength to carry on. His promises gave him reason to live. He

would have given up hope and perished at the hands of his enemies were it not for the hope God provided in His word. I'm sure that we can all identify with what the psalmist is telling us here.

God's law preserved the life of the psalmist (verse 93). He would not forget that law because he felt indebted to it. It had been his strength and hope in difficulty and affliction. Wicked people sought to destroy him but he reflected on the statutes of the Lord and found encouragement and strength in them (verse 95). Those commandments gave him hope and confidence to continue.

As he considered on the commands of God, the psalmist makes an important declaration in verse 96. "To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless." As the psalmist looked around him he saw many wonderful things. He could look up to the sky or around him on the earth and see the wonderful creative hand of God. The sunset in the evening seemed to be perfect. The way the human body functioned seemed to be without flaw but all this perfection had a limit. They would come to an end. God's commandments and decrees were beyond the perfection of this world. While the earth faded away, God's decrees would remain. Time and eternity destroy the earth bit by bit but has no effect on the purpose of God. Nothing can change God's purposes. Time, earthly powers or even the sinful and rebellious heart of humankind cannot change that which God has decreed. His promises stand despite the efforts of earth and hell to defeat them.

The law of the Lord was perfect in a way that nothing on the earth is perfect. It was eternal and enduring. It is faithful and true. The psalmist loved the law of God and meditated on it all day (verse 97). The commandments of the law gave him wisdom that was superior to the greatest wisdom

of this earth. God's commands gave him wisdom that was superior to all the wisdom of his enemies (verse 98). Through it he had more insight than all his earthly teachers or the elders of his land (verses 99-100). God's word was the source of all wisdom and understanding. It was the source of all truth.

How foolish it would be to depart from the source of all wisdom and understanding. The psalmist declared in verse 101 that he kept his feet from the path of evil so that he might obey God's word. He had not departed from His laws. God taught him through His word. The word of God was sweet to him (verse 103). There was nothing more wonderful to him than the wisdom of God. He compared it in verse 103 to sweet honey in his mouth.

What God showed him in His eternal and unfailing word changed his life. The understanding he gained from the Lord through His law kept him from following the wrong path in life. He learned to appreciate the path of righteousness and hate the path of evil (verse 104). That word was like a lamp for his feet and a light for his path. It showed him the way he was to go. It revealed the snares and obstacles in the pathway before him so he would walk without stumbling. The psalmist took an oath and confirmed it in verse 106. He would follow the Lord and His ways.

Life would not always be kind and considerate to the psalmist. He was not deceived into thinking that if he obeyed the law of God everything would run smoothly for him. In verse 107 it is clear that the psalmist had suffered much. He pleaded with the Lord to preserve his life. Though things would be difficult, the psalmist would offer willing praise to the Lord (verse 108). He would not let the enemy strip him of his confidence in God. Even when things were difficult, the psalmist would remain confident

in God's purpose and plan. He would choose to praise the Lord even when he did not understand what was going on around him.

In verse 109 he told the Lord that even if he had to take his life in his hands, he would not forget the law of the Lord. That is to say, if obedience to the law of God meant persecution, he would willingly endure that persecution but he would not be disobedient. He would willingly lay down his life rather than disobey the Lord.

Wicked people had set snares for him (verse 110). Their intent was to trap him. These wicked people did not appreciate the law of God and His ways. They were intent on destroying the psalmist because he stood for the Lord and His purposes. His commitment to the Lord made enemies.

While his commitment to God made him enemies, the psalmist refused to wander from the path God had set for him. God gave him strength and grace to remain faithful. The statutes of the Lord were his heritage forever. He would never forget them or turn from them. He delighted in the ways of the Lord and found great joy of heart in them (verse 111). This joy came even when he was being pursued by those who sought his life. His heart was set on keeping the decrees of the Lord to the end (verse 112).

God had taught the psalmist to hate "double-mindedness" (verse 113). The double minded person is one who says he or she wants to obey and serve the Lord but when difficulty comes they quickly change their mind and follow the ways of the world. The psalmist hated the ways of the double-minded. His heart was fixed on God's law and His law only. He wanted nothing to do with evil. He did not even want to be in their company lest they influence him to turn from God and His ways (verse 115). The company we

keep can often influence us one way or another. The commitment of the psalmist was to be faithful and to keep himself from anything or anyone that would tempt him to wander. He guarded his company and his mind.

It should be noted in verses 116-117 that the psalmist does not assume that he is able to keep the law of God in his own strength. He did discipline himself and keep himself from evil doers and things that would tempt him. In verse 116, however, he called on God to sustain him so he would live. He pleaded with God not to let his hopes be dashed. What were his hopes? The context indicates that his hopes were being saved from his enemies and being able to live completely for his Lord. The fact that he pleaded with God that these hopes should not be dashed is an indication that he knew he was dependant on God for this to take place. In verse 117 he asked God to uphold him so that he could be delivered. Again we see that his confidence in victory does not come from his ability to discipline himself or muster up enough human will-power and strength. His trust is in the Lord God by whose strength and promises alone there can be victory.

As we conclude this section of the psalm, the psalmist declared that God would reject those who strayed from His decrees (verse 118). Their deceitfulness was in vain. For a time, these individuals had profited from their brothers and sisters by deceit and falsehood. They had stolen from them and cheated them and by so doing had made themselves richer and more comfortable in this life. These things would not last, however. God would discard the wicked like impure waste (verse 119). They would be cast away like useless garbage. They would suffer at the hands of God's justice. The psalmist trembled because he knew that justice would come to all who turned from God and His ways (verse 120). He set his heart therefore to live in

obedience, not only because God's ways were true and wise but also because He would be judged by God for turning away from true wisdom.

For the psalmist, it was pure folly to turn from God and His ways. The law of the Lord was perfect. It was the source of all comfort, wisdom and truth. Everything was measured by this standard. Nothing could change the promises of God and following those commandments was the only path of true victory. While following the ways of God would not always be easy, it was only in doing so that the psalmist could find the meaning and purpose for which he had been created. He chose therefore to set his heart to live in obedience.

For Consideration:

- Does following God's law mean freedom from all pain and affliction? What does the psalmist teach us here?
- What is the difference between looking to God's word and looking at our circumstances?
- What does the psalmist teach us about the unchangeable nature of God's promises? What comfort do you find in this?
- The psalmist told his readers that God's law had saved his life? What did he mean by this? Has God's law ever given you such hope and comfort that you could say that you owed it your life?
- What does the psalmist show us here about our need for absolute obedience to God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the encouragement His word brings you.
- Thank the Lord that His law is the source of all truth and purpose in life. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you turned your back on that word and followed your own understanding.
- Ask the Lord to give you strength to set your heart to live in obedience to His word.

I WAIT FOR YOUR SALVATION

Read Psalm 119:121-176

In the final section of Psalm 119 the psalmist again re-confirms his commitment to live in obedience to the Lord God and to wait on Him for deliverance and salvation.

Psalm 119 seems to have two major themes. The first of these is the suffering of the believer. The second theme is the trustworthiness of the Word of God and His promises. The psalmist experienced suffering in his life even though he walked according to the command of the Lord God. Notice in verse 121 that he reminded the Lord that he had done what was righteous and just. He lived according to the teachings of the Word of God. Notice in the same verse, however, that the psalmist pleads with the Lord God not to leave him to his oppressors. It appears that he was being oppressed.

The sinful world in which we live will not always understand the ways of God. People will respond quite strongly

against the things of the Lord because His ways are different from their own ways. This means that those who want to live a just and righteous life will often face the persecution and ridicule of the unbeliever. Living in obedience to the Lord God does not guarantee a trouble-free life. In fact, the opposite is often the case (see 2 Timothy 3:12). While he is being oppressed for his faith, the psalmist casts himself on the Lord God. He asked Him in verse 122 to ensure his well-being. He pleaded with Him not to let the arrogant oppress him.

From verse 123 we understand that the timing of the Lord is not the same as ours. The confidence of the psalmist was in the Lord God but God seemed to delay. The psalmist told the Lord that his eyes were failing him as he watched for His salvation and the fulfilment of His promises. This delay does not cause the psalmist to give up on God. Notice in verse 124 how he continues to cast himself on the love of God and asked Him to teach him His decrees. He re-affirms his commitment to be the servant of God. He knew that his understanding of the purposes of God was limited. He prayed for discernment and deeper understanding as he waited for the salvation of the Lord.

Admittedly, if it were up to us, things would be quite different in this life. We tend to be impatient. We want things done right away. Clearly, the psalmist does not understand why the Lord allowed him to be oppressed at the hands of evil men and women. Nor does he understand why the Lord delayed in bringing His deliverance and salvation. He did understand, however, that the ways of God were higher than his ways. As he waited on the salvation of the Lord, he asked for discernment and understanding so that he would not wander from the Lord and His ways.

Humanly speaking, as the psalmist looked around him, he felt it was time for God to act. He says this in verse 126: "It is time for you to act, O LORD." Notice in verse 126 that the basis for this statement was the fact that the laws of the Lord were being broken. Men and women were living their lives disregarding the law of God. They lived as if there were no God to whom they would one day have to answer. This resulted in the oppression of the righteous and the suffering of God's servants at the hands of those who did not love the Lord.

From his own human understanding, the psalmist felt it was time for God to step in and do something. He felt this way because his heart was broken when he saw the law of God being disregarded. He loved the commands of the Lord more than gold (verse 127). He believed that all the precepts of the Lord were right (verse 128). It grieved the psalmist that this perfect law of God was being ignored by ignorant and rebellious humanity.

God's statutes were wonderful to the psalmist. He lived in obedience to them. As God unfolded His words to him the psalmist gained new insight and understanding into the heart of God and His purpose (verse 130). He panted for the law of God like a racer gasped for breath after a hard race. This law was his life. He depended on it. He could not see himself living without God's law.

In verse 132 the psalmist pleaded with the Lord God to turn to him and have mercy on him. The Lord seemed to be distant at the time. His salvation seemed to be far removed. The psalmist was not going to give up hope. He knew that God always returned to those who loved His name (verse 132). Though he did not experience the salvation and deliverance he sought at the moment, he waited on God, knowing that He would come to his aid. As

he waited on this deliverance, the psalmist has several requests for God in verses 133-135.

First, the psalmist asked that the Lord would direct his footsteps according to His word so that sin would not rule over him (verse 133). Often it is in waiting that we lose patience and take matters into our own hands. The enemy knows that if he perseveres in tempting us, the chances are that we will eventually give in to his temptations. The longer we bear the weight of oppression, the more we become weary and tired. The psalmist realized that the timing of the Lord was not the same as his. If he was going to remain under the oppression of the enemy, he wanted God to control every step he took. He did not trust his ability to keep on the right path. He needed God to be his guide in this time of oppression.

The second request of the psalmist in verse 134 is that God would redeem him from the oppression of men so that he might obey His precepts. The psalmist knew the power of oppression to wear down the strongest believer. It is true that God can strengthen and equip the believer through trials and struggles but the psalmist knew that he could only bear so much before he turned from the Lord and gave in to the temptations. For this reason he asked God to set him free from the oppression so that he would not wander.

The final request in this context is that the Lord would make His face to shine on him and teach him His decrees. As the psalmist waited on the salvation and deliverance of the Lord, he wanted to be sure that God's blessing was on his life. He wanted to be sure that God would face this oppression with him and guide him all the way. He wanted to know the blessing of the Lord and have the knowledge of

His presence. The presence of God would be His encouragement and strength in these times.

In verse 136 the psalmist returns to the condition of his society. He tells the Lord that "streams of tears" flowed from his eyes, because His law was not obeyed. This grieved him because these laws were righteous. They reflected the heart of a loving and holy God for humanity. God's word was absolutely perfect, holy and worthy of confidence (verse 138).

The psalmist told his readers in verse 139 that his zeal for the law of God was wearing him out. All around him, he saw men and women ignoring the word of God. This grieved him. He loved the promises of God and knew them to be trustworthy (verse 140). Even though people despised him for his stand on the law of God, he would not turn from it (verses 141-143). He stood firm in his commitment to God and His ways at a time when it was not popular to do so.

Notice in verse 145 that the psalmist pleaded with God to answer him and save him in his time of need (verse 146). Notice also that he arose before dawn to cry to the Lord for help (verse 147). He stayed awake at night and meditated on God's promises (verse 148). He put his confidence in the word of God even though he was not presently seeing the deliverance and salvation he sought. He committed himself to the love of the Lord. He asked God to hear his cry: "Preserve my life" (verse 149).

Around him people devised wicked schemes. These people were not governed by the law of God. They did as they pleased. While the enemy was near so was God (verse 151). Not only was God near but His commands and statutes were true and would not fail. This brought the psalmist

hope and gave him reason to persevere. Yes, his enemies were near but an even greater power was strengthening him. God had not left him. God had given His promise and that promise of salvation and deliverance would not fail.

He pleaded with God in verse 153 to look on his suffering and deliver him. He asked God to defend his cause and redeem him as He had promised (verse 154). The wicked could not expect to see the salvation of the Lord but those who loved Him had full assurance of that salvation as they cast themselves on Him (verses 155-156). In light of this truth, the psalmist makes it very clear that he would remain true to the statutes of the Lord his God and would separate himself from those who did evil (verses 157-158).

The psalmist was persecuted and oppressed because of his love for the Lord and His commands (verse 161). His commitment to God and His ways set him apart from the ungodly. He rejoiced in God and His ways like a soldier finding great spoil (verse 162). He loved the law of God. He found himself praising God seven times a day because of His wonderful law (verse 164). The reference to seven times may be taken literally but could also be understood in the sense of praising God all day long.

Because of his delight in the law of God, the psalmist had great peace. We were created to live for God and only in living for Him will we experience the peace He offers. The psalmist experienced this peace in his life despite the fact that he was being oppressed by his enemies. He knew that as long as he walked in obedience to the Lord he would not stumble.

The psalmist waited for the salvation of the Lord. While these were difficult times for him, he did not lose hope. He persevered in seeking the Lord and walking according to

His ways. In verses 169-170, he cried out to the Lord asking Him to hear his voice. As he waited for the salvation of the Lord, the psalmist would continue to praise Him and sing of His righteous commands (verse 171-172). He longed for the salvation of God (verse 174). He pleaded with God to let him live so that he could praise Him. He compared himself to a sheep that had strayed from the shepherd (verse 176). He felt overwhelmed and alone. He felt the presence of the enemy all around him, seeking to devour him. He knew as a sheep he could not overcome his enemy but he had a Shepherd who could protect him. This shepherd was all his hope and trust.

For Consideration:

- Has your choice to follow the Lord God and His ways brought you persecution? Explain.
- What do we learn here about the timing of the Lord? What is our temptation in times when the Lord seems to delay in responding to our prayers?
- Have you ever had times when God seemed distant from you? What is the commitment of the psalmist in these times of his life?
- What is your response when the Word of God is ignored or disregarded in your society? What should be our response?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you faith to trust Him when things do not seem to be happening as quickly as you would like.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater love for Him and His Word. Ask Him to forgive you for times when

your heart is not grieved over the condition of your society.

- Do you know someone who is facing a trial of their faith? Ask the Lord to guide their footsteps at this time so they do not wander from the truth of His Word.

THE LORD WATCHES OVER YOU

Read Psalm 120:1-121:8

What a wonderful thing it is to know that despite the struggles we face on this earth the Lord our God is at our side watching out for us. In these times of trial and difficulty, we can call out to Him and He will hear our request. Here in Psalm 120 the psalmist expressed his distress because of a struggle he faced from those around him.

In Psalm 120:1 the psalmist called out to the Lord in his distress. Notice that he was distressed particularly by lying lips and deceitful tongues (120:2). Things were being said that were not true. People around him were not governed by principles of honesty and morality.

The psalmist had a very strong warning to those who spoke with lying lips and deceitful tongue. He warned them that God would punish them with sharp arrows and with burning coals from the broom tree (120:3-4). The broom tree was a desert shrub which produced lasting and hot

flames. The psalmist was telling those with lying lips and deceitful heart that they would be severely punished by God for the harm they did with their tongues. We need to see the strong hatred of God for dishonesty and deceitfulness. It is of utmost importance that what comes from our lips be pure and honest.

Not only did the psalmist live among a people who were dishonest but he also lived among people who hated peace. They were always fighting among themselves.

In Psalm 120:5 the psalmist lamented the fact that he lived in Meshech and Kedar. Both Meshech and Kedar were foreign nations located in Asia Minor. These nations did not know the Lord God of Israel nor did they follow His law. The psalmist did not literally live in these foreign lands. What he is saying here is that he was living among a pagan people who did not love the Lord. The Israelites he lived with lived like pagans who had no concept of God. They were dishonest and deceitful. They loved to fight among themselves. They hated peace.

As a man of peace who loved the Lord God, the psalmist felt like a foreigner in his own land. He was uncomfortable among those who did not love and honour the Lord. It was for this reason that he called out to the Lord in distress.

We have to admire the way in which the psalmist grieved over the condition of his land. His heart was broken because his people did not live in a way that honoured the Lord his God. He felt alone and oppressed. These liars and deceivers spoke against him and caused him great distress.

Notice in Psalm 121 that in his distress the psalmist lifted up his eyes to the hills. The city of Jerusalem and the

temple where God revealed His presence were in the hills. In looking to the hills the psalmist is looking to the place where God revealed His presence. The psalmist knew that his help came from the Lord who was Maker of heaven and earth. There could be no greater help. If the Maker of heaven and earth came to his aid, what could his enemies do to him?

Notice the great confidence of the psalmist in his God. In Psalm 121:3 he makes it quite clear that with the Lord God as his help, his foot would never slip. Imagine a person walking on a steep mountain path where every footstep is dangerous. To slip was to fall to one's death. The psalmist knew that with the Lord God as his helper, guiding each of his steps, he would not stumble or fall. God would keep him safe.

Unlike human help, the God of Israel would never sleep (121:4). He did not need to rest for He never grew tired. This meant that he could devote all His time to watching over His child.

In Psalm 121:5-6 the psalmist described the Lord as a shade. As a shade, the Lord protected His child from the burning sun of the day and the moon at night. The sun and moon represent those things that might harm the believer. With God's protecting presence surrounding him, the psalmist had no cause for fear. Even though he was surrounded by people of lying lips and deceitful tongues, he could be safe and secure under the shade of the Almighty.

The promise of the psalmist in Psalm 121:7-8 is that God would keep all who would seek Him. He would protect them from harm and watch over their lives. Wherever they went the Lord would preserve them forever.

The psalmist felt like a stranger in his own land. He found that he could no longer identify with his people who were wandering farther and farther from the Lord and His ways. These individuals were people of lying lips and deceitful tongues. They had rejected God and His ways. They had rejected peace and fought among themselves and against those who stood for the truth. This meant that the psalmist became the object of oppression and scorn. As a righteous man in an ungodly nation, he was not popular.

For this reason it was a wonderful blessing for the psalmist to know that the Maker of heaven and earth was at his side watching every step and keeping him from stumbling. By His strength and because of His protection, the psalmist could continue to walk in the path of truth with assurance of safety and guidance.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the importance of honesty? What does the psalmist tell us God will do with lying lips and deceitful tongues?
- Have you ever felt like a stranger among your own people? The psalmist was willing to be different. He chose to be faithful to his God. Do you have this strength? Explain.
- What comfort does Psalm 121 offer those who want to take a stand for the Lord? What are the promises of this Psalm for all who will stand firm for Him?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to stand firm in the midst of opposition.
- Thank the Lord that He promises to keep us in our time of trouble.
- Ask God to break dishonesty and immorality in your society.
- Ask God to help you to be a shining light of righteousness to those around you.

A CRY FOR PEACE

Read Psalm 122:1-125:5

There is something very wonderful about knowing that we are protected and surrounded by the Lord God. Our enemies sometimes seem to overwhelm us. In those times, it is great to know that God, who is bigger than all our enemies, will keep us. In Psalms 122-125 we catch a glimpse of this presence of the Lord that surrounds His people.

As the psalmist began Psalm 122 he told his readers that he rejoiced with those who invited him to go to the house of the Lord. The reference to the house of the Lord here is a reference to the temple where God revealed His presence in Old Testament times. We should not see the rejoicing to be in the building, although it was a wonderful building. The glory of the temple and the city of Jerusalem was in the presence of the Lord God who dwelt there. The delight of the psalmist and his friends is not in wood and brick but in the revealed presence of the Lord.

In Psalm 122:2 the psalmist said: "Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem." There is a sense of awe in this

verse. The psalmist seems to be overwhelmed by the fact that he and his friends are standing in the very place where the presence of the Lord God is revealed. They know they are unworthy of this honour but they stand nonetheless in this place.

The psalmist took a moment to reflect on the city of Jerusalem. He told his readers that Jerusalem was built like a city that was closely compacted together (122:3). In other words, the city was well constructed. Imagine a great wall surrounding a city. As you examine this wall you see that there are holes in the wall. It is obviously not well constructed because the bricks don't fit together well to form a solid wall. This is not the picture of the city of Jerusalem. It was constructed well. Each part of the unit fit together with the other part. It was closely compacted together forming one solid unit that could not be penetrated by the enemy. This being the case, its inhabitants could live in security.

Not only was Jerusalem a place of security but it was also a place of praise. The tribes of the Lord went up to Jerusalem to praise the name of the Lord (122:4). This was a city where God dwelt. It was a place where God was honoured and worshiped. It was a wonderful place to go because those who visited this city could enjoy praising their Lord.

Notice in Psalm 122:5 that Jerusalem was also a place where the thrones of judgment stood. From this place the just purposes of God would be carried out. Here God had established His presence and authority. From here He would carry out His purpose and plan for the entire world.

For the psalmist, Jerusalem was an important place. Here the presence of the Lord was revealed. It was a place of security, praise and justice. From this place God would

carry out His worldwide purposes. For this reason, the psalmist called his people to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (122:6-7). Notice in Psalm 122:8 that it was for the sake of his brothers and friends that he prayed for the peace of this city. It is important that we mention something here in this regard.

There is one thing for sure in life. When the Lord chooses to use a person or a location for His glory and the expansion of His kingdom, the enemy will never be far behind to hinder that purpose. As the psalmist considered the wonderful purpose of God that was to unfold from the city of Jerusalem, he knew Jerusalem was strategic to the purpose and plan of God. He also knew that the enemy would make it his target. While those who lived in the presence of God in this city were secure, this did not mean that they would not suffer at the hands of the enemy. The psalmist knew that Jerusalem would be attacked because of its place in the plan of God. The Lord Jesus would visit this city and suffer death on the cross. The enemies of God's people would destroy it and burn it to the ground. Looking ahead prophetically the psalmist prayed for God's peace to rest on this important city. He considers his brothers and sisters who lived in this city as the enemy sought to attack it. In Psalm 122:9 the psalmist committed himself to seek the prosperity of the city God had chosen to unveil His purposes. His desire is that God would accomplish all He proposed in that city.

What we need to understand here is just how important it is for us to pray for and surround each other in the work of the kingdom. Satan knows that each of us is important to the work of the kingdom of God. He will not hesitate to do all he can to hinder us. For this reason, we need to be in prayer for one another. We need to join hands and learn to work as one. Even as Jerusalem was built closely

compacted together, we too need to become one closely knit body so that the enemy cannot penetrate our ranks.

The reality of the battle before us ought to cause us not only to join together in prayer and support of each other but also to lift up our eyes to the throne of God in heaven (see Psalm 123:1). In Psalm 123 the psalmist lifted up his eyes to heaven. Notice how he lifted up his eyes.

In Psalm 123:2 he told his readers that he lifted up his eyes like a slave looks to the hand of his master or the eyes of a maid to her mistress. How does the slave look to his master's hand? The slave looks to the master's hand with humility. The slave does not have anything of his own. He is completely dependent on his master's resources to accomplish the work he is called to do. This is how the psalmist looked to God. He realized that God alone had all that was necessary. He realized that if God did not provide, he could not accomplish what he was called to do. He comes to the master with absolute dependence.

Not only does the slave come to the master in humility and dependence but also with confidence. The slave knows that the master is aware of his poverty. The slave comes to the master in confidence that he who has called him to do a certain work will also provide him with the tools and resources necessary to accomplish that work. This is how the psalmist came to the Lord. He came with a deep understanding of his need but also of the resources of the Master. He came confidently knowing that the Master would give him all that was necessary to do the work He had called him to do. We who are central to the purpose and plan of God in this world can be confident that while the enemy will make us his target, the Lord will provide us all that is necessary to accomplish what He has for us to accomplish.

The slave also comes before his master in absolute obedience. What the master tells him to do he will do. He does not do things his own way. He is committed to his master and will only do what the master tells him to do. This is how the psalmist came to God.

We should not assume that because God is with us we will not have to face opposition. Notice in Psalm 123:3 that the psalmist cried out for the mercy of the Lord. He reminded his readers that, as a people, they had suffered contempt and ridicule from the proud and arrogant. The proud and arrogant are those who refused to submit to the Law of God and His purposes. These enemies of God caused distress for the people of God. We should expect this to be the case for us as well.

In Psalm 124 the psalmist takes a moment to consider the wonderful aid of the Lord in these moments of ridicule and distress at the hands of the enemy. Here in this psalm he reminded his people that if the Lord had not been on their side they would have perished.

Notice that there was struggle for the people of God. In Psalm 124:2 they were attacked. The anger of their enemies flared against them (124:3). Had it not been for the presence of the Lord God they would have been swallowed alive in that fierce anger. The floods, torrents and raging waters of opposition swept over them. Were it not for the Lord, they would have been engulfed and swept away (124:4-5).

Through all the opposition of the enemy the Lord delivered them. God did not let the enemy tear them apart with their teeth (124:6). He set them free from the snares set by their enemies so that they escaped their wrath (124:7). God

was their help in time of trouble. The Maker of heaven and earth surrounded them and came to their aid (124:8).

Reflecting on these wonderful truths the psalmist declared in Psalm 125:1: "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion." There are several reasons for this.

Notice, first, that those who trust the Lord are like Mount Zion because it cannot be shaken. Jerusalem stood firmly on the mountain. Imagine the enemy standing at the foot of the mountain trying to shake it like a fruit tree. This mountain was firmly rooted and could not be shaken by the enemy. The psalmist is telling us here that those who trust in the Lord have a sure foundation on which to stand. As long as they remain in Him there is nothing the enemy can do. In order to get to us, the enemy first has to deal with God who is our foundation.

Second, we see from Psalm 125:2 that those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion or Jerusalem because Mount Zion was surrounded by mountains. In the same way the Lord God surrounded His people. Notice in particular that the Lord surrounded His people "both now and forevermore." There will never be a time that the presence of the Lord will not surround His people. As a loving heavenly Father, the Lord cares for His children. Our enemy will do his utmost to defeat and oppress, but God will surround us like the mountains surrounded Jerusalem. In His arms we are secure.

Third, those who trusted in the Lord were like Mount Zion because God was jealous for them and would not allow their enemies to triumph over them. In Psalm 125:3 the promise of the Word of God is that the sceptre of the wicked will not remain in the land allotted to the righteous. God had given Jerusalem to His people. The enemy had

entered that land. They had come in like a flood and a raging torrent (Psalm 124:2-3). God's people were oppressed and ridiculed. God would not allow these enemies to continue in the land He had given His people. Their sceptre (symbol of authority and power) would be broken. God would do good to those who were upright in heart. He would banish those whose ways were evil from the land (125:5). Ultimately victory would belong to the Lord and His people.

The psalmist ended Psalm 125 with a prayer for peace to be on Israel. It is the prayer of the psalmist that God's people would live in the peace God provided. While his prayer could certainly be that the Lord would cause evildoers to cease their opposition, it should not be limited to this. Peace can be found in the presence of battle and turmoil. The Lord Jesus promised His peace to us in John 14:27:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

The Lord promised this peace to His disciples just before he was crucified. As the disciples carried the message of salvation to the ends of the earth they would suffer much at the hands of their enemies. The peace the Lord Jesus promised His disciples was not an absence of pain and struggle but a calm assurance in the midst of turmoil and confusion. The psalmist prayed that this peace would rest on the nation of Israel. He prayed that the comfort and assurance of the Lord's presence would be their strength and confidence as they carried out the purpose of God.

Psalms 122-125 call us to an awareness of our strategic place as the people of God in the purpose of God for this world. As elite warriors for the kingdom, we will be the

focus of the enemy's attack. In this battle, however, we can have the assurance of God's presence surrounding us. Like the mountains surrounded the city of Jerusalem, so God will surround those who love Him. In time, He will banish evil and give victory to His children. As we await that victory, we can live in the peace God delights to give to all who will rest in Him and trust His purposes.

For Consideration:

- Why is the presence of God a cause for great rejoicing for the believer?
- How was Jerusalem central to the purposes of God for humanity?
- What does this passage teach us about how the enemy attacks those who are strategic warriors in the battle for righteousness?
- The psalmist told his readers that he looked to God as a slave looked to his master's hand. What does he mean by this? What does this teach us about how we need to rely on God?
- How are those who trust God like Mount Zion? What encouragement does this bring you?
- Peace is not the absence of trouble, but grace to face trouble with confidence. Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider how the Lord has surrounded you and kept you in your time of trouble. Thank the Lord for His protection and guidance in those moments.

- Take a moment to pray for those around you who are key warriors in the battle for truth and righteousness. Ask God to keep them and give them His peace in the battle.
- Thank the Lord that, while the battle may be fierce, victory is secured for all who trust in Him.

**SOWING IN TEARS,
REAPING IN JOY**

Read Psalm 126:1-130:8

We have seen though the book of Psalms that the life of the believer is often filled with trials and suffering. The strange thing about this life, however, is that despite the suffering and oppression, there is still tremendous blessing and joy. In this meditation we will examine some of the blessings the believer can experience in the midst of suffering and pain.

We begin in Psalm 126:1 with a declaration of the psalmist regarding the return from captivity. The psalmist tells us that when the Lord brought the nation of Israel back from their captivity, they were "like men who dreamed." In other words, things were so wonderful and perfect that it was hard for their mind to believe that it was real. The experience of being set free from captivity was a wonderful one. Psalm 126:2 tells us that their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with songs of joy. These were marvellous days. God's people were free from the

bondage of the enemy. This was cause for great rejoicing and praise. Listen to their cry of praise in Psalm 126:3:

The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

One of the greatest blessings we know as believers today is that of being freed from our enemy. Our great enemy is sin. It holds us in bondage and separation from God. Under its dominion we are destined for an eternal separation from God under His wrath and justice. The Lord Jesus set us free by His death on the cross. We who have believed in the Lord Jesus and trusted His work can now declare with the psalmist: "The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."

Notice in Psalm 126:4 that the psalmist asked the Lord to restore their fortunes like streams in the Negev. It is true that the children of Israel had been set free from their bondage but this was not the end of God's blessings. God wanted to do far more than deliver them from their enemies. He wanted to restore their fortunes. As a people they had lost much because of sin. This enemy had stripped them of the wonderful intimacy with God and His infinite treasures. The same is true for us as believers today. It is the desire of God not only to set us free from the dominion of sin but also to restore to us everything sin has taken from us.

The blessing that God wanted to restore would come not to a proud people but to ones who had been humbled under His discipline. Notice the imagery of a gardener (126:5-6). This gardener sows in tears. He goes out weeping as he sows his seed. These are hard times. He weeps because things have been difficult. As a people, Israel had just come back from captivity. They had been disciplined.

They knew that heavy hand of God's punishment. They had been sowing sinful deeds in the past but now they had repented and with tears in their eyes began to sow righteousness.

Notice, however, in Psalm 126:5-6 that those who sowed in repentant tears would reap with songs of joy carrying their sheaves with them. God would respond to their repentant hearts. He had broken them through their captivity in order to restore their blessing. Even their captivity was a blessing from God. God's discipline led His people to repentance and ultimately to a deeper walk with Him.

God is in the process of working in the lives of His people. We see in Psalm 126 that God worked through the captivity of His people to restore them to fellowship. God's delight was to restore all the blessings sin had stripped from His people.

As God's people sought to rebuild their lives after their captivity they needed to understand how much they needed the Lord. In Psalm 127 the psalmist told his readers that unless the Lord built the house the builders laboured in vain. If God was not in what they were doing they were wasting their time and effort. The psalmist challenges his people to watch what God was doing and submit to it. He encourages us all to let God go before us. How often do we feel like the work of the Kingdom of God depends on us? We feel that it is by our human effort and wisdom that it will advance. This is simply not the case. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus said to Peter:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Notice that the Lord made it very clear that it was He who would build His church. The church would not be built on human wisdom and effort but in the power of God's Spirit through human vessels. This is also what the Lord said to Zechariah in Zechariah 4:6:

So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."

The Lord is in the process of doing a wonderful work. He is restoring the blessing of His people and pushing back the strongholds of sin. It is our privilege to be part of this wonderful work of God. We are blessed to be the focus of God's efforts. We are blessed to be instruments of His great work in this world.

Our tendency as believers is to try and take on God's role. We see the problems around us and take them on ourselves. In my own ministry I have often worn myself out with good efforts. I have lost sleep worrying over problems. I have worried about situations that were beyond my control. I have often tried to change my situation or the circumstances in the lives of others to no avail. Notice what the psalmist told his readers in Psalm 127:2. He told them that they were waking up early and staying up late in vain. He told them that God gave His loved ones sleep but they were pushing themselves in vain to achieve things that only God could achieve. Do you realize how easy it would be for God to change your current situation? In an instant everything could change. We wear ourselves out to achieve what God can achieve in an instant.

As believers we need to catch a glimpse of what the psalmist is telling us here. If God is not doing anything about your problem, do you think you can fix it on your own? What can

we do that God cannot do? We burn ourselves out with worry and human effort when God simply asks us to wait on Him and obey His leading. He is able to do more than we could ever imagine in our situation. His desire is to bless us and restore our fortunes. Can we trust Him to do what He wants to do in us? If so, we will rest and wait on Him and His timing. It is a wonderful blessing to know that God is working on our behalf.

In Psalm 127: 3-5 the psalmist spoke of yet another wonderful blessing from the Lord. Here he reminds his readers that sons were a heritage from the Lord and children were a reward from Him. He compared these children to arrows in the quiver of an archer. The idea here is that the Lord would provide for the His people through their children. Children would be their defence and support in old age. When the parents grew old and were humbled by age and weakness their children would contend for them at the gate (127:5). The gate of the city was where business matters were addressed and important decisions made. It was also where the enemy would attack. The psalmist is telling his readers that when they were old and unable to conduct their business or defend themselves, their children would be there for them.

The psalmist is telling his readers that God would provide for them in their time of need through other human beings. In this case, God would provide children to stand with them. This passage speaks also to those who do not have children to stand with them. The principle remains the same. God provides people to stand with us in our need. If you do not have children God will provide others to stand with you. God's desire is for believers to live in community. In the context of community they are to bless and encourage one another. Together we stand as one family against the attack at our gate.

Those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways would eat the fruit of their labours (Psalm 128:1). God's blessing and prosperity would be on their lives (128:2). Children would sit around their table like olive shoots. The olive tree was a symbol of prosperity. It produced the oil that was so useful for cooking and medical purposes. Each olive shoot could produce great quantities of oil in its lifespan. That oil would be a tremendous blessing for many. This is what the psalmist is telling his readers here. He is telling them that their children would be productive and fruitful. They would be a source of tremendous blessing for them as parents. The prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 128:5-6 is that those who feared the Lord would be blessed and would live long enough to see their grandchildren.

From Psalm 129 we understand that there are also many trials in the life of the believer. In Psalm 129:1 the psalmist told his readers that he had been greatly oppressed from his youth. Notice that, though he was oppressed, his enemies did not have victory over him (129:2).

In Psalm 129:3 the psalmist compares his struggle to ploughmen ploughing furrows in his back. We can only imagine how much pain would be inflicted if a plough were digging deep trenches in his back. His enemies hurt him but God cut him free from the cords of his enemies (129:4).

He was not the only one who was suffering because of His enemies. The psalmist cried out to God in Psalm 129:5-8 about those who oppressed his people. He prayed that those who hated Zion would be turned back in shame. He asked God to make their enemies like grass growing on a roof in the heat of the sun (129:6). It withers before it can grow. There is not enough for the reaper to fill his hands because it perished in the sun (129:7). The psalmist also asked that the blessing of the Lord would depart from

those who hated Zion so that they could not continue in their evil practices (129:7-8).

In Psalm 130 the psalmist cried out to God and asked Him to have mercy on him in his anguish. It is true that those who love the Lord are blessed. We have seen evidence of this in Psalms 126-129. This blessing, however, does not remove pain and trouble. As believers, we live in a sinful world. Our experience of the blessings of God is very real but so is our experience of trouble at the hand of the enemy. We experience blessing and trouble at the same time. The psalmist cries out to the Lord for blessing in the midst of terrible oppression.

The psalmist knew that he did not deserve that God should come to his aid. He knew that he was a sinful man. If God were to keep a record of all his sins he would not be able to stand before Him (130:3). He approached God, however, on the basis of His forgiveness and mercy (130:4). He knew that in the Lord God was wonderful forgiveness. He could ask God for assistance because God was a God of grace whose desire was to bless His children, despite their shortcomings.

He waited on the Lord and put his hope and confidence in Him and His word. He watched for the Lord more than the watchman waited for the morning (130:6), when he would finally be able to rest. All his hope and confidence was in the Lord. He encouraged Israel to do the same in their trouble. God was a God of unfailing love. He would redeem His people from the hands of their enemy (130:7-8).

These psalms remind us that as believers we must walk in a world filled with trouble. There are times when the enemy will overwhelm us. There are times when we will suffer at the hands of those who "hate Zion." As believers, however,

we also have another hope. God can use trials to draw us closer to Himself. He will shower us with His blessings in the midst of our pain and oppression. Blessings do not remove trials in life. They are evidences, however, that God is still with us. Those blessings give us courage to face the pain of life. As God builds His church, there will be times of struggle. We should not expect to live a trouble free life in a sinful world. We should expect, however, that God, who is a God of unfailing love, will reach out to us in this time and guide us step by step. He will take us through the pain. He will bless us in the pain and He will bless the pain in us.

For Consideration:

- It is the desire of the Lord God to restore the fortunes that sin has stripped from us. What has sin stripped from you?
- How do trials produce repentance and restore intimacy and blessing? Have you ever experienced trials that restored your spiritual blessing?
- What do these psalms teach us about resting in what God is doing? Have you ever found yourself being worn out by human effort and worry? What should our attitude be in these times?
- One of the blessings of the Lord is a family to stand with us in times of weakness. Do you have such a family today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He came to set us free from sin. Thank Him that we can live victoriously over that sin now because of Christ.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for not trusting Him and His loving-kindness enough. Ask Him to give you grace to trust Him more in your particular problem or struggle.
- Thank the Lord for the way He can use trials to bring blessing into your life.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to accept the struggles that come your way. Thank Him for the blessing He gives you in the midst of trials.

**THE LORD
DWELLING IN ZION**

Psalm 131:1-134:3

If there is one thing we need to understand about the Lord God it is that His ways are greater than our ways. I have often spoken with people who were attempting to make sense of God's plan. After completing Bible School I enrolled at a secular university and did a major in Religious Studies. This was a mind opening experience for me. In this secular university setting I saw a whole new way of thinking. Here the human mind reigned supreme. Anything that was not logical or could be explained by rational or scientific means was immediately cast off as being untrue. Faith was seen as a weakness. Only what could be proven scientifically or rationally could be believed. This is the mind-set of proud humanity. With it, comes the idea that the human mind is the judge of all that is true.

Several years later I ran up against this mind set when I was speaking with an individual at a print shop. He was examining some booklets I was having printed. The

conversation turned to spiritual matters and soon we found ourselves speaking about the doctrine of the Trinity. He told me that he did not believe this doctrine because it did not make any sense to him. I remember telling him that I was very glad there were things about God I could not understand because if God could be understood by our human minds He would not be big enough.

There will always be things about God and His ways that we will never understand. He is too big to be understood. He is too wonderful for our minds to comprehend. There are some things we will just have to accept by faith. We will just have to learn to trust Him even when we don't understand His ways and purposes.

In Psalm 131:1 the Psalmist David told his readers that his mind was not proud nor were his eyes haughty. He did not concern himself with great matters or things too wonderful for him. In saying this, the Psalmist realized that some things about God were not to be understood by the human mind.

Notice that David chose to quiet his soul like a child with his mother. How often do we get concerned about matters that are too big for us? We lose sleep over issues that we have no control over. We wrestle with doctrines that are too hard for our minds to comprehend. David tells us that instead of trying to deal with matters too wonderful for us to understand, we need to rest like a little child in the arms of our Lord trusting Him completely.

The little child in this picture does not concern himself or herself with the worries and concerns of the universe. They rest undisturbed, confident in their parent. They leave all matters in the capable hands of their mother and father.

This is what David did when he didn't understand what was happening.

God is calling us to be a people who humble ourselves to realize that there are matters too big for us to be concerned about in life. He calls us to learn how to trust Him and His ways. God is bigger than we are and is fully capable of dealing with the affairs of the universe. We need to cast off all worry and concern and find our place in the arms of our heavenly Father. Here we will find rest from our concerns and worries. Here we will find perfect security and contentment. In Psalm 131:3 David called all of Israel to put their hope in the Lord both now and forevermore. That same call goes out to us as well.

Knowing the glorious and loving nature of the Lord God, David set his heart to find a place for Him to dwell and be worshiped. David knew that God could not be confined to any one place for He was everywhere present. At the same time, however, David knew that God did delight in revealing Himself to His people. David delighted in the presence of the Lord. We saw in Psalm 131 that David compared his relationship with God to that of a child resting in the arms of his father.

Because David wanted to see the presence of the Lord manifested in greater measure, he made an oath to God. He explains to his readers the nature of that oath in Psalm 132:3-5:

I will not enter my house
or go to my bed—
I will allow no sleep to my eyes,
no slumber to my eyelids,
till I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob.

It was the heart of David to build a house for the Lord in Jerusalem. In this house the Lord God would be worshiped and honoured. Here praises would rise to His name. Here sacrifices would be made to cover the offenses of his people. People would come from distant places to worship the Lord God in this house (132:6-7).

This temple of God in Jerusalem would be the resting place of the Lord. Here the Lord God would make His presence known to His people. In Psalm 132:8 David called on the Lord to arise and come to His resting place. This was David's greatest desire. He wanted to see God in His midst. He wanted to rest in that wonderful presence. He asked God to clothe His priests with righteousness and His people with songs of joy as they entered that presence (Psalm 132:9).

Notice from Psalm 132:10 that David pleaded with God not to reject him as king. It is quite likely that with this request David is asking the Lord to honour his desire to see His presence revealed in Jerusalem and the temple he had made for God.

God swore an oath to David (132:11-12). He promised him that one of his descendants would sit on the throne in Jerusalem. As long as his sons lived in obedience to God and honoured His name then they would sit forever on the throne in Jerusalem. More important than this, however, God had promised that he would make Zion His resting place and He would sit enthroned there as true King. From this place God would establish His kingdom and from there it would expand to cover the entire earth.

Notice in Psalm 132:14 that the Lord delighted in revealing His presence from Zion. "Here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it." It was the heart of God to reveal His

presence to His people. When David called on the Lord to manifest His presence in the midst of Jerusalem he was asking Him for something God already wanted to do.

Notice in Psalm 132:15-18 the blessings that come with the revelation of God's presence. God promised to bless His people with abundant provisions and satisfy them with food (132:15). As a loving heavenly Father, He would provide them with all they need to live. He would take care of their very basic needs.

The Lord would also clothe His priests with salvation and His saints with songs of joy (132:16). In the presence of God there would be forgiveness of sin and wonderful joy.

God's presence would also bring with it a "horn" and a "lamp" (132:17). The horn was a symbol of authority and power. For an animal the horn was a weapon. God's presence in their midst would give His people authority and power. A lamp provided light for the path. It guided the traveller along the way so that he or she did not stumble and fall. God's presence in their midst would give them the light they needed for the path of life. His presence would guide them and keep them so that they did not stumble.

It is important to note that this horn of authority and the lamp of guidance could very well point prophetically to the Lord Jesus and His ministry. Jesus came with the horn of God's authority. His word was also a light for His people.

The presence of God would also bring victory over the enemies of God's people (132:18). God would clothe His enemies with shame. He would reign with a "resplendent" crown. His rule would not be contested. His enemies would be put to shame and turn their backs in defeat.

Another wonderful blessing of the presence of God can be seen in Psalm 133. Here the Psalmist speaks of how wonderful it was for brothers to dwell together in unity.

The psalmist compared this unity of brothers and sisters to precious oil poured on the head of Aaron running down on his beard and onto the collar of his robe. Oil is often seen as a sign of blessing. In this case, the oil is pouring down from Aaron's head and dripping on his beard and robe. There is an abundant supply of oil here. It covers Aaron, saturating his head, his beard and his clothing. Unity of brothers and sisters is like this oil. It brings abundant blessing. Oil in the Scriptures is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit and His ministry. It should be noticed that unity of brothers and sisters is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. Like fragrant oil pouring down over the beard of Aaron, the Holy Spirit comes to bring this wonderful unity among brothers and sisters in the faith.

In Psalm 133:3 the psalmist went on to compare this unity to the dew. The dew brings refreshing to the ground and restores the earth. This too is like the unity among brothers and sisters in the Lord. There is nothing worse than disharmony among brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have all known what it is like to clash with a fellow believer. Churches of our day have been destroyed by disunity. The enemy knows how to create disunity to hinder the work of the kingdom of God. Unity, on the other, hand creates an atmosphere for refreshing and renewal. In unity the blessings of God are experienced in abundance. Unity is not only a blessing from God but the atmosphere in which further blessing is poured out on us like oil on Aaron's head.

As we conclude this reflection on the blessings of God in Zion, we see the psalmist calling all God's servants to praise the Lord in Psalm 134. He called all who ministered

in the house of the Lord, where God's presence was manifested, to lift up their hands to Him in praise (134:2). He calls on God, the Maker of heaven and earth to release His blessing from Zion where His presence was being made known on the earth.

We discover in these psalms that it is the desire of the Lord God to reveal Himself to His people. There are times when this world can become a very complicated and difficult place. In those times, the psalmist tells us we need to rest like a young child in his or her mother's arms. He calls us to seek after and delight in the blessing of God's wonderful presence. He reminds us that in the presence of God there is rest, guidance, refreshing and victory. May this be our experience in the midst of life's struggle.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself concerned and worried over things too difficult for you to understand? What is the challenge of the psalmist in Psalm 131?
- The delight of the psalmist was to know the presence of the Lord. Are you aware of the presence of the Lord in your midst? What keeps Him from revealing Himself to you in an even greater measure?
- What are some of the blessings God's presence brings in these psalms?
- What do we learn about the unity of brothers and sisters in the Lord? How does the unity of brothers and sisters in the Lord create an atmosphere for greater blessing from God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to teach you what it means to rest in Him when things are too difficult for you to understand. Thank Him that He is bigger than anything you will ever be able to understand.
- Thank the Lord that He delights to reveal His presence.
- David's desire was to build a place where God could reveal His presence. Ask the Lord to enable you to create an atmosphere in your church or in your life where His presence is welcomed and desired.
- Do you have a brother or sister you have trouble loving? Ask the Lord to break down any barriers to greater unity.

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PRAISING AND GIVING THANKS

Read Psalm 135:1-136:26

Psalm 135 and 136 are psalms of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord God of Israel. Here in these two psalms the psalmist challenged his people to lift up the name of the Lord in praise and thanksgiving. He gives his people ample cause to give thanks to the Lord in these two psalms.

As we begin in Psalm 135 the psalmist speaks to the servants of the Lord who ministered in the house of the Lord and in His courts (135:2). These servants were the ones to lead God's people in praise and thanksgiving. The psalmist challenged them to take their role seriously and lead the people of God in worship.

In Psalm 135:3 the psalmist told his readers that they were to praise the Lord because he was good. That is to say, everything the Lord did was right and true. There was no evil in Him nor did sin have any effect on His decrees and actions. He was perfect in all His ways. The psalmist did

not see the worship of such a God to be difficult. In fact, he describes the worship of the Lord's wonderful name to be "pleasant." In other words, there was a richness and great blessing in worshipping the Lord.

This good God had chosen Jacob to be His and Israel to be His treasured possession. This Almighty God of goodness and beauty reached down to the nation of Israel and made them the object of His special attention. They were His treasured possession. We need to understand that Israel did not deserve this attention. They were not treasured because of anything in themselves. They were treasured because God chose to honour them and treat them in a special way. The psalmist challenged his people to praise the Lord for this wonderful honour.

The God of Israel was greater than all other gods (135:5). There was no god who could compare to the God of Israel. From Psalm 135:6 we discover that the God of Israel did whatever He pleased in heaven, on the earth or in the sea. There was no place in heaven or earth where His power did not extend. In the verses that follow, the psalmist gives us examples of the power of the Lord over heaven, earth and the sea.

In Psalm 135:7 the psalmist reminds us that the Lord God made the clouds rise from the ends of the earth and sent lightning to the earth. Behind the rain, wind and storms was the hand of an all-powerful God who controlled these elements of nature. Lightning stuck at His command. The wind blew where He told it to blow. By His order, the earth was watered by the rain of heaven. There was no God like Him.

Psalm 135:8-12 speak of God's work in the life of the nation of Israel. In verses 8-9 the psalmist reminded his

people of how the Lord God struck down the firstborn of Egypt (see Exodus 12:29-30). This same God also performed great signs and wonders in Egypt. By means of these wonders God broke the power of Egypt and set His people free from bondage.

God promised His people a land of their own. As they left Egypt, the land of bondage, they went their way toward the land of Canaan. As they travelled, the Lord gave them victory over the Amorites and the land of Bashan. When they arrived in the land, He also gave them victory over the Canaanites. He gave them the land He had promised as their inheritance. Though during this time, the people of God complained and rebelled against God, He was faithful to His promise.

In Psalm 135:13 the psalmist reminded his people that the name of the Lord endured forever and His renown through all generation. God's name represented goodness, holiness and faithfulness. This would never change. God would vindicate His people and have compassion on them (135:14). Even as the Lord had compassion on their fathers and mothers when they left Egypt and conquered the land of Canaan, so He would be faithful to Israel and her children forever. He would protect them from their enemies and have compassion on them in their time of need.

No other god was like the God of Israel. In Psalm 135:15 the psalmist reminded his people that the gods of the nations were idols of silver and gold made by human hands. These idols had mouths but could not speak. They had eyes but they could not see. They were dead and lifeless.

Those who made idols were just like them. These idols were lifeless and foolish. They could not think or reason. This is what those who worshiped them were like. These

idol worshipers were foolish and unreasoning people who could not see the obvious. These idols could not help them.

Israel's God was different. He was a God of compassion and power. He ruled over heaven, earth and the sea. By His command the earth was watered and produced fruit. He delivered His people from their enemies. The psalmist challenged his readers to praise this wonderful God (135:19). He called the house of Aaron and Levi (the priestly line) to lead in the worship of His name.

This wonderful God made His presence known in Jerusalem. He was not a God who was far off. He was very near to His people and delighted in them (135:21).

Psalm 136 continues in the same theme of praise and thanksgiving. It is important that we notice in Psalm 136 the repetition of the phrase "for His love endures forever." The psalmist is deeply touched by the love of the Lord God for him and his people. As the Psalm unfolds, the psalmist gives his readers example after example of the love of God for them and calls them to give thanks for that love.

In Psalm 136:1 the psalmist began by reminding his people that God was good. We have already seen this expression in Psalm 135:3. He is telling his readers that God is perfect in all His ways. He was not influenced by evil or sin. God's love was an expression of His goodness toward His people.

The psalmist called God the God of gods and the Lord of lords (136:2-3). That is to say, there was no one with more authority, dignity and might. There was no god like the God of Israel. Despite His awesome power and might, this God

was a loving God whose love for His people was unending. He was powerful and mighty but also very personal.

The God of Israel was a God of great wonders (136:4). He made the heavens by His own understanding (136:5). No one told Him what to do. He was the source of understanding and knowledge. He made the heavens and spread out the earth on the waters (136:6). The sun, the moon and the stars were all created by God and put in their place to give their light to the earth (136:8-9). All these wonderful acts of creation were expressions of God's unfailing love for His people.

God's love can also be seen in the way He delivered His people from their bondage in Egypt (136:10-15). Here the psalmist reminded Israel how the Lord God heard their cry and struck down the firstborn of Egypt. He brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt with a mighty hand and great demonstrations of power. When the whole Egyptian army came after them, the Lord divided the Red Sea so that His people could cross on dry land. Pharaoh and his whole army were drowned in that sea.

God cared for His people as they wandered through the wilderness. This was yet another demonstration of His unfailing love (136:16-20). As His people wandered through the wilderness God give them victory over their enemies. He struck down mighty kings in defence of His people. Mention is made of Sihon, king of the Amorites (136:19) and Og, king of Bashan (136:20). God gave His people victory over both of these kings.

As He promised their ancestors, God gave His people possession of Canaan as their inheritance (136:21-22). He did this, not because they deserved such favour and attention but because He loved them. He remembered Israel in her

"low estate" and provided for them in abundance. He took them from slavery and set them up as kings and queens in their own land because He loved them. He freed them from their enemies and had compassion on them (136:24).

This great God provided food for every creature (136:25). All creation is dependent on Him. Without Him there would be no life. He deserves our highest thanksgiving and praise.

For Consideration:

- The psalmist tells us that the God of Israel is good. What does he mean by this? What comfort do you find in this fact?
- What gods do people serve today? How do they compare to the God of Israel?
- How was the love and faithfulness of God demonstrated in the life and history of Israel. How has God demonstrated His love to you in your life?
- One expression of God's love for His people was seen in how the Lord set His people free from bondage. From what bondage has the Lord set you free?

For Prayer:

- God chose Israel as His "treasured possession." As believers in the Lord Jesus today we are His treasured possessions. Take a moment to thank the Lord for this unmerited favour.

- Thank the Lord for His faithful demonstration of love for you personally. Thank Him for some particular examples of this love in your life.
- Take a moment to consider some of God's characteristics. Thank Him for who He is. Praise Him that there is no other god like Him.

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

Read Psalm 137:1-138:8

If we are honest with ourselves there are times when it is difficult to praise the Lord. This is not always because of rebellion and sin. There have been times in my life when the burdens and struggle seemed so great that praise was almost impossible. In this psalm, the people of God found themselves in this situation.

The scene is set in the nation of Babylon. God's people had been sent there because of their sin and rebellion against the Lord their God. This exile to Babylon was not pleasant. Babylon had ravaged the land of Israel. Jerusalem lay in ruins. All their principle buildings were burned to the ground. The temple of the Lord had been defiled. The wall surrounding the city was broken down. Those who were now in Babylon had lost brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, parents and children in the struggle for their city and nation.

What made things even worse for these exiles in Babylon was what happened at the hand of the Edomites. The

Edomites were the descendants of Esau. There was a history between Jacob and his descendants (the Israelites) and Esau and his descendants. In the book of Genesis we read how Jacob stole both the birth right and the blessing from his brother Esau. Esau made a vow in Genesis 27:41 that when his father died he would kill his brother Jacob. While this was bad enough, what made matters worse was the fact that this hatred was passed down from generation to generation. Speaking to the Edomites in Ezekiel 35:5, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied that the time of their punishment had reached a climax because they had harboured an ancient hostility against the Israelites:

Because you harboured an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax.

Likely this hostility went way back to the days of Esau and Jacob. The bitterness between these two brothers was passed on from generation to generation.

Here in Psalm 137 we see evidence of this "ancient hostility." Notice in verse 7 how the Israelites, in their exile, cry out to God because of what the Edomites had done to them on the day that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Psalm 137:7 tells us that the Edomites cried out to the Babylonians: "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" The Edomites encouraged Babylon in their destruction of Jerusalem. This offended Israel greatly.

Now, in their bondage in Babylon, the children of Israel wept as they remembered Jerusalem (Zion) and the blessings they once enjoyed. In Psalm 137:2 the psalmist told his readers that the Israelites had hung their harps on the

poplar trees. The picture is one of defeat. The praise of the God of Israel is silenced. The enemy has overcome.

The Tyndale Bible Dictionary says that "altars were usually erected on top of a hill and in the shade of a poplar grove" ("Poplar," Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Electronic Edition, 2001, Tyndale House Publishers). Here in the poplar groves of Babylon, Israel's captors asked them to sing them a song from their homeland. Notice in Psalm 137:3 that the Israelites describe their captors as "tormentors." Notice also the use of the word "demanded" (137:3). This gives us the idea that the Babylonians were mocking the people of God. They tormented them and demanded that they entertain them.

The pain of their loss was so great that the Israelites could not sing the songs of the Lord. Praise and worship had fled from their hearts. Now in its place sorrow and sadness ruled. They could no longer praise God. Their grief was too great.

This is not to say that God's people had forgotten God. They made a commitment never to forget Jerusalem (137:5). Notice what they say in Psalm 137:7:

May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy."

Israel would not forget the blessings of God in her moment of grief and pain. Israel knew that God would punish their enemy (137:8). The "Daughter of Babylon" was doomed to destruction. Israel still believed that God saw what had happened and would judge Babylon. Babylon was cursed by God. Her future was bleak. Her children would perish and no more would her evil be propagated on the earth.

Her descendants would be destroyed, her children dashed against the rocks (137:9).

Even in her time of deep grief when praise and worship seemed far removed, Israel was still able to cling to the truth that God was a God of justice and faithfulness. He would not forget her. He would punish her enemies for their evil deeds. In times when worship does not seem present in your heart, cling to the truth you know about God. When your heart does not leap for joy find comfort in the truth you know about God.

While their harps hung silent in the poplar trees, the day was coming when Israel's voice of praise would again be heard. In Psalm 138:1 the psalmist told his readers that he would praise the Lord with all his heart in the presence of the gods. He would bow down toward God's holy temple and praise God for His love and faithfulness (138:2). He called out to the Lord and the Lord heard his call and answered him.

Notice in Psalm 138:3 that God answered him and made him bold and stout-hearted. In his pain and suffering the psalmist was humbled. In his agony he had lost his courage. His heart was weak and feeble within him. God reached out to him in his pain and gave him boldness. He took the weak and feeble heart and made it stout and strong.

The prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 138:4 is that all the kings of the earth would praise the Lord and sing of His ways. The psalmist knew that his God was a great God. He was worthy to be praised not only in Israel but in Babylon and in all the nations of the earth.

The psalmist was confident that the Lord would look down to the lowly (138:6). In their pain and discouragement they could be assured that God would hear their cry. God also saw the proud who oppressed His people. He was not blind to what they had done nor was He deaf to their arrogant boasts against Him and His people.

In Psalm 138:7 the psalmist had the assurance that even though he walked in the midst of trouble, God would preserve his life. God would stretch out His hand against his foes to save him.

The confidence of the psalmist was that God would fulfil His purpose for him and that His love endured forever (138:8). What wonderful comfort there is in this verse. The context of these two psalms is pain and suffering at the hands of the enemy. God's people in exile in Babylon felt so overwhelmed that they could not even praise the Lord. While their crushed spirit could not worship at this time, the truth of who God was remained. He was a God of justice who was fully aware of what His enemies were doing. He was a God of love, whose love endured forever. He was a God who would always fulfil His purposes for His children. That purpose would be fulfilled either in ease or in suffering but it would always be fulfilled and God's people would be better for it.

There have been times in my relationship with the Lord that my heart could not rejoice. As much as I wanted to praise the Lord, my heart simply could not sing. In those times I have found comfort in the fact that the truth never changes nor does the love of God for me. His love remains whether my heart can praise Him or not. He is working out His purposes and as I remain faithful, He will accomplish His plan in me. For this we can all be thankful.

For Consideration:

- In this life, will we always have hearts that overflow with praise to God? Have you ever had "dry" times in your spiritual life? Give an example.
- What is the place of truth in these "dry" times? How does the truth carry us through even when we cannot find it in our hearts to sing the songs of Zion?
- The psalmist tells us in Psalm 138 that God will accomplish His purpose for us and that His love endures forever. What encouragement should this bring us in our trials?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that no matter how we feel, His truth will never change.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that no matter what happens to us we can have confidence that He will accomplish His purposes for us.
- Do you know someone who is facing a difficult time in their relationship with the Lord? Ask the Lord what you can do to encourage them at this time.

JUSTICE SECURED

Read Psalm 139:1-140:13

As the psalmist begins Psalm 139, he tells his readers that the Lord had searched him. The idea here is that the Lord God knew everything about him. There was nothing hidden from God. God knew every attitude of his heart. He knew every tear he shed. Not a thought or a desire was hidden from God. God knew the psalmist better than the psalmist knew himself.

Notice in the verses that follow the depth of God's knowledge about the psalmist. The Lord God knew when the psalmist sat down and when he rose up (139:2). He also knew the psalmist's thoughts from afar. That is to say, He saw those thoughts coming from a distance. Even before the psalmist could formulate his thoughts in his own mind, God already knew what he was thinking.

God knew wherever the psalmist went and where he lay down to rest. God was familiar with all his ways. The word "all" is important. There was nothing the psalmist did or thought that God was not aware of. He knew what he

would speak even before the words were formed on his tongue (139:4).

Not only did God know all about the psalmist, but He surrounded him on all sides (139:5). Notice in verse 5 that God laid His hand on the psalmist. In laying His hand on him, the Lord God is protecting, keeping and blessing him. He is setting him apart as His special instrument, an object of His special favour.

The mere thought of these things was wonderful for the psalmist (139:6). How could God know so much about him? Why would God care to know so much about him? Why would God lay His hand on him and set him aside for protection and special favour? These questions would have to remain unanswered. The psalmist did not try to understand them, instead he chose to live in their truth and rejoice in his position.

There was nowhere the psalmist could go from the Spirit of God. He could not flee from His presence even if he tried. He tells us that if he went up to the heavens the Lord would be there to greet him. If he went down to the depths of the earth the Lord would be there as well (139:8). He could settle on the far side of the sea but even there the hand of God would guide him and His right hand (the hand of favour) would hold fast to Him (139:10). There is something extremely wonderful about this thought. There is no where we can go where God will not be with us. His hand will guide us no matter how far we wander. He will never leave us.

Even in the deepest darkness, the light of God will shine on His children. Notice in Psalm 139:11 that the psalmist tells us that even if he chose to have the darkness hide him; God's light would shine through. There are times

when God's children choose to wander from the path of light into darkness. There are times when, in our rebellion, we surround ourselves in evil. God will not leave us even then. His light is greater than our rebellion. His grace is bigger than our sin. He will chase after us like He chased after the prophet Jonah in the Old Testament until He wins our heart. He will risk everything to find the lost sheep in its dark rebellion.

No matter how dark things get for the believer, the darkness will not be dark to God. He sees through the darkness and reaches in to where we are. We cannot hide even in sin and rebellion for His hand will be on us wherever we wander.

In Psalm 139:13 the psalmist marvels at the wonder of God's creative work. God knit him together even when he was in his mother's womb. God formed every individual part and shaped his character and personality. He did this with delicate care and precision. The psalmist praised the Lord because he was "fearfully and wonderfully made."

The word "fearfully" has the sense of reverence, dignity and respect. In other words, the Lord's work was such that it inspired awe and a sense of reverence. This is what the psalmist felt when he looked at how the Lord formed him. I had the privilege of being present at the birth of each of my children. Those who have seen the birth of a child have this sense of awe and wonder. The birth of a child is one of life's most wonderful miracles and leaves us in awe of our Creator. This is what the psalmist felt as he looked at how God had knit him together in his mother's womb.

God saw the unformed body in his mother's womb. In saying that God saw his unformed body, the psalmist is not just saying that God was aware of his presence in his

mother's womb. He is saying that God's heart was drawn to his unformed body. God took an interest and delight in him even before he was born. He designed a purpose and plan for his life. That purpose and plan would be special to him alone. God had a special path for him and a special purpose for him to accomplish.

Again the psalmist breaks from his reflection to take time to wonder at the marvellous plan of the Lord God (139:17). These thoughts and this knowledge and intimacy were beyond his comprehension. He could not measure the weight of these thoughts. They were vaster than the grains of sand in the ocean.

The reflection of the psalmist in Psalm 139 is in the context of suffering and trial. All around him were evil men and women who made his life difficult. These individuals had no concern for God or His ways. Even though God knew them and formed them in the womb as He had formed the psalmist, these individuals chose a very different path. They were blood thirsty and evil people. They spoke of God with evil intent. They misused and disrespected the name of God (139:20).

There is hatred in the heart of the psalmist for the evil rebellion of those around him. In fact he tells us that he hated those who hated God (139:21). He counted them as his enemies (139:22). What seems to grieve the heart of the psalmist is how these evil individuals despised such a wonderful God. His heart was broken with what he heard around him. His love and respect for God was such that those who disrespected Him were an abomination to him. He speaks out of jealousy for the name of the Lord.

As if he wonders at the intensity of his feelings toward these evildoers, the psalmist asked God to search his

heart and examine his thoughts to see if there was any offensive way in him. If there was, he asked Him to lead Him into truth. We need to see that this attitude of hatred toward those who despised God is not being condoned. The psalmist is not telling us that we need to have this attitude, in fact, he questions his feeling himself. He is simply being honest here. He expresses a heart of intense jealousy and envy for the glory of God and His ways.

While there is no excuse for hatred of people, the Psalm does challenge us in the area of our relationship with God. Do we have the jealousy of the psalmist for the glory of God? Have we been so moved by God's provision and care for us that we despise anything that would distract from His glory on the earth?

There are many people on this earth who have no respect for the Lord God and His ways. These evil people set themselves up as enemies of the Lord and His kingdom. In Psalm 140 the psalmist cried out to God to deliver him from the violence of these wicked people. They had been devising evil plans in their heart against him (140:2). Their tongues were as sharp as a serpent's tongue and as poisonous as a viper. With their lips they sought to defeat the purposes of God in this world. With their tongues they sought to harm His children.

From Psalm 140:4 we see that these evil people sought to trip the psalmist. They watched him to see if they could find a way of causing him to fall. They wanted to do this, not only so they could harm him, but also the purposes of His God on this earth. We can be sure that the enemy is trying to do all he can to find a way to cause us to fall. He seeks by this means to hinder God's work in our lives and His influence through us in the world.

The psalmist cried out to God for mercy in this difficult time in his life (140:6). He recognized Him as a Sovereign Lord and strong deliverer who shielded him in the day of battle (140:7). He prayed that God would not grant the wicked their desire or let their plans succeed (140:8). Instead, he prayed that their heads would be covered with the trouble they caused the righteous (140:9). He prayed that God's justice would come like burning coals consuming the evil so that they would never rise again (140:10). He prayed that the slanderer would not be established in the land and that men of violence would see the sword turned against them (140:11).

The psalmist concludes with assurance that the Lord who surrounded him and formed him in the womb would secure justice for those who loved Him so that they would have cause to praise Him in the end (140:12-13).

For Consideration:

- The psalmist tells us that the Lord God knows everything about us. What encouragement and challenge does this bring you today?
- What do we learn about the Lord God being bigger than all our rebellion? Will God leave us when we wander from Him?
- The psalmist reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. What does this tell us about the delight God takes in us? What does this teach us about God's feelings toward the practice of abortion?
- What do we see in these psalms about the deep concern of the psalmist for the glory of the Lord? Do you have a jealousy for the glory of God?

- Is the anger and hatred of the psalmist toward his enemies legitimate? What does Jesus teach us about this in Matthew 5:44? In light of the fact that God already knows our thoughts, is it acceptable to express how we feel to God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is interested in you as His child. Thank Him that He watches over you in every way.
- Thank the Lord for how He created you so wonderfully and has a very special purpose and plan for your life.
- Ask God to give you a deeper hunger and jealousy for His glory.
- Thank the Lord that you can tell Him what you feel. Thank Him that He is very patient with us.

COME QUICKLY

Read Psalm 141:1-143:12

We have already seen in the book of Psalms that the life of the believer is not one of ease and comfort. The psalmist experiences tremendous opposition and trouble but he also knows the presence and comfort of the Lord his God.

As we begin Psalm 141 notice that the psalmist cries out to the Lord to come quickly to him (141:1). This is the cry of a heart overwhelmed with the sorrow that surrounds it. It is the cry of a heart that does not know how long it can remain under the weight of grief it feels. The psalmist has been brought to a place in his life where he feels that if the Lord God does not come quickly he will be overwhelmed by pain and agony. In desperation he calls out to the Lord.

Notice in Psalm 141:2 that the psalmist wants God to receive his prayer like incense and the lifting up of his hands like the evening sacrifice. Incense was used in the temple worship. It was offered with a sacrifice and is described by the writer of Leviticus as a "pleasing aroma to the Lord" (see Leviticus 2:2; 6:15). The cry of the psalmist is that his

cry for help would have the same effect on the Lord God as the sacrifice offered with incense. He wanted the Lord to receive it as a pleasing aroma. His desire is that the Lord would respond favourably to his cry.

It would be easy to assume that the first request of one struggling with the attack of an enemy would be for deliverance. While this is the cry of the psalmist in this psalm, it is not his only cry. Notice in Psalm 141:3-4 that he asked the Lord to guard his mouth and heart. We need to examine this briefly.

In Psalm 141:3 the psalmist prayed that God would set a guard over his mouth and keep watch over the door of his lips. In times of trouble and stress in my life, I have often found myself saying things I should not have said. I have had to apologize to my wife or others for things spoken under stress. The children of Israel, wandering through the wilderness, grumbled and complained because God allowed them to pass through great difficulty. The psalmist was aware of this tendency in his human nature. He prayed that God would keep him from grumbling and complaining. He asked that God would keep his words from being offensive and hurtful to others at this time.

Notice also that the psalmist asked that God would not let his heart be drawn to what was evil. In Psalm 141:4 he speaks particularly of the "delicacies" of the evildoers. If we are honest with ourselves, we will realize that sin and evil is attractive to our sinful nature. The enemy knows that if he can wear us down, it will be difficult for us to resist these "delicacies." The psalmist knew how easily he could be tempted by sin. He knew the sinfulness of his heart and how easy it would be for him to surrender to the temptation in times of trouble. He asked the Lord for strength to resist

in his weakened condition. He wanted his heart to be devoted to the Lord God alone.

In Psalm 141:5-10 the psalmist speaks to the Lord about the evildoers around him. Notice that the psalmist begins by telling his readers that if a righteous man struck him it would be a kindness. If a righteous person rebuked him it would be oil on his head and he would not refuse it (141:5). There have been times in my life where I have needed to be corrected. I remember a time when I would consistently speak negatively of a church that I did not feel was doing the work of God. A brother in Christ challenged me on this. It was a correction I needed. I took it as being from God. Not all opposition is bad. Some is designed to challenge us and train us in righteousness. The psalmist rejoiced in this sort of correction in his life. It was not always pleasant to be "struck" with the rod of righteous correction but it is always for our good. We need to have the attitude of the psalmist in regards to this sort of correction.

While the psalmist wanted to receive righteous correction, he prayed against the work of evildoers. I have not always made a distinction between the righteous correction of the Lord and the work of evildoers. We need to accept one and cry out against the other.

The deeds of evildoers have, as their objective, to draw us away from the Lord God. These deeds come from the enemy whose desire it is to hinder the work of the kingdom of God. Righteous correction, although sometimes very difficult, always has as its objective to draw us closer to the Lord God and His purposes for our lives.

The psalmist prays in Psalm 141:6-10 against the deeds of the evildoer. He tells us that the rulers of these evildoers would be thrown down from a cliff. In other words, their day

of judgment was coming. God would not allow them to continually oppose the work of His kingdom. In that day those evildoers would realize that the Word of God that the psalmist loved and proclaimed was truth (141:6).

These evildoers had caused much pain for the righteous. In fact in Psalm 141:7 the psalmist tells us:

As one ploughs and breaks up the earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of
the grave.

The picture here is one of deep struggle and pain for the righteous. They are compared to the earth that has been broken up with a plough. The enemy has been breaking them like a plough breaks the earth. Their bones were scattered and they were ready to die.

Even in the face of such opposition, the psalmist keeps his eyes fixed on the Lord God. Notice in Psalm 141:8 that he calls Him the Sovereign Lord. In other words, He was in control of even the wrath of the enemy. While it appeared that the enemy was in control, there was a higher authority that would overrule and call them to give an account of their actions. It was to this authority, the Sovereign Lord of all, that the psalmist turned his attention. He cried out to Him to overrule and spare his life. When the enemy ravaged his land, the psalmist took refuge in the Lord his God. He knew that in Him alone he could be safe.

Evil people had set traps for the psalmist (141:9). The picture is one of a hunter seeking his prey. In fact this is exactly what was happening. Satan is seeking to destroy the work of God. He sets his traps for the believer. He wants more than anything to see the believer fall into his temptations. He wants to destroy them before they can be used

for the glory of the Kingdom of God. We can be sure that the enemy has set many traps for us in our day as well. This may come in the form of open persecution. At other times it will be through immorality, false doctrines or pride. We can be assured that the enemy will do his best to cause the believer to fall. Notice how the psalmist prayed in Psalm 141:9 that God would keep him from the snares the enemy had set for him. He asked that the Lord would cause the evildoer to fall into his own trap while he passed by safely (141:10).

In Psalm 142 the psalmist reminds us that he will not give up crying out to the Lord. When we are opposed and the Lord does not answer immediately, it is easy to stop praying and lose hope. The psalmist refused to do this. He tells us in Psalm 142:1 that he would cry aloud to the Lord, asking Him for mercy. He believed the promise of the Lord that he would be delivered, and so he would call on God to be faithful to what He had promised. He would not give up seeking this deliverance.

The pain was obvious in the psalmist's life. He did not hesitate to tell God about that pain. Notice that he poured out his complaint to God (142:2). He was not afraid to speak what was on his mind and tell God about the struggles he was facing. What a wonderful thing it is to be able to speak so freely with God. He does not close His ears to our complaint. He listens with tender compassion.

The psalmist knew that God was aware of the struggles he was facing. God knew that his spirit was growing faint. He knew the problems that faced him on the path He had called him to walk (142:3). Evildoers had littered that path with snares. God also understood that the path the psalmist walked was a lonely one. He tells God that no one was

concerned about the problems he was facing. There was no one to come to his aid. No one cared for his life (142:4).

God alone was the psalmist's refuge in these times of trouble. In fact, He was all he had left. When friends abandoned him, and the enemy raged against him, the psalmist knew that God was his portion. God would never leave him (142:5).

In his desperate need, the psalmist called out to God. He pleaded with Him to listen to his cry for help. He begged Him to come to his aid and rescue him from those who were pursuing him. He knew they were too strong for him (142:6). He also knew that the Lord could set him free.

Notice the desire of the psalmist in Psalm 142:7. He wanted to be set free so that he could praise the Lord. This was the cry of his heart. The pain and suffering he was experiencing in life was too much for him. It wore him down and kept his spirit from rising up in praise and thanksgiving to God. The psalmist did not want to remain in this place. He wanted to be able to freely and joyfully worship the Lord again. He wanted to know the close fellowship of the Lord and to experience His presence. He wanted others to see the goodness of God in his life. His prayer is not just to be set free from pain and suffering. His great desire is that the Lord draw near to him and that his heart be set on fire again with passion for the Lord he loved so much.

As we examine Psalm 143 the psalmist continues with this same theme. He pleads with the Lord to hear his prayer and cry for mercy. He asks God to come to his relief (143:1). Notice that he makes this plea based on the faithfulness and righteousness of the Lord. He knew that God was a righteous God. Evil and sin would not be left unpunished. He also knew that God was faithful not only to His

promises but also to His children. He does not ask God to do anything that was contrary to His purpose or character. He has confidence that, because God was righteous and faithful, He would hear his prayer and come to his aid.

Notice from Psalm 143:2 that the psalmist knew that he was a sinner. He knew that God could judge him for his sins as well. He did come to God asking for help because he felt he deserved it. He understood that God could easily find fault with him. Despite his failures and sin, however, the psalmist still has confidence to cry out for deliverance. He asks God not to judge him for his own shortcomings. He knows that no one on this earth could live a perfect life before God. Every one of us falls short of the standard God has set for our lives. Were it not for the mercy, forgiveness and grace of God, none of us could approach Him for help.

Though, the psalmist knew he had often failed the Lord, he still comes to Him for help. He freely tells the Lord God his problems. The enemy was pursuing him and crushing him to the ground (143:3). He felt like he was living in darkness. The light of God's presence seemed to be hidden. His spirit was crushed and he was feeling depressed and dismayed (143:4). It is important to note here that the psalmist was feeling depressed and dismayed but his confidence was also in the Lord. There will be times in this life when happiness and joy seem to disappear. This ought not to keep us from trusting the Lord and looking to Him for a restoration of that joy. I have had many times in my life when depression has set in and all I had to trust was the Lord. It was faith in Him that took me through those times when my mind and emotions failed me. This seems to be what the psalmist is feeling here in this psalm.

Notice in Psalm 143:5-6 what the psalmist does when he feels dismayed. He has wonderful advice for those who

are discouraged or depressed because of the weight they carry. He offers us two pieces of advice here in these verses.

First, when the psalmist felt dismayed, he remembered the days of long ago (143:5). What was it about the days of long ago that would be helpful to him at this time? As the psalmist looked back on his life and examined the history of God's people, he could see that God had always been faithful. He could look back and see times in his own life when God broke through in victory over the enemy. He could remember the stories of God's victory and blessing on the lives of others in his nation. These stories reminded him that the God he served was a great and powerful God. Other people had faced what he faced and had overcome. When you are feeling discouraged or depressed, take the time to remember how God has worked in the past. Let what He has done inspire you to greater confidence and trust.

Second, when the psalmist faced discouragement he chose to spread out his hands to the Lord God (143:6). In times of depression it is easy for us to lose sight of the Lord. Our problems begin to hide His presence from our eyes and we begin to give up hope. The psalmist tells us here that in these times of struggle and despair, he chose to seek the Lord. He lifted up his hands to Him, pleading with Him to come to his aid. He stretched out his arms to Him asking for Him to reveal His presence.

In his despair, the psalmist cried out to God to hear and answer him. He reminded God that his spirit was failing in him (143:7). He knew that if the Lord did not come to him, he would perish. His only hope was in the Lord God. He knew that there was only one thing that could satisfy the deep thirst of his soul. Only God could fill the emptiness.

The psalmist does not give up hope. He asks God for evidence of His unfailing love. He commits himself to trusting the Lord and asks Him to show him the way he should go (143:8). This was especially important in a time when the enemy was oppressing him and his spirit was failing within him. He dares not trust his own reasoning in these times. He knows that he needs the Lord to guide him.

As the psalmist concludes, he has four requests for the Lord. His first request is that God would rescue him from his enemies (143:9). He does not want his enemies to have victory over him. He does not want to surrender and admit defeat. He knows that God is bigger than anything the enemy can do to him. He also knows that God loves him and will come to his aid. He asks, therefore, that the work of the enemy would be defeated in his life.

The second request of the psalmist in this final section of Psalm 143 is that God would teach him His will (143:10). These were difficult times for the psalmist. His mind was clouded with the trouble he was facing. He doesn't understand what God is doing or what God expects of him in his pain. He asks, therefore, that the Lord would teach Him all he needed through this time. I remember a time, after an accident, where there was a lot of medical uncertainty in my life that I said to the Lord: "Lord, I am willing to face this uncertainty but I ask one thing from you. Teach me all you need to teach me. Don't let me come out the other side the same." I was willing to face the struggles as long as they drew me closer to the Lord. This is the cry of the psalmist. If he was going to face these difficulties, he wanted God to use them for His glory and the psalmist's good.

The third request of the psalmist is that God would preserve his life and bring him out of his trouble. Notice in that it was not for himself that he asks this of God. He asks for

his life to be preserved for God's name's sake (143:11). What is the psalmist saying here? He wanted to be preserved so that he could praise the Lord for His goodness. He wanted to be preserved so that he could declare the goodness of God to others. His desire, even in his deliverance, is for the glory of God.

Finally, the psalmist prays that God would silence his enemies and destroy all his foes. He asked this because he was a servant of God (143:12). He believed that God would take care of His own. He also asked this because of God's unfailing love. He never doubted the fact that God loved him. Even though he was facing tremendous obstacles at this point in his life, he is very much confident in the love of God for him.

The problems the psalmist faced were very real. He was brought to the point of dismay. His soul was crushed. God delayed in answering his prayer. He would not give up hope in the Lord God. He knew that in Him alone there was satisfaction. He knew that his sovereign Lord would use what he was going through to teach him and draw him closer.

For Consideration:

- What are the temptations the Psalmist prays against in Psalm 141? Have you ever fallen prey to these temptations in your struggle?
- What is the difference between the correction of the Lord and the opposition of the enemy?
- What traps does the enemy set before you today?
- Do we deserve that God should come to our aid? What do we learn about God in these psalms? Why does He hear our prayers?

- Can believers be brought to the point of dismay in their lives because of the opposition of the enemy? What does the psalmist tell us to do when we feel dismayed or depressed?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to guard your mouth in times of struggle and difficulty in life. Ask Him to keep you strong so that you do not fall prey to the temptation of the enemy.
- Ask the Lord to help you to receive the correction He brings you through the trials of life. Ask Him to teach you all He needs to teach you through the suffering you are facing.
- Ask God to give you grace to praise Him even when things are difficult in your life.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of righteousness and faithfulness.
- Thank the Lord that while we do not deserve His aid, He is a God of forgiveness and grace.

THE LORD

WHO WATCHES OVER

Read Psalm 144:1-145:21

Repeatedly in the book of Psalms, the psalmists express their amazement at the fact that the Lord God of Israel would reach out in compassion to a sinful people. Here in these next two psalms we see the contrast between the holy and awesome God of Israel and His sinful people.

The psalmist began in Psalm 144:1 by expressing praise to the Lord his Rock. A rock is something that cannot be penetrated. It is a safe and secure shelter for those who hide behind it. This is what the Lord was for His people. There is nothing our enemy can do to us as long as we are hidden in this Rock.

Notice also in Psalm 144:1 that the Lord trained the psalmist's hands and fingers for battle. In other words, the psalmist owed all his battle skill to the Lord. It is of significance to note here that the psalmist was, himself, involved in the battle. In the battle for righteousness we are active

participants. God is our protection and shelter, but He also trains and equips us to step out into the battle. There is an effort we must make ourselves.

The psalmist went on to remind his readers that the Lord God was also his loving God and fortress (144:2). A fortress is a shelter. Notice the reason why the Lord was a fortress for the psalmist. He chose to be his fortress, stronghold, deliverer and shield because He was a loving God. It was love that motivated the Lord to care for the psalmist.

In reflecting on this love and protection, the psalmist feels somewhat overwhelmed. "O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him?" he asks (144:3). We do not deserve or merit such loving protection. Notice in Psalm 144:4 that the psalmist is reminded that human life is like a breath and his day like a shadow. We are here today and gone tomorrow. In an instant, life is snuffed out and is no more. Human life is fragile. Compared to the eternal and imperishable God of Israel, humans are fading shadows. Our frail and sinful nature makes God's delight in us all the more wonderful.

While the psalmist felt his smallness compared to the eternal God of Israel, he refused to let that smallness keep him from coming to God. The invitation to God is open for all who will listen. There are many people who feel so unworthy that they never accept that invitation. They feel unworthy so they don't come to God. This is not the case for the psalmist here. Notice in Psalm 144:5 how he calls out to God to part the heavens and come down. He prayed that God would touch the mountains so that they smoked. The reference here to the mountains may be a reference to what happened in the days of Moses when God would come down on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:18).

The desire of the psalmist is that the glory of God be revealed. He prayed that God would reveal Himself in holiness. He pled with God to send lightning to scatter His enemies. He prayed that God would send his enemies into retreat (144:6). The psalmist does not hesitate to ask God to reach down from heaven to deliver him from the hands of those who sought his life. All around him he saw trouble and terror. He described it as "mighty waters." The picture he paints here is of a man or woman caught in the turbulence of a great river. They are being taken by the force of that river and now cry out to God for deliverance. The psalmist recognized that his only hope was in the Lord God reaching down from on high to help him. The psalmist tells us that this trouble was at the hands of foreigners. The unbeliever was oppressing him.

From Psalm 144:8 we discover that these unbelievers who troubled the psalmist spoke lies about him. The psalmist is not discouraged by this. He chose instead to put his trust in the Lord his God. He expressed his commitment to sing a new song to the Lord on the ten-stringed lyre (144:9). The emphasis should be put on the word "new." The psalmist believed that he would see the deliverance of the Lord and have reason to write a new song about that deliverance. This new song would be a personal reflection on the goodness and deliverance of the Lord. It would be a song to the God who gave victory to kings and delivered His servant from the deadly sword (144:10).

Notice from verse 12 that the psalmist seeks God for the prosperity of His land and His children. He took no delight in being oppressed and troubled by the enemy. He wanted to live in victory. He wanted his sons to grow up like well-nurtured plants (144:12). He wanted his daughters to be like pillars carved to adorn a palace, stable and beautiful. He wanted to see his barns filled with provision. He wanted

to see his sheep increase by thousands and tens of thousands (144:13) and his oxen drawing heavy loads (144:14). He wanted all breaches in the wall of the city to be restored and all captivity and distress to stop (144:14). While not all prosperity is a blessing, the psalmist does teach us to seek the Lord for greater things. He wants to see the blessing of God poured out on his society and his children. He believed that it was the heart of God to bless His children.

We need to remember that the psalmist was fully aware of his humanness. He does not take God's protection lightly. He knows that he is a sinful man before an eternal and all-powerful God. Despite this infinite contrast, the psalmist still came to God for help. He appeals to His love and compassion knowing that God will reach out to save and prosper him and his people. This balance between recognizing our unworthiness and still coming to God for blessing is not always easy to maintain.

In return for His compassion and love, the psalmist made it his commitment to exalt the Lord and praise His name forever (145:1). Every day he would praise and extol the Lord his God (145:2). The God he served was a great God, worthy of praise. No one could ever fathom the extent of His greatness (145:3)

Confident that the Lord God would care for his children and grandchildren, the psalmist told his readers in Psalm 145:4 that one generation after another would lift up the works of the Lord and tell of His mighty acts. Each generation would speak of His glorious splendour and majesty. As for the psalmist, he would meditate on the works of the Lord. That is to say, he would think long and hard about the wonderful things that God had done. He would allow the memory of those deeds to well up inside him so that his heart

expressed its gratitude. The psalmist would not keep his reflections of God's wonderful deeds to himself. In Psalm 145:6 he told his readers that he would speak of the Lord's awesome works and proclaim His great deeds. Generations to come would celebrate God's abundant goodness and sing joyfully about His righteousness (145:7).

God is gracious and compassionate. He is slow to become angry and very rich in love (145:8). He is good and has compassion on all He has made (145:9). Everything He made owes Him praise (145:10). Those who love God will offer Him praise and thanksgiving for His work and compassion. All His saints will tell of the glory of His kingdom and might (145:11-12). It is the duty of the believer to let the goodness and love of the Lord God be known wherever they go.

In Psalm 145:13 the psalmist reminded his readers that the kingdom of God was an everlasting kingdom and God's rule endured for all generations. God's kingdom will never come to an end. There was no power equal to God in majesty and glory. He will reign forever as God over all.

While God is all-powerful and eternal, He is also a God who delights in His people. He will always be faithful to them and His promises. He demonstrates love to all His creation (145:13). Here again we are struck with the contrast between the glory and majesty of God and His concern for us as His creation.

This all-powerful and yet loving God upholds all who fall and lifts those who are bowed down (145:14). All of God's creation is dependent on Him. In Psalm 145:15 the psalmist reminds his people that all eyes look to God for food at the proper time. God opens His hands to His creatures and satisfies their desires (145:16). He provides for and

satisfies the deepest longing of their heart. Again we are struck by the concern of the Lord God for His creation. He is the source of life. Without Him all would cease to exist. In love, He commits Himself to provide our every need. In love He satisfies all our desires. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all He has made," the psalmist told his readers in Psalm 145:17. Never could He be accused of wrong. His love and tender mercies were obvious everywhere.

Notice in Psalm 145:18 that the psalmist reminded his readers that God was near to all who called on Him in truth. He walked close to His people. His hand was ready to reach out to them if they stumbled. His ears were always attentive to their cry for help (145:19).

Not only does the Lord hear the cry of the person whose heart is right with Him, but He also fulfils their desire and saves them (145:19). This is not to say that God will give us everything we want. Notice here that it is the desire of the person who fears the Lord that will be satisfied. The satisfying comes in the context of fearing God. If my heart is set to fear God, I will desire His glory and honour more than anything in the world. Nothing but His glory will matter. The cry of the one who fears the Lord is a cry for God's glory. When we fear the Lord and seek His glory first, God will hear our prayer and satisfy the desire of our heart because our desire and His are the same.

The Lord watches over those who love Him but He will destroy the wicked (145:20). This is not to say that God will not care for the unbeliever. God does provide for the unbeliever as well as the believer. No one could live if God were to turn His face from us. While God provides for both the believer and the unbeliever, it is only the believer who will be safe in the day of His wrath. On the Day of

Judgment, God will destroy the wicked and their ways. God is a God of justice. In the end, the ways of the wicked will be destroyed.

For such a God as this, the psalmist would not be silent. In Psalm 145:21 he told his readers that his mouth would speak in praise to his wonderful God. He called on every creature to do the same.

What we see here in these two psalms is that God is a God of wonderful grace and mercy. He has compassion on His own. He longs to minister to them and care for them. He is our Rock and Fortress. He cares deeply for us. We are totally dependent on Him. We could not exist without His loving care. He is a big God but He still cares for us. He is eternal and all-powerful but He reaches down to our need. We have the privilege of being His children. What can our enemy do to us? How we need to praise and thank Him that He cares so deeply for us.

For Consideration:

- The psalmist told his readers that the Lord was a Rock and a Fortress for him. How has the Lord been a Rock and Fortress for you?
- The psalmist tells us that God trained his hands to do battle. What has God been teaching you? How has He been better equipping you to do battle?
- Have you ever felt unworthy of the Lord's affection? Thank Him that He still wants to love and care for you.
- What new song do you have to sing to the Lord today? What is the subject of that new song?

- What does it mean to call on the Lord in truth? Have you been doing so?
- God promises to satisfy the desire of the one who fears Him. What does it mean to fear God?

For Praise:

- Thank the Lord that He is our Rock and Fortress. Thank Him for a particular way in which He protected and kept you.
- Thank the Lord that He delights in you. Ask Him to give you courage to stand firm for Him and seek Him with all your heart.
- Ask God to give you greater courage to share His loving kindness with those you meet.
- Thank God for how He has satisfied the deepest longing of your heart. If are not sure you can pray this, ask Him to give you the right desires.

THE BLESSINGS OF GOD

Read Psalm 146:1-147:20

Have you ever taken the time to compile a list of the blessings of the Lord God in your life? How many blessings could you list? It would do us all good to take the time to reflect on these blessings. This is what is happening in Psalms 146 and 147.

As we begin Psalm 146 we hear the psalmist call his soul to praise the Lord. Notice that this is a decision the psalmist had to make. He chose to lift up the name of the Lord. He committed himself to worship the Lord his God all his life and to sing His praise as long as he lived (146:2). This would require discipline on his part. There would be times when worship and praise would not come easily. There would be times of trouble and difficulty where he would have many questions regarding the purpose and plan of the Lord for his life. In those times, praise would not come easily but it was not impossible. In saying that he would praise the Lord all of his life, the psalmist is saying that he would lift up the name of the Lord no matter what happened. He would do so in the good times as well as in the bad times.

The temptation in times of trial and oppression was to turn to earthly help. I have often found myself turning to my own understanding or to other people for help. The psalmist challenges us not to do this. He tells us in Psalm 146: 3 that we are not to put our trust in princes or in mortal men who cannot save us. This is not to say that God will not use people to minister to us. Very often God will use us to answer the prayers of His people. I have often seen this in my life. One of the things that the Lord has been teaching me, however, is that my trust is to be in Him and not in people.

In Psalm 146:4 the psalmist reminds us that human beings, however powerful they are, are mortal. They will one day pass from this earth. Our deliverance and salvation is not in the hands of men and women but in the Lord. The purposes and plans of human beings will one day come to an end. Their strength will fade away. Their wisdom will diminish and they themselves will perish. Only God is eternal and all-powerful. He alone is able to save us completely. In His hands alone can we be secure and confident. His strength will never diminish. His plans can never be thwarted by circumstance or people. In Him alone can we know perfect salvation and deliverance.

The psalmist reminds his readers that the one who finds help in the Lord God of Jacob is truly blessed (146:5). He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He knows what He is doing. There is no help like that which the Lord supplies. Notice in Psalm 146:6 that the Lord God our Maker is a faithful God. His faithfulness is forever. This means that He will never let us down. He will always be there for us. Unlike human beings whose ability and time is limited, God is eternal, all-powerful and sovereign. His promise to be faithful is forever. Those whose find help in the Lord are surrounded and protected

by an almighty God who cannot fail. No enemy can penetrate His defences. This is true blessing and confidence.

In Psalm 146:7-9 the psalmist reminds his readers that the God of Jacob upholds the cause of the oppressed. In particular, he mentions the hungry and the prisoner (146:7). The reference to prisoner refers to anyone who has been bound by a force or power greater than themselves. There are many kinds of prisons in this world. God is our liberator. God is also our healer. He gives sight to the blind (146:8).

We see also from Psalm 146:8 that the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. Those who are bowed down are those who have been oppressed with the cares and concerns of this life. God is able to encourage those who are weighted down with worry and stress. He lifts up the head of those who feel the sting of sin and evil. He gives them reason to rejoice again.

The Lord loves the righteous (146:8). He takes special delight in those who love Him. This is something that ought to cause us to marvel and burst forth in praise. If you know the Lord Jesus today you are the object of His special affection and care.

The Lord also watches over the foreigner (146:9). The psalmist reminds us here that while the Lord does love His own children, His concern is not limited to them alone. He also cares for the foreigner. The foreigner was not under the covenant God made with Abraham. He or she was not considered to be a child of God but God was still concerned for them. There was a special place in His heart for those who did not know Him. God is a missionary God whose concern is for the entire world.

Finally, in Psalm 146: 9 we see that God has a heart for the fatherless and the widow. He sees their condition and reaches out to them in care and concern. If this is the heart of God then it ought to be our concern as well. Those who love God and delight in His purpose will also be moved by the plight of the widow or the orphan.

We see from Psalm 146 that there are many difficulties in this world. This earth is filled with those who suffer abuse and physical problems or afflictions. Prisoners, orphans, those bowed down by the weight of sin and stress as well as the widow and the foreigner are all challenged to turn to the Lord for support and help in time of need. God is Lord over all sickness, pain and oppression of the enemy. He reigns forever and is deserving of our praise and adoration (146:10).

Psalm 147:1 reminds us that it is fitting and pleasant for God's people to praise the Lord. We have already seen from Psalm 146 some of the reasons why God is worthy of our praise. Notice that this worship of God is not only fitting or appropriate, but pleasant as well. To praise the Lord ought to be a delight. While it is our duty to praise the Lord, to praise Him out of obligation does not honour Him. If we worship because we have to, or because we are expected to do so, we do not bring God the praise He deserves. The praise that honours God is the praise that comes from those whose heart delights and rejoices in Him. Praise ought to be our delight and great joy. This is why the psalmist tells us that praising God is not only the right thing to do, but it is also pleasant and delightful.

As in Psalm 146 the psalmist lists the reasons why it was a fitting and delightful thing to praise and thank the Lord. He begins by reminding his people that the Lord built up Jerusalem and gathered the exiles of Israel (146:2). This

is in reference to the exile of God's people from their land. They were forced to leave their land because of sin and rebellion against God. Despite their rebellion, the Lord God gathered them from their exile and returned them to their land. He restored the broken walls of the city of Jerusalem and rebuilt their temple. He did this because He was a forgiving God who delighted to see relationships restored.

God also was concerned for the brokenhearted (147:3). He saw them in their need and delighted to restore them by binding up their wounds. I like to picture a young child who has fallen and cut himself. Like a loving mother, God gently picks up His child, brushes off the dirt and covers the wound. The child is comforted and restored to health. This is what God wants to do for each of us.

We need to remember that the God who delights to comfort and restore the brokenhearted is the God who determined the number of stars in the sky and called each of them by name (147:4). He is a big God. He is the God who created the stars, but He takes the time to comfort and heal the brokenhearted. It is wonderful that such a God cares so deeply for each of His children. He is a mighty God of power whose understanding has no limit (147:5) but He willingly sustains the humble (147:6). Those who are humble are those who recognize their need of God. They are not too proud to recognize that life, with all its problems, is too big for them. It is the humble who come to the Lord for help. It is God's delight to reach out to them and minister to their need. Notice, however, in Psalm 147:6 that while God delights to help the humble, He will not hesitate to cast the wicked to the ground.

The God of our help and support is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. He covers the sky with clouds and pours rain on the earth so that it produces grass (147:8). That

grass in turn provides food for the cattle and the birds of the air. His concern reaches down to the smallest of His creation.

From Psalm 147:10 we understand that God's greatest pleasure is not in demonstrations of great strength and power on our part but in humble submission and trust. How easy it is for us to want to show God how much we have done for Him. We have our statistics and agendas. We busy ourselves with activity and programs but God is not impressed by these things. God delights, instead, in those who realize their need and put all their hope in Him. He delights in those who trust and rest in His unfailing love no matter what happens.

As believers we will often be attacked. We are the focus of Satan's attack. Despite the growing threat of the enemy around us, the psalmist calls us to lift up the name of the Lord in praise (147:12). We can do this because God will strengthen the bars of our gates. The picture is of a gate that is closed and locked by strong bars. As the enemy attacks and pushes against the gates, everything depends on those bars holding. If the bars break the gate will come crashing in, allowing the enemy access to the city. God strengthens those bars so that they will not break. The enemy can pound the gates all he wants but the bars will hold because God will strengthen them so that the enemy cannot enter.

Not only will the bars of our gates be strengthened but God will also bless those who trust Him behind those gates (147:13). What a wonderful picture. While the enemy is seeking to destroy, he cannot enter. While he pounds on the gate, God's people are basking in His blessings. The enemy is frustrated in his attempt. God's people rejoice and delight in their God. Notice also from Psalm 147:14

that while the enemy surrounds them, God grants His people peace and satisfies them with the finest wheat.

What can the enemy do to us when God is at our side? God sends His word and the earth obeys His command (147:15). What God decrees, stands. What He determines comes to pass. The enemy's efforts are in vain. He is no match for the God of the universe whose orders stand firm. This wonderful and awesome God calls for the snow, and in obedience to His word, it covers the earth like wool. He scatters frost like ashes on the earth (147:16). He hurls down hail like pebbles on the earth (147:17). Who could ever stand against Him? God sends His command and the snow and hail melt. He stirs up the breeze and the ice melts in the streams and the water flows (147:18). Such power is awesome to see. The forces of nature are in the Lord's hands. In my life I have seen and heard of the tremendous power of nature. Great cities are ground to a halt at the voice of the Lord commanding these storms. Human technology fails as the elements of nature shut it down. In an instant all that we have taken years to achieve is in ruins at our feet. All this power is too awesome for us to understand. It is only a small sampling of the ultimate power that flows from the command of God's voice.

As the psalmist concludes Psalm 147 he reminds his people that the Lord God has revealed His word to Jacob and His laws to Israel (147:19). The revelation of God's law and decrees was evidence of a very personal relationship. God revealed His laws for a purpose. That purpose was so that His people could come to know Him and enter a relationship with Him. Israel was privileged to be the people God had chosen for Himself. He gave them His word to show them who He was. He opened His heart to them and taught them His ways through the laws He gave. Israel had the privilege of becoming His children and knowing Him as

their God. No other nation had ever experienced this (147:20). The God of awesome power chose to reveal Himself personally to Israel.

Since the coming of the Lord Jesus, the doors have been opened for all nations to experience this God of power and faithful love. What a wonderful privilege it is for us to know this God intimately and to know that He delights in us. Of even greater value is the knowledge that His delight in us is unmerited. He loves us, not because of what we have done or will do. He loves us unconditionally and nothing will ever diminish that love. We can be confident in His care. Even when we wander from Him, His delight is still in us. This is reason to lift up His name forever.

For Consideration:

- Can you praise the Lord even in times of trouble? What does this passage teach us about worshipping God no matter what happens?
- Compare the help that humans give with the help God provides. What is the difference?
- We learn, in these psalms, that God is a God of tremendous mercy and compassion to all who are in need. Do you have the same heart? What are the needs around you?
- The psalmist tells us that it is pleasant for us to worship the Lord. Has this been your experience? Explain.
- What do we learn in these psalms about God?

For Prayer:

- Consider a time when the Lord was your help and comfort. Take a moment now and thank Him for this.
- Thank the Lord that He offers peace and security in the most trying times of life. Thank Him that you are safe in His presence.
- Praise the Lord for His awesome power as described in these psalms. Thank Him that despite His awesome power, He is full of tenderness and compassion for you.
- Ask the Lord to give you a heart of praise and thanksgiving.

PRAISE THE LORD

Read Psalm 148:1-150:6

Psalms 148-150 have one common theme. Together they call the whole earth to lift up the name of the Lord in praise and thanksgiving. It is a fitting end to the book of Psalms. Here in this book we have seen the hand of the Lord working in His people in the midst of pain and suffering. We have caught a glimpse of how He cares for and provides for all His creation. We have come to understand His deep desire for His children. He is an awesome and powerful God who reaches down to His people in compassion and love. The psalmists have continually called us to lift up His name in praise and thanksgiving. Here before us is the final call to worship.

Psalm 148 challenges both heaven and earth to lift up the name of the Lord. The psalmist begins by calling to the angels of heaven (148:2). He challenges them to praise the Lord from their position in heaven. The psalmist next speaks to the sun, moon and shining stars. These heavenly lights were also to praise the Lord (148:3). They were to be shining examples of His power and faithfulness. The heavens and the water in the sky that rained on the earth

were also to praise the Lord (148:4). They demonstrated His greatness and care for the earth. God sends the water from heaven down on the earth to provide food and prosperity for His creatures. The heavens and the waters in them show us the wonderful compassion of a big God.

These heavenly bodies were set in place by God. They have faithfully remained in their place from the beginning of creation, shining down on the earth and providing for its needs. They testify to an all-powerful God who is over all and who cares for all He has created. The heavens speak loudly of God.

The same challenge goes out to the earth in Psalm 148:7-14. Here the psalmist calls the earth to lift up the name of the Lord in praise. If the heavens declare the praise of God so does the earth. The psalmist calls the sea creatures of the ocean depths to praise the Lord (148:7). The presence of these great sea creatures is a testimony of God's great creative power. Who among us has not seen the great fish of the sea and not thought of their Creator? The ocean in all its vastness and complexity is a powerful testimony of the greatness of God.

In Psalm 148:8 that psalmist reminds us that lightning, hail, snow, clouds and winds move at the command of the Lord God. They reflect His power and gentleness. The same wind that devastates and destroys can also kiss us with tenderness. All this is in the hands of God who controls their every move. They testify to His sovereignty and control.

All around us we see the wonderful beauty of the creation of God. Mountains and hills lift themselves up above the earth in testimony to the artistry of their Creator. The cedar trees and the fruit trees colour the landscape and show us

His attention to even the smallest detail (148:9). Wild animals, cattle, small creatures and flying birds give life and movement to the whole scene (148:10). Creation teems with life. It testifies of a great and awesome Creator who delights in beauty. All this lifts up the name of God and demonstrates His delicate care and sovereign control.

A call goes out next to human beings in Psalm 148:11-14. They are to give praise to the Lord. Kings and princes as well as young men, maidens, old men and children are all called to lift up the name of the Lord. They were to do this for two reasons.

First, they were to praise the Lord because His name was exalted and His splendour was above the earth (148:13). In other words, we are to praise the Lord for who He is. He is a God of splendour and power. The heavens and the earth testify of God's awesome power and majesty. They proclaim a great God who was bigger than anything the human mind can understand. Men and women on the earth were called to join in this great chorus of praise.

Second, human beings were to lift up the name of the Lord because of what He had done for them. Psalm 148:14 tells us that God had raised up a horn for His people. A horn in Scripture symbolizes power and authority. It can refer to a person who is His instrument to defend and protect or may simply refer to the protection of God over His people. God was to be praised by His people because He was their defence. He protected His people by the horn of His strength. They were secure in Him.

Notice, also, in Psalm 148:14 that not only was God their horn of defence but He also held His people close to His heart. This was reason to praise the Lord. Who are we, as mere human beings, that God should hold us so closely to

His heart? Why would He set His affection on us? While we may never understand this, we cannot deny its truth. God delights in us as His children and will keep and protect us. He desires fellowship with us. How we need to praise Him for this.

Psalm 149 continues in the same theme. Here the psalmist renews his call to his people to sing to the Lord a new song. A new song is a fresh expression of praise to God. It is the expression of a heart that has been touched by God and responds in gratitude and thanksgiving.

Notice two things about this new song. First, it was offered up with rejoicing and gladness (149:2). Israel was to rejoice and be glad in her Maker and King. Those who truly want to worship must do so with rejoicing and gladness. We can give grudgingly, or we can give with joy. Only that which is given with joy truly honours the receiver. God calls us to be a people who rejoice in the worship of His name.

Notice, secondly, that God's people were to praise Him with dancing and the music of tambourine and harp (149:3). Music is an important part of worship. In the Old Testament, animals and grains were offered to the Lord as tokens of thankfulness. What we need to understand here is that the music of the harp, tambourine or any other instrument can also be an offering of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. The psalmist tells us that dancing and song is an offering pleasing to the Lord. It pleases the Lord to accept our music and dance as expressions of praise. The Lord delights in His people and their praise (149:4). Just like the songs of our children delight our hearts, so God too receives our musical offerings with great delight. He is worthy of these offerings because He has crowned us with salvation (149:4).

The psalmist calls all saints to rejoice in the privilege of offering the Lord these musical offerings. He tells us that it is an honour to offer praise and thanksgiving to the God of our salvation (149:5). He calls us to sing for joy on our beds (149:5). We are to learn to rejoice in the Lord God on all occasions.

The Psalmist tells his readers that God would put the praise of His name in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands (149:6-9). With this double-edged sword, they would inflict vengeance on the nations binding their kings and nobles. In so doing, they would carry out the sentence written against them. This was the glory of the saints. The psalmist is saying that the glory of the saints is two-fold. First, it is to bring praise to the Lord from their lips, and second, to move out in victory over their foes. Victory and praise walk hand in hand in the life of the believer. It is a two edged sword that defeats the purpose of the enemy and brings great glory to the Lord our God.

As we conclude our reflection on the book of Psalms in Psalm 150 the psalmist calls us once again to worship. He challenges his people to worship God in His sanctuary and the heavenly hosts to worship Him in heaven (150:1). He gives us many different reasons to praise the Lord in this final psalm.

We are to worship the Lord for His acts of power (150:2). Those acts of power can be seen in many different ways. They are seen in creation but they are also seen in practical ways in our own lives. The children of Israel saw God parting the sea and setting them free from the power of their enemies. We too see clear demonstrations of His power and strength in our lives.

We are also to worship God because of His surpassing greatness (150:2). This greatness has to do with His character. Whether God did anything for us or not, He is still a God who deserves our praise because of who He is. He is great in sovereignty and holiness. He is great in majesty and glory. We are to worship Him for who He is as a great God. No other god can be compared to Him. He is deserving of praise simply because He is a great and awesome God.

Notice, again, that the emphasis of the psalmist here is not in sacrifices of animals or even acts of service. While these things are important, the call of the psalmist is for God's people to worship His power and greatness through offerings of music. They were to come before Him with instruments in hand to declare His value and worth. They were to praise Him with trumpets, harps, lyres, tambourines, dancing, strings and flutes. Notice in Psalm 150:5 that the praise of God does not always have to be quiet. Here the psalmist calls for offerings of loud music. He called for clashing and resounding cymbals.

While there is a place for quiet and reflective worship, the call here is to a worship that draws the attention of the outsider to God. This type of worship publicly and unashamedly lifts up the name of the Lord before all who will listen. It is a public declaration of His worth to those who do not yet understand.

The psalmist ends his psalm with a cry that everything that had breath would praise the Lord (150:6). This is his heart. He recognized the value of His God. He recognized that His God deserved praise from all His creation and not just from those who loved Him.

What we understand from these psalms is that God delights in our worship. He is pleased to accept our musical offerings. The psalmist calls his people to delight in worship and praise. He calls them to active and exciting worship of a God who is worthy, not only because of who He is, but also for what He has done.

For Consideration:

- How do the heavens and the earth testify of the greatness of God? What do they show us about God?
- We see from these psalms that God is to be worshiped for two reasons. First, because of who He is, and second, for what He has done. Take a moment to consider who God is. Thank Him for His character.
- What has God done for you personally? Take a moment to thank God for His demonstrations of power in your life.
- What do we learn about the importance of rejoicing in worship from these psalms?
- How important are our offerings of music to the Lord? What does God feel about our musical offerings?
- The psalmist tells us that the two-fold glory of the believer is in their worship and victorious living. Does this describe your church or you personally?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to praise the Lord for what He reveals to you through His creation.

- Ask the Lord to help you to be a greater worshipper. Ask Him to fill you with joy in worship.
- Are there areas of your life where you are not walking in victory? Ask the Lord to give you victory in those areas so that you bring greater glory to His name.
- Ask God to help your church to catch a vision for worship and praise of God's name that is based on a greater understanding of who He is and what He is doing in each member personally.

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