

1. This is one of those lessons where the title is obvious, because it is stated several times within the biblical text itself. It is the phrase "Praise the LORD, O my soul". The challenge is to explain what that phrase means and how it applies to our lives. Let me give it my best shot:
 - a) Let's start with the phrase "Praise the LORD". As I like to explain a lot in these lessons as of late, the word "LORD" is the most holy name of God. It is also transliterated "Jehovah". The meaning of that name for God is in effect, "I am what I am".
 - i) If "God is what He is", what does that mean and how does it affect how I worship Him? I think it begins with the idea that God is "knowable". Not that we can fully understand Him, but we can understand enough that we can appreciate Him and worship Him as an entity we can comprehend.
 - ii) It is like the expression, "The more you know someone (God in this case), the more one appreciates them". The more time we actually spend being grateful for what God has done for us, the closer we can get to Him. The interesting thing is that act of praising God gives us a better ability to face life itself. It is amazing how the time we spend praising Him benefits our own life and makes us more joyful.
 - b) OK, John and what exactly do we praise God for? That is the main topic of this lesson. These two psalms are both full of reasons why we should praise Him.
 - i) Many bible commentators believe these two psalms actually go "hand in hand" in that they were each meant to be complimentary of each other.
 - ii) If both psalms go together, why not combine them? Because each psalm praises God for a different reason: Psalm 103 is about praise for the good things He has done for our lives, while Psalm 104 is about gratitude for the world we live in.
 - a) In fact, Psalm 104 parallels the creation story of Genesis Chapter 1, with a big emphasis on why we should be grateful for God's creation.
 - c) This reminds me of an important point about both psalms: There are no requests made to God in either psalm. There is no, "Dear God help me for this reason". Both psalms are strictly reasons to praise God for the good He has done in our lives and in our world.
 - d) Let me at this point get back to my lesson title. The other part of that title contains the phrase "my soul". I would like to talk about what our souls are and understand how our souls are different from our minds and our bodies.
 - i) To explain, let me start with a conversation I had with my youngest daughter last night. I was reading this psalm and she was asking me what it meant. I was trying to explain to her what her soul was. Here is the illustration I used:
 - a) I asked her to name her favorite movie to watch on DVD. After she told me her answer, I then asked, do you know what a blank DVD is? She understood the difference. I then explained, other than the movie label, a blank DVD disk weighs the same as the one with her favorite movie on it. In other words, the movie itself as recorded on the disk has no weight.
 - b) For us adults, think of our computers. Do those machines weigh more now than they day we bought them? With all of the information stored on those computers do they now weigh more? The answer is no, other than dust. The information stored on our computers has no measurable weight.
 - ii) Here comes the important point: Our souls have no weight either. That is why I believe our souls can live forever. When we die, our souls get transferred to a new body that is designed for the "atmosphere" (whatever that is) that exists in heaven.
 - a) Will we still be able to recognize each other? I believe we can. At the same time, the focus is the soul within us is what makes it to heaven.

2. OK so far in this lesson we have established the fact that we should praise God because it brings us joy and that our souls have no weight. Tell me why our souls should praise God as opposed to the concept of just "mentally" praising Him? It is like asking, why does the bible separate the concept of mind, body and soul? Jesus said the most important biblical command is to love God, with all of our hearts, souls and minds. (See Luke 10:27 or Mark 12:30). What does that mean?
 - a) To answer, let me define "heart, soul and mind". The idea of our minds is the easiest so I'll define that one first. That is about mentally appreciating what God has done for us.
 - i) The heart is not just describing the "organ". It is like saying praise God with all of our guts. It is about appreciating God with every aspect that is within us.
 - ii) The soul is a little more complicated. To explain the soul, believe it or not, I have to explain an atheist's view of life. To an atheist, we only consist of our mental thoughts and our physical bodies. In other words, their view is life is "two-fold": When our bodies and minds stop working that is the end of one's life.
 - a) To those of us who believe in eternal life, there is a third aspect to our lives and that is our soul. That is the part of our lives that lives forever and as I described earlier has no weight.
 - b) OK John, I already believe I have a soul and that my soul will live forever. How does my soul praise God and how does that differ from mentally just thinking about Him?
 - i) If are our souls live forever, then we would want our souls to praise God, as that is the part of our "make up" that will be with Him forever. To have a relationship with Him, we need to worship Him with all that is within us and whether we realize it or not, we are using our souls to worship Him.
 - c) To explain our soul further, I need to bring up my favorite atheist writer: Ayn Ryan.
 - i) When I was younger I was influenced by what she taught. It wasn't until I read a biography of her life that I realized the fault of her logic. I will give her credit that she understood well human reasoning worked and how the mind operates.
 - ii) In her life, she was married but had a long-term affair with a much younger man and never lived up to her own moral standards. I don't believe anyone can live the perfect moral life that even she believed is the right thing to do. She could not live up to her own standards based just on her own desire to do so.
 - iii) This leads me back to our souls: I am convinced in order to lead a life pleasing to God, does require making the effort to worship Him. The point is we want God to interact with the aspect of our life that does live forever. If our minds don't live forever, in a sense we shouldn't care how God interacts with our minds. If our bodies eventually wear out, we shouldn't care that much about how God interacts with our bodies. However if this weightless aspect of our lives (i.e., our soul) does live forever, we should care about how God does interact with our souls.
3. All of this gets me back to my title of "Praise God all my soul". While it is hard to describe exactly what is our soul, the true point is we want God to interact with our soul if for no other reason, then we as Christians will live forever. To praise God with all of our soul is more than just saying, "We are grateful for this or that aspect of our lives". It is to say the aspect of our lives that will live (i.e., our souls) forever want to express our appreciation for what You have done for us.
 - a) This leads me to my favorite topics as of late. That is, how Book 4 of the Psalms (the one we are close to finishing right now) ties to the biblical book "Numbers". The idea is that the way we overcome our doubts about trusting God (which is an underlying theme in Numbers) involves the acts of praising Him.
 - i) That is what the two psalms in this lesson get us to do. In other words, we want our souls to praise God as that act gets us to trust Him more with our lives.
 - b) OK, I've now completed two full pages and I haven't touched one verse in this lesson. It is time to focus on some specific reasons as to just why we should praise God. With that said, let me break down and actually start this lesson:

4. Psalm 103, title: Of David
 - a) All that we have in this title is that David wrote it. I don't know if he did that to take credit for it or if there is something about his life that God wanted us to know here.
 - i) What I suspect it means is that it was David's desire to praise God with all of his soul and we should do likewise. Instead of starting another lecture of what is our soul or why we should praise God with our soul, let's just start the text.
5. Verse 1: Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
 - a) Verse 1 contains the title of my lesson. That same expression is used to end this psalm and that same expression is used in the next psalm as well. The fact that it is repeated so often made me figure, that I might as well use that as my lesson title.
 - b) This psalm will in effect state many reasons why we should praise God. Verse 1 gives us the command to do so. Why? If for no other reason than the fact that He is God and we are not. Another big reason is that it benefits our life here and now by praising Him.
 - i) I have learned that my life goes better when I make the time to praise Him.
 - c) It is important to state here again that the word "LORD" is the most holy name of God. In fact, many religious Jews won't even write out the word "Jehovah" or even the word "God" as they believe it is too holy to be written out. My view is that if I am giving God glory by writing out His name, I should do so.
 - d) I am convinced that the "how" we praise God is not as important as the fact we do so in the first place. Don't get me wrong: The "how" includes the idea of honoring Him as God and respecting who He is and what He has done for our lives. My point is I am convinced God is interested in us making the effort in the first place to honor Him, and then I have found that He does guide us through His Word as to how He desires to be worshipped.
 - e) Let's say at this point you are still confused as to what our soul is and how that is different from just praising God with our thoughts? My response is "welcome to the club".
 - i) My conclusion here is simply to praise God like we really mean it and tell Him what it is we are grateful for in our lives. As we do that, whether we realize it or not, our soul do praise Him. Therefore, let me stop worrying about how our soul praises Him. I just focus now on praising Him and why we should do so.
 - f) I can't leave Verse 1 without sharing a cute bible joke: Verse 1 is a great prayer when we forget to pray before we eat. When we realize we have forgotten to pray before a meal, we can say, "Bless my soul and all that is within me" (To use the King James translation of this verse). The point is about being grateful for the food that is now inside our body.
 - i) That joke doesn't work well with the NIV translation, so I used "King James" here.
6. Verse 2: Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
 - a) Verses 2 through 5 in the NIV translation are all part of one sentence. If you wonder why we should praise God, some specific reasons are given in these four verses.
 - b) Let's start with Verse 2 since we are in the neighborhood. ☺ The point here is to not forget all the benefits of being alive and the fact we get to live forever with God. OK, John, so what are those benefits? That is what the next three verses discuss.
 - i) The first benefit stated here is that God does forgive all of our sins. Remember that God does not just forgive our sins because He can. God forgives them because we trust in His Son as complete payment of those sins.
 - ii) When we take the time to become aware of our sins, we should confess them as to say, "Dear God I realize at this moment, You were right and I was wrong on that specific issue". That too, draws us closer to Him and is a form of praise.
 - c) Let me also discuss the phrase "heals all of your diseases". Exodus 15:26 states if we trust in God, He will heal our diseases. The idea is that He promises to rescue us from all (note the all) diseases. I still take medicine as needed and try to eat right, but one should never ignore that our health requires trust in Him. I'll expand on this concept in a moment.

7. Verse 4: who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
 - a) The next aspect of showing gratitude to God is for the fact He does promise us eternal life. Notice that eternal life is listed after the concept of health that as described in Verse 3. I suspect eternal life is listed second only because it is natural to first be grateful for the "here and now" before we think about the eternal aspect of our existence.
 - b) No matter what our life is like now, we can be grateful that we are alive and can use whatever time we have in this world to make a difference for God. We can be "healthy" in this life because we can accept the idea that we don't have to carry any guilt for our sins. That is the main idea being taught in Verses 2 and 3: That no matter how bad we mess up our lives, God does want to forgive us and we don't have to carry the weight of guilt.
 - i) That also leads me back us to the concept of God healing our diseases. I am convinced a lot of sickness we get in life comes from carrying around guilt for things we have done wrong.
 - c) All of this health talk leads us to Verse 4. The point here is that concept of trusting God will lead us to everlasting life in His presence. That is the "love and compassion" being discussed in this verse. If God does not want to be with us forever, there would be no love and compassion on His part for us now, let alone for eternity.
 - i) Let me expand on that concept: Why would God want to be with us forever and offer us love and compassion? As I explain every so often, God doesn't need anything, but He is full of love and He desires something to share that love with. He chose us to show His love to. What God asks of us is to trust in Him and trust in His perfect payment for our sins. That way we can be perfectly forgiven and spend eternity with the perfect entity (i.e., God) that loves us and cares for us.
 - d) In summary we should be grateful not only for our eternal salvation, but that God loves us and cares for us as individuals and wants to get involved in our lives to guide it for His glory in all that we do.
8. Verse 5: who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
 - a) We now end the run-on sentence of this psalm that started in Verse 2. This verse starts by saying that God satisfies our desires with good things. That does not mean He gives us everything we want in life. It means that God does equip us with everything we need in order to live and in order to glorify Him with our lives.
 - i) Let me explain it this way: If we can pray, then we can give God glory for our lives. If we have any sort of blessing in our lives, be it our health, our families, our friends, the beautiful things around us, or even "stuff we have" we can tell God how grateful we have for what we have and realize that any and all blessings we have in life do originate from Him in the first place.
 - b) The second concept in this verse is about our youth being renewed. This comes back to the concept of God relieving our guilt for our sins. Lately I have studying the faces of people I know who I am convinced either have or never have trusted God most of their adult lives. I have noticed nonbelievers aging in ways that are noticeably different from the way Christians age. It is a matter of seeing people carry the guilt of sin on their faces as opposed to letting go of their worries and trusting God for one's life.
 - i) I'm not saying Christians don't age. I am saying one can see the physical effects to one's body when one carries the guilt caused by sin in one's life.
 - c) Coming back to Verse 5 let me discuss the "eagle" reference. The idea is that eagles get to soar high up in the sky. The idea is about looking up, seeing these birds fly and realize that God who figuratively speaking is "up in the heavens" has also lifted us up:
 - i) He has given us eternal life and therefore, we too like eagles soar high above those who never trust in God in the first place. The idea is that if we trust in God, and have the gift of eternal life, we too get to soar (figuratively speaking) like an eagle.

9. Verse 6: The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
- a) Is this verse saying God does what is right for those who are oppressed in this lifetime? While many who trust in Him do see relief in this lifetime, I believe most see the ultimate fulfillment of justice comes in the next life. The point is if we trust in God in effect, we can't lose. He will do what is right in our life if we trust in Him.
 - b) This leads us back to the lesson theme. The point is not to focus on what is wrong in our lives and ask, "OK, God, why haven't you taken care of "this" aspect of my life yet?"
 - i) The point is to be grateful for the good things God has done in our lives. The idea is to be grateful for the good God has already done in our lives and be grateful that on His timing He will also work "what is right" in our lives and our society. Our eternal future as believes is certain. We should be grateful that God in effect has already won all battles.
 - c) I am reminded of my favorite definition of the word "all": "All is all that all means." God will dispense His justice for all who are suffering on His timing and His way. We can have faith in the "all" aspect of this verse.
10. Verse 7: He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:
- a) The psalm now switches to a history lesson. Remember that David wrote this psalm and apparently he had a pretty good knowledge of the history of his own people.
 - b) The point for you and me is that if we can't think of any reason to praise God for our own lives, it helps to recall points in history where we have read of Him working. The idea is that if God has worked then, then He can work in our lives now. This is about trusting in Him as much as the ancient Israelites did for their survival.
 - i) To read the history of ancient Israel is a story of "When they trusted in God and expressed their love to Him, they were blessed by Him. When they collectively turned from Him, God turned from them to draw them back close to Him again."
 - ii) That is also how God works in our lives today. God does bless our lives when we trust Him and praise Him for our lives. It doesn't mean we get great material blessings just because we trust in Him. If that were true, people would come to God for "stuff" and not for a relationship. Still, I have found that God does bless us in great ways when we, like those Israelites make the time to praise Him.
11. Verse 8: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.
- a) I have to admit, I do struggle with the idea of a perfect God having anger. I do not believe God jumps up and down in frustration and then sends a few lightening bolts at our heads when He is mad. ☺ It is about understanding that God works on our level in ways to get our attention in order to keep us close to Him.
 - i) The point is from our perspective, when we do sense the anger of God for our sins, it does not last forever. He is willing to forgive us simply when we ask for that forgiveness and we should be grateful for that forgiveness.
 - ii) At the same time, He shows us love despite our faults and despite the fact we do mess up in terms of what is His desires for our lives.
 - b) Let me put this whole concept another way: What we do deserve for how we act in this life is eternity away from His presence. If God's standards are perfection, then none of us could stand against Him in judgment and win. That is, God does not grade on a curve. Therefore, we have to be perfect to be with Him forever. The only way we can be perfect to God is to be perfectly forgiven. It also means that when we become aware of our sins, we do confess them, because it is our desire to please Him with our lives.
 - i) That little speech of the last paragraph is in effect a summary of what these Verses 8-10 are trying to teach us. That God does forgive us of our sins and He does not hold resentment over those of us who are trusting in Him for forgiveness.

12. Verse 11: For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- a) Consider the following illustration: If one travels north or south, one eventually comes to the north or south pole and then one has to travel in the opposite direction. If one travels east or west, one can travel forever in those directions. The point is that the love that God has for us goes on forever just as traveling east or west can in theory go on forever.
 - b) OK John, cute point. What does it mean practically? It means we don't have to worry about sins we have committed last week, year or say, century. If we have turned from them, even if we mess up again, we can have confidence we are forgiven of those sins.
 - i) Remember this psalm is about expressing our gratitude to God. One thing we can be grateful for is that God doesn't "hold grudges" against us. Just as there is no limit in distance from east to west, so there is no limit in how far away God has removed the memory of our sins from our lives.
13. Verse 13: As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.
- a) Let me discuss the idea of compassion here. God is well aware that we are imperfect people. One reason why God is so slow to show anger at us is He understands how imperfect we are and He wants us to take the time to comprehend our own mistakes.
 - i) To put it another way, God's standards are still perfection and He still wants us to make the effort to turn from sin as much as possible. A reason to praise Him is because that effort to praise Him does keep us close to Him. However no matter how hard we try, we will still be imperfect people. That doesn't mean we should give up trying, it just means God understands we are imperfect.
 - ii) God is also very aware of the fact that our time on earth is relatively short. The reason He does not usually take us to heaven right after we discover who He is, is because He wants us to grow in Him and be witnesses to other people.
 - a) God gives us the privilege of sharing His love with others around us. That too is a reason and a method of praising God with our lives.
 - b) Let me also comment on the word "dust": The same elements found in dust are the same elements found in human bodies. In that sense, we as humans were first literally formed from the dust through Adam and we return to dust. This is a reminder of just how short live really is, and it is a reminder to use what time we have to make a difference for God.
14. Verse 15: As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.
- a) These two verses give us two more illustrations of how short our lives are on earth. Our lives are compared here to flowers and grass. The point is neither grass nor flowers live a very long life. No matter how long we get to live on earth, it is relatively short and is over before we know it. The point comes back to using our time wisely. One way to wisely use our time is to praise God for the life we do have. That praise not only gets our focus on Him, but gets us to appreciate our lives all the more than we have.
15. Verse 17: But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children-- ¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.
- a) The point here is to contrast those who do trust in God with those who don't. The idea is that generations come and go, but God's love will never die for those who trust in Him.
 - b) We can have faith that His love for us will last for all of eternity. I'm not sure what that entails but I am convinced eternity will never be boring and that our love relationship with Him will grow forever.
 - c) The other thing I see from these verses is the importance of passing on a trust in Him to the next generation. These verses teach about sharing His love with others around us.

16. Verse 19: The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.
 - a) Most of us accept that there is a single God that rules over our universe. My question is why make the statement that God has established His throne in heaven?
 - i) While the bible does not give us a lot of information about what heaven is like, the point is God wants us to trust not only in the fact that He exists but that there is a literal place where He exists and rules from.
 - ii) The point is to know that God is approachable. At the same time, we can always come to Him through our prayers so that we can have a relationship with Him. That connection with God should bring joy to our life as well.
 - b) To quote a movie line I like: "There are two things I am sure of in life, there is a God and I am not Him." (From the movie "Rudy".) My point is I let God worry about the "how it works" aspect of eternity and my job as best I can tell for the moment is to discuss why it is we should praise Him. One reason to praise Him is because of His love for us. God wants us to spread that love to others so they can too enjoy a relationship with Him.
17. Verse 20: Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. ²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. ²² Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.
 - a) In these final three verses, David asks others to join in praising God for the appreciation of all that He has done for our lives and our world. David asks angels to join him in Verse 20 and he asks the "heavenly hosts" to join him in this "praise fest" to God in Verse 21.
 - i) Also in Verse 21, David asks "his servants" which I can assume is fellow believers to join in this praise to God for all the good He has done for our lives.
 - ii) The point of these verses is that praise of God should not just be something we do alone, but should also be a group effort whenever possible.
 - b) What sparked my curiosity here is what is the difference between angels and "heavenly hosts"? I suspect it is a poetic way of describing different entities (for the lack of a better word) that exist in heaven. I'll have to ask an angel one day to explain that one. ☺
 - c) Instead of worrying about different classes of angels, what is more important is the idea of taking the time to regularly praise God. If we are going to spend eternity with Him, we might as well get used to the idea of giving Him praise now, as I suspect we are going to be doing a lot of that through out all of eternity.
18. We now continue our "praise God fest" with Psalm 104. This psalm has no title and as I said in the introduction, this psalm focuses on praising God for our world He has created.
 - a) OK John, why should we praise God for this world? Another great question.
 - i) As I like to point out every so often, the bible as a whole does not have a lot of text describing this created world. There are a few chapters in Genesis, a few in Job and a few in the psalms, including this one. Since we are at one of those spots, we will take the time to discover what it is about His creation He wants us to focus upon and why that is important to us.
 - ii) What is interesting is this psalm focuses on this world as God originally created it before it was affected by sin. We'll discuss why that is so in this psalm.
 - b) As I discuss this psalm, know that it is going to parallel Genesis Chapter 1. It is as if the author had a copy of Genesis Chapter 1 in front of him and God inspired him to write a commentary on Chapter 1. It makes me feel better that I am not the only one who feels inspired to write about the bible itself. ☺ No I am not in the same league as this author, but I am just saying commentating on the bible is a "biblically supported" concept.
19. Psalm 104, Verse 1: Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
 - a) I've already beaten to death in this lesson why we should praise God with our soul. Therefore, I will focus on the last part of this verse that states that God is very great. The ideas is about appreciating who God is and appreciating this world as He created it.

- b) I find it interesting that this psalm focuses on how God created this world before it was corrupted by sin. There are some scholars who speculate that a reason that aspect is emphasized is that when Jesus returns, He will return this world the way God intended it to be again, before the influence of sin corrupted it. We'll find out one day if that is true.
 - c) Let me touch on the last phrase of Verse 1: clothed with splendor and majesty. This is about appreciating our world and it is poetically describing God as being well, "wonderful". The idea in effect is that if we love God, we think of Him as being special.
 - i) I believe the last line of Verse 1 is about simply praising Him for how wonderful this world was as God first intended it to be.
- 20. Verse 2: He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent
 - a) If one reads Genesis Chapter 1, note that the concept of light was first mentioned in Verse 3 of that chapter. The sun was not created until the fourth day of creation in Genesis 1:16.
 - i) My point here is simply that the "light" in this verse in Psalm 104 and also in Genesis 1:3 does not refer to any created light like the sun or any of the stars.
 - b) So what does "God is light" mean? It is to teach us that we can understand aspects of Him and in effect a spotlight is put on Him so we can comprehend aspects of His existence.
 - c) Next the verse says God stretches out the heavens like a tent. Scientists will explain that the universe as we know it is expanding. What our universe is expanding into is beyond my ability to grasp. From the point of the writer's knowledge of creation, I believe he is commenting on Genesis 1:1 that says God created the heavens and the earth.
 - d) OK John, why should I care about how the earth was made? To appreciate the world we live in. If conditions of our world changed much, (e.g., temperatures or distance from the earth to the sun) life as we know it would cease to exist here.
 - i) If one has nothing else to be grateful for in life, be thankful that God created this world in the first place and gave life to all of us.
- 21. Verse 3a: and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.
 - a) If one studies the second day of God's creation in Verses 6-8 to Genesis Chapter 1, one will notice there were waters below the sky (i.e., oceans) and waters above the sky. The idea is that a water vapor once existed above our atmosphere. I believe that same water vapor came down on the earth when the great flood happened.
 - b) If such a water vapor in the sky still existed today, ultraviolet rays, (which is what causes our bodies to age) would have a minimal effect on our bodies. I don't know how much of this concept the author understood. I just suspect he understood the world was a better place before the waters that were above the earth "fell out of the sky" with the flood.
 - c) Coming back to this verse, the point is simply that the author understood that God had "upper chambers of water" above our atmosphere as stated in Genesis 1:6. The psalmist is praising God for His intention of how He desires us to live in a world uncorrupted by sin.
 - i) Understand how the effect of sin causes us to age in the first place. In effect, God allowed ultraviolet rays to age us so we wouldn't have to live forever in this world that is again, corrupted by sin. Think of aging as form of "mercy killing" by God.
- 22. Verse 3b: He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. ⁴ He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.
 - a) I struggled with these verses until I remembered something: In the original Hebrew language, the word for "spirit" and the word for "wind" is the same word.
 - b) Jesus once made a pun on the fact that "wind" and "spirit" are the same word. Jesus said in effect, "We don't know which way the wind blows and we also don't know how the Spirit of God works in people's lives. (My paraphrase of John 3:8.)
 - i) These psalm verses are making a similar comment. The Spirit of God "hovers" over the created world in a way for us to appreciate it. The idea in effect is that God did not create our world in a haphazard, or random format. He created it for the specific purpose to sustain and support the growth of life.

- c) Therefore, when these verses say for example, "makes winds his messengers", it is a poetic way of stating the "Spirit of God" was part of the creation of this world and it was made in a way for us to appreciate how it was made.
 - i) When the last part of Verse 3 says God makes "clouds of chariots" to ride upon, it is not saying God went joy riding in the sky. ☺ It is saying in a poetic way that God's spirit created this world in a way for us to appreciate.
 - d) The last part of Verse 4 mentions "flames of fire". This is another poetic way of describing how the world was made and how God's spirit was involved in that creation process.
 - i) This whole section is a commentary on Genesis 1:2b that reads, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters". Verses 2-4 here are expanding on that thought.
23. Verse 5: He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.
- a) We are now focusing on the second and third day of creation that describe how the land surfaces of earth were first created for life. The point is to show gratitude to God for creating a place where we can live and learn to appreciate the world as He created it.
 - b) The idea of Verse 5 saying, "it can never be moved" is a poetic way of saying God put the earth where He did and it can't move from where He wanted it to exist.
 - i) This verse is not saying the earth does not rotate around the sun. It says saying that God is in control of where the earth is located in the first place.
24. Verse 6: You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.
- a) In Verse 6 of Genesis 1, it describes land that "surfaced" from the water. The idea is that when the earth was first made, the original surface was all water and then God created land for life to exist. OK, why are both "Verse 6's" focusing on land rising from the water?
 - i) In other words, why does God want us to know that when the earth was first made, it was "all water first" and then land? It is about appreciating how water sustains our life and appreciating how land appeared for our benefits.
25. Verse 7: But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; ⁸they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. ⁹ You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.
- a) The idea here is not about the great flood. It is about how water resending from parts of the earth to create the continents and islands of this world.
 - i) Again the idea is about us appreciating how God created the world. He is the one who created landmasses for us to live upon by resending the water.
 - b) But John, if this is describing the world before the flood, didn't water cover everything again after the flood happened? Remember that the flood was caused in part by the waters in the sky coming down on the earth. Waters in the ocean prior to the flood somehow sunk in the earth so that landmasses did appear. Those oceans cannot and never did rise again to a point where they could cover the world's surface with water.
 - c) OK John, as you like to say, "I have enough to worry about in life. Why should I spend any time focusing on all of this stuff?" The answer is, in order for us to have joy in life, we should take some time to appreciate all that God has done for us by making this world.
26. Verse 10: He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. ¹¹ They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. ¹² The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. ¹³ He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. ¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate-- bringing forth food from the earth:
- a) The verses listed here are in effect are about appreciating God's "watering system": Rain from the ocean rises to clouds. Rain and snow then come from clouds on the highest mountains to bring that water for animals and plant life to be sustained and flourish.
 - b) I was asking earlier why did God want us to know that the "waters" were created first and later the landmasses? I believe one reason is for us to appreciate God's way of bringing water to all points in the world. That is another reason to praise Him for this world.

27. Verse 15: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.
- a) First let me say here that this verse is not condoning getting drunk. It is just giving an example of how God's "watering system" makes it possible for grapes to grow and even for wheat to grow in the ground. Again, the big picture idea is about appreciating the earth and how it works for our benefit of sustaining life.
 - b) Let me put this concept another way: If you are ever feeling depressed and believe that you are not lucky in life, be grateful that God gave you the ability to appreciate this world, how it was created and how it can sustain life ultimately to bring Him glory.
28. Verse 16: The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. ¹⁷There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. ¹⁸ The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coneys.
- a) Here the psalmist describes the fact that plant life and animal life exist in every place that land exists. The author uses some local examples to make his point.
 - b) To put these verses another way, "Was it by random accident that certain types of trees grow well in Lebanon and wild goats and coneys can live in high mountains?" The more one understands how complex life is, the more one cannot believe this world is a random accident. This psalm is mainly about appreciating how God created this world and it is full of examples like these to show how this world was created.
 - c) OK John, I have enough issues to deal with than to think about trees and animals "here and there" this world. Tell me again why I should care? It is not for example, so that we can go hug a mountain goat. ☺ It is for us to understand that the same God who went to such great trouble to create all sorts of life on this planet, also cares deeply about your life and my life and wants us to live with a sense of joy and appreciation for how wonderful life can be when we do trust in His existence.
29. Verse 19: The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.
- a) This verse is not saying the earth is the center of the universe. It is simply saying we can mark the passage of time by the rise and fall of the sun and the rotation of the moon.
 - b) Before modern electronics, the sun, moon and the stars were the main way people marked the passage of time. OK John, one more time, why bother contemplating of all of this?
 - i) Well, the next time we complain about bad weather, or say the next time we complain that there are not enough hours in the day to get done what we want to get done, we can think in effect, "God created the world the way He did for a reason. We are not in control of time, He is. He gave each of us a specific but unknown amount of time on this planet and we should appreciate the time we do have and use it ultimately to make a difference for Him."
30. Verse 20: You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. ²¹ The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. ²² The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. ²³ Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening.
- a) In case you forgot, this psalm parallels the creation story of Genesis Chapter 1. ☺
 - i) On the fourth day of creation is when the sun and moon were made. The point here, which parallels God's creation story of the sun and moon, is simply that He designed us to appreciate the concept of daytime and nighttime.
 - b) It is interesting to note that most meat-eating animals do their hunting at night when their prey is less likely to see them coming. The idea is that God designed daytime for most of us to "live our lives" when such dangerous animals are sleeping. Among the reasons God created "day and night" is so there is a time of separation when such animals hunt and the time of the day where most people should do our work.
 - c) OK John, suppose I have a night job, or suppose someone reading this lives in a big city where there are no wild animals roaming the street. (For those who have never lived in a big city, there are far worse human animals roaming late at night there, but I digress. ☺)

31. Verse 24: How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.
- a) Remember I said how this lesson is about appreciating God? Well this verse pauses from giving examples to do just that. It asks us in effect to say, "All of this creation is beyond our ability to fully grasp and there must be a God who created all of this in first place."
32. Verse 25: There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number-- living things both large and small. ²⁶ There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
- a) Speaking of appreciating God, we now focus on life in the oceans, which is Verse 20 in Genesis Chapter 1, and the fifth day of the creation story. You may find it interesting that there is more variety of life in the oceans than there is on land. I suspect the psalmist knew the fact that the ocean is full of creatures beyond numbering.
 - b) The psalmist also states that a purpose of seas is to allow relatively fast travel from one point of land to another. That is the "ship" reference in Verse 26. Again, the issue is about appreciating God's creation as it is and how we are blessed by this world He created.
 - c) Finally a quick word on "leviathan". This word is mentioned five times in the Old Testament and apparently refers to some type of giant (probably extinct) sea creature.
 - i) The purpose of mentioning this sea animal, whatever it was, is that if people were not be capable of stopping this creature by themselves, God is more powerful than any and all creatures in the sea. He "balances" the amount of life in the sea so that ships can still travel along its surface without the threat of this animal.
33. Verse 27: These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. ²⁹ When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. ³⁰ When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.
- a) These verses say in effect that all the creatures in this world look to God for their source of food. The verses then say that when God hides His face from these creatures, they die. Obviously these verses are not being that literal. Animals and sea creatures don't have a conscious knowledge of God as humans do. So what do these verses mean?
 - i) The answer is that the source of food for each of these creatures does ultimately come from God even though such creatures don't realize that fact.
 - b) I am reminded of the fact that Jesus once stated that whenever a single bird dies, God is aware of that fact. (See Matthew 10:29.) The point for us to know is that the God we worship is aware of all life on this planet.
 - c) It is hard to grasp that our God is always aware of all life. As I was taught, "Every time I try to think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache." (David Hocking).
 - i) The point for you and I that God does want us to grasp the idea that He is aware of all life and He is aware of all things in life. That does not mean we have to focus on say, animal and plant life all the time. It just means that a god that is big enough to know the fate of all life is big enough for us to worship Him as God.
34. Verse 31: May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works-- ³² he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.
- a) The idea here as we wrap up this psalm is for us to consider the fact that God has created this world and He wants us to appreciate the fact that "I (God) created it and it is mine."
 - b) If God rejoices in the world that He has made, so should we. If it is the job of Christian's to love what God loves and hate what He hates, then we should have a love for the world that He has created. It just means we should take some time to appreciate this world.
 - i) I am reminded of something my pastor said to me recently as he just returned from visiting his daughter in Italy. I asked him what was his favorite part of the trip: He said, "Just enjoying the views." I don't think he intended that line as a biblical concept, but it is in the sense that God made this world to be enjoyed.

35. Verse 33: I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. ³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.
- a) These verses encourage us to sing out to God. In context of the entire psalm, they are also about appreciating the world in which we live and singing out to God for creating it in the first place. The way I put it is, "If I have nothing else to be grateful for, I can always thank Him for this world He has created. Even if I don't appreciate how it looks say, out my window, I can appreciate it as He intended it to be when it was first made.
36. Verse 35: But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more. Praise the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD.
- a) This psalm ends on a strange note. After spending a lot of verses praising Him for this created world, Verse 35 mentions the death of those who refuse to turn to Him with their lives. OK, why have this verse here? I believe the answer is that only those who care about God would be willing to take the trouble to praise Him for this world. Those who don't care about God are too busy with their lives to appreciate what He has done for us.
 - b) Finally this psalm ends with another round of "Praise the LORD, oh my soul".
 - i) That of course is the title of my lesson and another reminder that when we read of all the good things God has done for our lives and the world He has created for us, it should get us every now and then to praise Him for what He has done for us.
 - ii) Let me emphasize one final benefit of praising God. If it is the goal of believers to live a life pleasing to Him, I believe it is necessary to praise Him regularly for the sake of our own lives here and now. The act of praising God gets our soul to focus on Him and gives us the ability to live a life pleasing to Him in the first place.
 - c) This psalm actually ends with a reminder that while the nonbeliever will be "removed" one day from God's presence, those of us who trust in Him, will continue to grow in that trust. Again we do that by praising Him with our souls and that starts "today" and not just when we get to heaven.
37. OK time to end this lesson with some praise to Him: Father, help us to take the time to praise You for the good things we have in our live and the world You have created for us. Help us to remember praise to You is the source of our joy and not the particular circumstances of our lives at any given moment. Help us to praise You so we can have the ability to make a difference for You with our lives. Finally, may our lives as believers both individually and collectively be used to make a difference for You as we live for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus' name we pray, amen