

1. If I had to pick a title for these four psalms, it would be "dealing with hatred". This is an issue that is common through the psalms and this is as good a place as any to discuss the implications.
 - a) First of all, remember that we are talking about "hatred that deserves to be hated". In other words, these psalms are not dealing with good people who messed up. They are about people who don't care for God. It is about those who their lives opposing His will.
 - b) This leads me back to my psalm title. How do we deal with hatred? Is it proper to hate evil and to wish bad things on those who commit evil? If God hates evil deeds, is it acceptable for us to hate the people who commit such evil deeds?
 - c) Also, how do we balance the love God has for people and the love that Christians are supposed to share with others and this issue of hatred? Is that a contradiction?
 - d) There, that's enough tough questions to get us through a whole lesson. ☺
2. To answer these questions, first thing we have to remember is to give that hatred to God. He does not call on believers to dish out punishment unless we work for some sort of government agency in charge of "punishment". My point is we don't take the law into our own hands. At the same time, God wants us to give Him the pain we feel due to that hatred that exists around us.
 - a) My point here is not so much about dealing with government ordained laws, as much as it is about giving the pain caused by that hatred to God. That is what David does through these psalms and that is what God calls on us to do.
 - b) As I was writing this, I was confronted by an "old hatred" that happened to my father. Roughly 20 years ago, my father was wrongly accused of a crime. His board of directors eventually settled the legal case. They determined it was cheaper to settle than going to trial. I bring that up here as one of my clients from my work asked me to support the accuser's sister who is now running for political office.
 - i) I'm convinced that God brought this issue up as He wants to show me how to deal with issues that are blocking my relationship with Him. The end of the story (to date) is that I gave a donation to this woman not because I support her political views, but I did so because my client asked me to do so. The key was letting go of the issue and letting God deal with my past anger.
 - ii) My goal is not to teach you about my family history. Just as God brought this old anger back to my life, so David is dealing with legitimate anger he has.
 - c) The more important point is that God does not want us to carry any anger or past hurt around inside of us. He wants us to give that anger to Him and let Him deal with those who have hurt us (or hurt those close to us) on His timing and His way.
 - i) I never thought of that family issue as blocking my relationship with God. I am also sure it is not a coincidence that this issue is now "front and center" as we study specific psalms that deal with confronting one's hatred of enemies.
 - ii) I realize that one of the most difficult pains to deal with is when someone hurts someone you love. I have learned to forgive that person who hurt my father, not for the sake of the one who did the hurting, but to let God deal with the pain so I can have a better relationship with Him.
3. Getting back to the psalms of this lesson, am I saying that all four of these psalms are dealing with the pain of anger? Of course not. There are a lot of "Praise God's" mixed in with lines dealing with giving God the credit for the victory over the "enemies at hand". My point is the underlying theme of these psalms appears to deal with legitimate anger over those who have hurt us and to what extent do we give that anger to God to let Him deal with it.

4. Now I can go back to my opening questions. I sort of answered the key point of "what do we do with our anger" and that is, give it to God. The next and important question is "what do we do next?" Do we become pacifists? Well, David was not and I don't think God calls to be either.
 - a) David had to fight to stay alive at many points in his life. I'm sure most of David's enemies were people who opposed the God of the bible. I can't answer every possible way that God calls on us to fight those who oppose Him, I just know that in the end, those who trust in God do win those battles.
 - b) This just leaves one more question: How do we balance the "God of Love" with having a hatred for those who oppose Him? It starts by remembering that we are called to judge actions, not salvation. We don't know who is saved, as we can't read people's hearts. We are called to judge actions and we should oppose the actions that are opposed to God.
 - c) So what does that mean practically? It means we judge what people say and do, and treat people based on how they live their lives. It does not mean we treat people badly. We still need to be a good witness to all people. It does mean we react to people based on what we see them do. We have the right to judge wicked behavior.
 - d) Back to the question: How do we show God's love, and at the same time have a hatred for the things God hates (i.e., sin)? First we separate the sins from the people who commit them. We may pray for the salvation of wicked people but we must also pray that God help us to deal with the sinful or "just plain wrong" deed in the first place.
 - i) The trick in life is to balance "showing God's love" and at the same time hating the deeds that God hates.
 - ii) God loves people but He hates the deeds of the wicked. God wants us to love what He loves and hate what he hates. Just as I have to let go of my hatred of what a politician did to my father, so we have to let go of "old hates" that block our relationship with God. Those "hates" may be legitimate, but again, they are blocking our relationship with Him. That is the real issue.
 - e) Ok on that depressing thought, ☺ let me get away from that hatred and start the psalms.
5. Psalm 11, Introduction: For the director of music. Of David.
 - a) The only thing recorded about this psalm is that David wrote it and it is for the "director of music". The only thing we should know about this psalm is that David wrote it with the intent of it being played publicly. As I have stated, the original music is long gone.
6. Verse 1: In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain."
 - a) This psalm only has seven verses. The main point of the psalm is to compare and contrast how those who seek God live their lives versus those who don't seek God live. OK, John, I usually can tell the difference between how those who seek God "act" because those who do seek God usually run to Him for help. So why should I study this psalm?
 - i) The problem is we forget easily. Even the most devout Christian can easily focus on problems and forget that God wants to help us through our problems.
 - ii) It never ceases to amaze me how often I am looking for something or I am trying to accomplish some goal and it is "taking forever". When I stop and pray for God's help, whatever I want to accomplish usually happens a whole lot faster.
 - iii) With that said, we should study this psalm with the reminder of how we should act on a regular basis. It is a reminder that when things are going wrong, no matter how small or how big the problem, we should give that situation to God. After we do that, it is usually amazing how fast that situation "works itself out".
 - b) With that out of my system, ☺ let's look at the first sentence. It says that David takes refuge in God. That does not mean David runs to a specific location where David believes God is located. It means that when trouble occurs, the first thing David does, and we should do, is run to God for help. We stop and mentally take refuge to the God who can and wants to help us deal with whatever problem we are facing at that moment in time.

- c) The second sentence appears to be a contradiction to the first sentence. It says that somebody is saying to David, "Flee like a bird to your mountain".
 - i) So, does that mean someone wants David to run away from whatever he is dealing with at this moment? Yes it does, and yes it is wrong.
 - a) When we are facing some sort of problem, God does not want us to run away from that problem (unless it is life-threatening and God calls us to run at that moment in time.) Most of the time, God wants us to face whatever we are facing "head on".
 - ii) The idea here is we are to seek God for help, but at the same time, face, whatever it is we have to face. Getting back to my introduction comment about this psalm, when we deal with a particular problem, God does not want us to run away from that problem, but God just wants us to seek His help in order to get to the solution of whatever we are dealing with.
 - iii) This idea of prayer does not mean that our problems instantly go away. Often I have prayed for God's help and often the solution then "comes" right in front of me. Other times those problems still continue, but what prayer does is lead us down the path that God wants us to go in that situation.
7. Verse 2: For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart.
- a) The verse is describing a wicked person firing arrows at godly people. Since most of us rarely encounter someone firing arrows at us, we can assume this verse is meant to be taken poetically. The arrows we do face might be emotional issues, a friend who is in a lot of pain or if we are in the military, it might be much greater weapons than arrows.
 - b) OK John I get that. What does it mean? It means that there are demonic forces that don't want us to do God's will and it means that there are people out there working against us to do God's will for the moment.
 - i) Putting aside our problems for the moment, what is the motivation of wicked people or demonic forces to work against us? The answer is such forces can't get us to lose our salvation, but they can get our focus onto those "arrows".
 - ii) The goal of demonic forces is to make us ineffective witnesses for God. Let's face it, if we are busy staring at the "arrows" coming us, it is easy to forget that God can and does want to help us.
 - iii) Again, those arrows are whatever problem we are dealing with. We may think that the problem is just the "arrows". The real issue is are we giving God a chance to work in our lives, or are we going to just try to dodge the arrows our self?
 - c) Therefore, the reason to pray this psalm has nothing to do with understanding David's problems. It is about reminding ourselves that God wants to help us through whatever we are dealing with at this time.
8. Verse 3: When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"
- a) This psalm does not deny that life can get very difficult at times. That is the idea behind the phrase, "The foundations are being destroyed". We can watch whole societies falling apart or entire nations being attacked. The term can also refer to smaller scale issues such as those among our families or our church that are under attack.
 - b) When I think of the second sentence that says, "What can the righteous do?", I remember Jesus word, "The gates of hell cannot prevail against you." (Matthew 16:18b, NKJV).
 - i) What Jesus meant is that it is the job of Christians to spread the Gospel, which includes learning to trust God in every moment of our lives and all the efforts that demonic forces throw against us will be ineffective. The term "gates of hell" is a defensive term. Gates are designed to prevent people from entering somewhere.

- ii) Let me explain this a little more: The underlying idea is that this world is "Satan's home". When we are calling upon God for His help in any situation, or when we are calling upon God to help us be a good witness for Him, we are attacking Satan's home (or gates), which again is this world, whether we realize it or not.
 - c) Getting back to the verse, the point is when it appears that everything around us is falling apart the first step should be to trust in God and to seek His help. We then go forward, knowing that the outcome is already in God's hands.
- 9. Verse 4: The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. ⁵ The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.
 - a) These verses are reminders to us that there is a God, He is in charge and He is watching over us and He examines how people react. To put it another way, when things are going wrong, know that God is there, testing us to see what we will do.
 - b) One of my favorite commentators (Chuck Missler) puts it this way: "I am convinced God stays up at night thinking of new ways to ask me in effect, "Do you trust me?" What Chuck meant is he deals with all sorts of problems and he is convinced that God allows these troubles to come in order to test to see if Chuck (and us) really trust Him.
 - i) I don't know how much truth there is to the idea that God is behind every problem. I do know that when problems occur, God is reminding us that He is watching us and He want us to seek Him through whatever we are dealing with.
 - c) Verse 5 also has a second line that reads, "Those who love violence his soul hates".
 - i) First thing to ask is who are those who love violence? Remember that in general the unrighteous are describing those people who don't seek God.
 - ii) So what does the text mean by "those who love violence"? Does that mean that fighting is never appropriate? No, that is not the issue. The issue is seeking God's peace through whatever is the problem of the moment. Those who are trying to prevent us from seeking God's peace (back to those arrows flying at us) want us to try to fight those arrows using our own strength.
 - a) It may be describing spiritual forces or people who don't seek God. The point of this psalm is those arrows are (whatever they are) real, and those who oppose God are really firing those arrows at us.
- 10. Verse 6: On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.
 - a) Well, so much for any motivation to turn against God. ☺ This verse is describing the fate of those who turn their lives against God. It is not good.
 - b) There is an eternal price for turning against God. The point is whether or not one admits there is a God, we are still accountable to Him for our lives.
 - c) OK John, I already believe that there is a literal hell. Why remind me of that here? The point of this psalm is that when life appears to be falling apart, remember that God is still in charge, He still rules over the affairs of mankind and just because the "bad people" appear to be winning, this verse reminds us of their ultimate fate.
 - i) In other words, don't panic when things are falling apart. Know that God is still in charge, He still wants the best for our lives and He will decide the ultimate outcome for those who think they are "winning" at this time.
- 11. Verse 7: For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.
 - a) Sometimes I worry when I write things that I am going "off course", and then I read the next verse and I get assured I was on the right track. The point of the previous verse is in effect, "Don't worry about wicked people because in the end they will get punished. Verse 7 in effect tells what happens to the people who do trust in God.
 - b) As I like to say, those who don't believe in God can at the most, enjoy this lifetime. Those who trust in God get a far greater reward that lasts for eternity.

- c) Verse 7 says that God ("The Lord") is righteous. What does that mean? Does it just mean that God always does what is right? Well, that's a good start. ☺ The idea of righteous is that God is perfect, and none of the sin characteristics that people do, He does. The idea of righteous also contains the idea that God "rights the wrongs" that people do.
 - i) This leads to the second point of this verse. It says he (God) loves justice and upright men will see His face. I think the point there is not so much about God's justice as it is about believers being willing to "stand up" and do what is right.
 - ii) In other words, it does not matter if the odds are against us. God wants us to take a stand for what is right or do the right thing. It means when we are facing those who don't care about God, we are willing to take a stand for Him and not fear the consequences because in the end, we win.
 - d) To sum up the whole psalm, the point is sometimes bad people appear to be winning or at the least they are on the attack. We can have confidence when it appears there are no "Godly people" around to lead, that He is still there, He is still in charge and those that trust in Him will "See His face".
 - e) OK, time to move on to Psalm 12.
12. Psalm 12, introduction: For the director of music. According to *sheminith*. A psalm of David.
- a) This is another of David's psalms. We encounter another untranslated word in the introduction that is "sheminith". That term is possibly a musical term and it means to go up or down an "octave". If you recall or didn't know, there are only seven musical notes, and to go up or down an octave means to play those notes one set higher or lower.
 - b) OK, so if the original music to this psalm is long gone, why preserve this comment? Is it just because David wrote it that we should remember it? Let me throw a theory at you.
 - i) Jesus said in effect the "whole Old Testament speaks of Him" which is a reference to Psalm 40:6-8 as quoted in Hebrews 10:7. My point is whenever one comes to a passage of the bible that doesn't make sense, try putting Jesus in the middle of that passage and see if it works. With that said, here comes my theory of the day. ☺
 - ii) To change an octave means to change an "eighth". When studying numbers in the bible, the number eight is associated with a new beginning, just like going up to the eighth note is a new beginning of the same seven notes. If you study all of the names and titles for Jesus in the New Testament, all of them are multiples of eight when looking at the numerical values of the letters of Jesus' titles in the original Greek. My point? The names and titles for Jesus are all numerically associated with the number eight, which is symbolic of our new beginning in Christ.
 - iii) OK, John, now you've really lost me. ☺ My point here is the title of the psalm has a reference to the "eighth", which is a rough translation of "sheminith".
 - a) The various names and titles of Jesus (when read in the original Greek) has numerical values that are associated with the number eight.
 - b) My point is that this "octave" may be a reminder of the "new beginning we have in Christ" is somehow "hidden" in this psalm.
 - iv) If I'm totally wrong about this, I'll shrug my shoulders and say so what. If I'm right it is simply another proof that the "volume of the entire bible" (again a reference to Hebrews 10:7) is written about, and speaks of Jesus.
 - c) OK, time to get back on track on go to Verse 1 of Psalm 12.
13. Psalm 12, Verse 1: Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men.
- a) Psalm 12 continues the theme that focuses on the ultimate fate of those who don't seek God, especially at times when such people are in charge.
 - b) Psalm 12 says in effect, "Hey God, what do we do, since everyone around here has turned against You and there does not appear to be any godly people left?"

- c) What popped in my head was the Old Testament prophet Elijah. At one point in his life, he thought he was the only godly person left in Israel. God responded to Elijah in effect, "Don't worry, even though it looks like everyone has turned against Me, there are still 7,000 people left in Israel who still follow Me." (See 1st Kings 19:18.)
 - i) The point as it relates to this psalm is that when it seems that there is no one left to stand up for what is right, God is saying in effect, "Don't panic, I still have a large number of people who are willing to stand up for Me and you (the one who is complaining) are not alone in your views about Me".
 - d) The point of this opening verse is that David is complaining that no one is willing to stand up for God and only the "ungodly" are now ruling over the land.
 - i) What we have to remember when the wicked are in charge to not panic, continue to take a stand for God and remember that there are others out there who think the way we do and we are not alone in our willingness to stand up for God.
14. Verse 2: Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception. ³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue ⁴ that says, "We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips--who is our master?"
- a) These three verses all revolve around the concept of "lying lips". The idea is that those in charge are willing to lie to cover their true intentions. What is worse is that such people have no fear of being punished by God.
 - i) So are these verses just condemning lying? It is bigger than that. The point here is about having to live with people who don't care about doing what is right, and dealing with people who have no fear of God's judgment.
 - ii) Such people are often willing to give "lip service" about doing the right thing, but all they really care about is getting their agenda accomplished and they have no real interest in what God or "righteous people" think of them.
 - b) OK John, so there are times when those in charge are not God-fearing. How does this psalm help me? Will it stop people from acting the way they act? No.
 - i) The underlying point is that this psalm is a reminder that God is in charge and His will, "will" get done no matter how bad are those in power.
 - a) This reminds me of my opening comments: The city attorney who pressed filed charges against my father as best I could tell (I worked for my father at that time), only did it to get publicity. The evidence was obvious that there were no merit to his charges.
 - ii) The point is (for all of us) when wicked people rule, we as believers in God can still run to Him for a refuge and He still cares about those who are oppressed due to leadership that don't care about God's rules.
 - c) Let me try explaining this another way: Suppose there is a group leader who says he or she is doing the right thing, but they still appear to be getting away with something.
 - i) I was reading in the news one time about a married pastor who was found guilty of soliciting a prostitute. Instead of admitting the problem, that person hid it and he stayed in charge of his congregation. The underlying point is that "God won't be mocked" in the sense that sooner or later, He will not allow such people to get away with what they did. (See Galatians 6:7 on this point.) God hears "their lying lips" and He will deal with that situation on His timing.
 - ii) On many levels, I suppose lying or twisting the truth is common. Many people think they are getting away with it, but they don't know they will be accountable to God whether they want to accept that fact or not.
 - iii) OK John, none of this is news. Why should I pray this type of prayer? The point is to let go of one's worries about such issues and let God deal with them. You and I may not have the power to stop such people, but such leaders are accountable to God and on His timing He won't let them get away with lies.

15. Verse 5: "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the LORD. "I will protect them from those who malign them."
 - a) This verse is not saying God will work now because we are praying "hard enough". This verse is saying that God will work on His timing to make a difference. This verse is reminding us that there is a God, He cares about those who are truly in need and He will help those who are oppressed through no fault of their own.
 - b) So why does God react here? It is a reminder to us that God will "right the wrong" on His timing and His way if we give the situation over to Him.
 - c) Why should I worry about others who are oppressed when I have my own issues to deal with? Why can't those who are actually suffering pray this prayer? Why do I have to get involved? The short answer is that prayer is about God's will getting done. Christians should care about the things God cares about. If God cares about helping those who are truly suffering, then so should we. This prayer should not only motive us to pray for the suffering but to do something about it.
 - i) I'm not saying God calls all believers to quit their lives and go live a life to help the truly suffering. While God calls some to this life style, the point is to care and do something and not just focus on our lives.
16. Verse 6: And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. ⁷ O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever.
 - a) Verse 6 is saying in effect "We can count on God if we seek Him. We can count on God to protect us from those who want to harm us." Verse 6 is saying that God's words have been tested over time and have proven to be true over time. Just like those who lived in the bible can count on God's word to be true, so can we.
 - i) Translation? When others are oppressing us, we can take comfort in God and trust that He is aware of our plight and will deal with it if we let Him.
 - b) So why does God allow suffering in this lifetime? Part of the answer is simply that sin exists in the world and we have to live with the consequences of sin. Part of the answer is that God is waiting for us (collectively) to petition Him to deal with those issues.
 - i) The important thing to remember is that God is aware of all suffering that goes on in the world and in His timing, such oppressors will not get away with it forever.
 - ii) This leads me to the final verse of this psalm, Verse 8.
17. Verse 8: The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.
 - a) A classic line says in effect, "All it takes for bad people to succeed is for good people to not do anything about it." (Attributed to Edmund Burke). Often the great mistake God's people make is failing to petition Him to deal with such issues. We carry the burden of our pains around and complain about them, but don't take them to God in prayer.
 - b) A summary point of this prayer is not just "giving the problem to God and then ignoring the problem". The point is often that God does call us to get involved and do something about it, but our first response should be to give God the issues to deal with.
 - i) If we can deal with it ourselves, then we should ask God what He wants us specifically to do about the "issues at hand" and how to get involved.
 - ii) The other equally as important idea is to understand that God is aware of the situation and wants to work through people to "right the wrongs".
 - iii) Praying about the oppressed and the oppressors is a way of letting God know that we are aware of the problems at hand. It is a way of saying, "We can not deal with this problem without Your help. Please Lord, deal with these problems and if it is Your will for us to get involved guide us in what to do to overturn such evil."
 - iv) Sometimes God's answer is to "Just wait and watch Me (God) work" and other times the answer is for us to do something specific. The point is we won't know what to do until we ask Him in the first place.
 - c) OK, on that scary note, we can move on to Psalm 13. ☺

18. Psalm 13, introduction: For the director of music. A psalm of David.
 - a) This psalm just says is that David wrote it and it was meant to be played musically. That means at one time, there was a musical tune that went with this psalm and David wrote it with the idea that it be used in prayer.
19. Verse 1: How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? ³ Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; ⁴ my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
 - a) The first four verses of this psalm ask a series of questions that all say in effect, "God I am in big trouble right now and I don't see You getting involved in my life. Help!"
 - b) First let me talk about periods of "God's silence". Most veteran Christians understand that term is describing times when it feels like God is silent. Such times is God saying to us in effect, "Trust Me. Keep moving forward and trust Me. You may not sense me working in your life right now, but I am here. Keep praying and know that I'm listening".
 - i) So why does God go "silent" at times? Sometimes there is a sin God wants us to deal with first. Other times it may be God testing of our faith. (It is like a parent who watches to see what their child will do as opposed to correcting that child immediately). Finally, sometimes God is saying in effect, "I was waiting for You to bring this issue to me as opposed to trying to deal with our own strength."
 - a) I find the main reason God goes "silent" at times is usually to test us to see if we do "walk by faith" that He is there in our lives.
 - c) OK, let us get back to the verses at hand. David is crying out to God that He is silent and at the same time, David's enemies are winning. David is suffering due to his enemies' victory and David is bringing that pain to God.
 - i) All right John, how do I relate to this? I'm not at war at the moment. First of all, remember that we are at "war" whether we realize it or not. As I like to say, there are spiritual forces who's job it is, to make you and I a bad witness for Jesus.
 - ii) The point is whatever David was going through at that time it appears as if God was silent because David's enemies were winning. So what do we do when it appears like we are losing our battles? The answer is to be like David and cry out to God to do something now about our battles.
 - iii) Sometimes God does not answer simply because He is waiting for us to cry out to Him over the situation. Sometimes God wants us to realize that we cannot win the battle at hand without His help and it is a matter of us, crying out to Him.
 - iv) I'm starting to realize the reason some of my prayers are not answered is because I am not trusting that He is aware of my problems and He is going to deal with oppression "His way on His timing". Remember again that the purpose of prayer is to get God's will done and not our will. Sometimes God is saying to us in effect, "I have heard you pray about your problems. Now why aren't you moving forward through these issues and trusting that I will help you at this time?"
 - a) Let me try to explain a little more: Let's say we are really going through a difficult time right now. We've prayed about it over and over again, and God does not appear to be doing anything about it. Sometimes that is God saying in effect, "I've heard your prayers, I will do something, but now, just keep moving forward and trust that I am working".
 - b) That is relevant to these verses. These verses start with us realizing that we are in a battle and crying out to God for help. It is the realization that we can't win without His help and He does want to lead us to a victorious life based on our trust in Him working out our life for His glory.
 - c) Which surprisingly enough, does lead us to Verse 5.

20. Verse 5: But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.
- a) This is the end of this little psalm. The final two lines say in effect, "I don't have to worry about God not reacting fast enough. I can rejoice in God knowing that He has heard my prayers. I can have joy knowing that God will save me. I can have joy knowing that God has been good to me in the past and He will be good to me and see me through my situation at the moment. God will work out my problems for His glory if I am simply willing to turn them over to Him. I can have joy knowing that the victory on my behalf is already won not because I am a good person, but because I am trusting in God for His will to be done in my life."
 - b) To sum up this six verse psalm, the point is when we feel like life is falling apart around us, we can turn to Him, we can have confidence that He will work it out on His timing and finally we can have joy knowing that our victory is already won.
 - c) There, on that happy note, I can move on to Psalm 14. Just to warn you, the theme of dealing with the wicked continues in Psalm 14, so I'm not letting up on my theme. ☺
21. Psalm 14, introduction: For the director of music. Of David.
- a) This psalm has the same title as the last psalm, so I won't comment any further than just to say, this psalm too was meant to be sung amongst His people. (I have to admit I wondered if David knew that his psalms would be part of God's word or did he think he was just writing them to be sung in his local "church service".)
22. Psalm 14, Verse 1: The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.
- a) There is a classic American joke amongst Christians that April 1st is "national atheist day" as that day is known as a day for foolish pranks. David says here that the definition of a fool is a person who says or thinks that there is no God.
 - i) I am not commenting here on practical jokes. I am saying that when the bible uses the word "fool", it refers to a person who has no interest in God and that person is in effect an atheist or an agnostic.
 - b) I've never spent a lot of time in this ministry arguing for the existence of God. There are people who specialize in such arguments, but I don't. When Moses asked God what is His name, God responded with "Jehovah" which means in effect, "I am that I am".
 - i) To put it another way, God does not spend much time explaining who He is in the bible. God says in effect, "I exist and you (that's us) have to deal with it."
 - ii) The bible is one big collection of stories that all say in effect, "God exists and here is what I expect from people". Jesus summarized what God expects of us in effect by saying we should love God as much as possible and love others as much as we love ourselves. (See Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:30 on this.) If we can practice that concept, then we do get the idea what God expects of us.
 - c) This leads us back to Verse 1. It is describing the person who refuses to believe in God. Notice Verse 1 says, "The fool says in his heart (as opposed to head)." In other words, the evidence for God is all around us. Someone who refuses to believe in God doesn't do so because of "head knowledge". They do so because their heart refuses to change.
 - i) What does that mean? It means that deep down inside of us, people know that a god exists no matter what "scientific experts" claim to say. There is too much evidence for God's existence to ignore. The fact that the planet earth is so "finely balanced" is evidence of God's existence. The fact that humans instinctually know that killing and stealing is wrong is evidence of the existence of a greater power. If there was a "big bang", it means that someone had to "light the fuse". ☺
 - ii) My point is when people claim that God doesn't exist or they are not sure whether or not God exists it is not due to "head knowledge of the facts". It is due to the fact that people are unwilling to give their hearts to God.

- d) As we get into Psalm 14, there is a classic debate as to whether or not this psalm refers to all people or just those who refuse to acknowledge God.
 - i) On one hand, Verse 1 starts off by describing the behavior of a fool. Given that fact, many argue that all of Psalm 14 is describing the behavior of those who are foolish. When Verse 1 says, "no one has done good", the argument is that the term "no one" refers to all of those people who are considered fools.
 - ii) The counter argument is that the "no one" in Verse 1 refers to all people and not just all fools. Verse 3 will say, "no one has done good". The idea is that no person is perfect and we all sin. Therefore, many argue that this psalm is about the foolish behavior of all people not just those who don't believe in God.
 - iii) Personally I see it both views as relevant. This psalm is primarily dealing with people who don't believe in God. At the same time, we have to remember that it is not "fools" who read this psalm, but people who believe in God. Therefore the point of this psalm is for us (believers), who have to watch for foolish behavior.
 - e) Let me end this discussion with something Jesus said about "calling someone a fool".
 - i) In Matthew 5:22, Jesus says in effect, that it is not proper for a believer to call someone a fool. In fact if we do that, we are in danger of being sent to hell.
 - ii) Ok, if calling someone is a fool is that bad, why bring it up in this psalm?
 - a) The idea of this psalm and of the bible is that we are called upon to recognize foolish behavior when we see it. At the same time, only God knows people's hearts and only God knows who is saved.
 - b) To call someone a fool is to say in effect, "You are going to hell". Jesus' point was that only God the Father knows the ultimate fate of people. For us to make eternal judgments about people is wrong and that is why Jesus condemns the idea of calling specific people "fools".
 - c) At the same time, God does want us to recognize foolish behavior when we see it and that is why this psalm teaches us about foolish behavior.
23. Verse 2: The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. ³ All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. ⁴ Will evildoers never learn-- those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the LORD?
- a) These verses lead us back to the question: Is God talking about us (all people including believers) or is God just talking about those who don't believe in Him?
 - i) A point is, if this psalm is for "all people" why does Verse 4 specify "evildoers" amongst all people? That is a good argument this psalm is not intended for all people but those that specifically turn from God in their lives.
 - ii) This psalm reminds us that the fate of atheists and agnostics is already determined by God. They don't do "good" and their fate is set unless such people are willing to change and open their hearts to God.
 - b) Also notice Verse 4 says "Those who devour my people". That part of the verse also supports the idea that God is not talking about all people but only those who refuse to turn their hearts to Him.
 - i) If that is the case, what does God want me to know about the fool? A key point is such people (that the bible calls fools) don't understand God because they choose to be ignorant. They have become corrupt, not because they as a group are worse people than believers. It is because they refuse to open their hearts to God's forgiveness and in that sense they have and are becoming corrupt.
 - c) If you don't know, much of this psalm is quoted in Romans Chapter 1.
 - i) The main topic of Romans Chapter 1 is the behavior of the nonbeliever. The essential idea is when one refuses to turn to God, one's behavior gets worse and worse to the point where a person can get "beyond help". Let me explain further:

- ii) It would be like us saying to a nonbeliever, "You better change, because you are going down a road that is greased. The longer you refuse to change, the harder it will become to change one's ways because of that "greased road"." So why does God do it that way? You would think that God would make it easier to repent with time. The answer is in effect when people turn from Him, going down a "greased road" (i.e., it becomes harder for people to change to a lifestyle pleasing to God) becomes more obvious of the choices we make in life.
 - iii) When we do things that are displeasing to God, those choices become obvious and it becomes more difficult to change our bad ways without His help.
 - d) Looking at these four lines again, what occurs to me is that God is not impressed by mankind without His influence. In other words, all the "good" the world does without Him is not enough to impress Him to say in effect, "You deserve to spend eternity with Me based on the good things you (people) are doing."
 - i) The problem is sin is like a disease we are all born with. No matter how hard we try, we cannot avoid the effects of that disease.
 - ii) That is why "good people" who refuse to turn to Jesus can be sent to hell. It is not that their good deeds don't outweigh their bad deeds. For all we know, their good deeds may far outweigh their bad deeds. The problem is that sin "disease" is incurable and God cannot allow that "disease" to be in heaven.
 - iii) So why can't God just separate that "sin factor" from "good people" like He will from those who trust in Jesus? In other words, why can't "good people" who reject Jesus go to heaven and be separated from sin?
 - a) Part of the answer is that it is an insult to God to turn down His free gift of salvation. The true answer is that God just can't forgive sin without being perfect in His justice. That is why accepting Jesus payment for our sin is the only remedy for "sin disease".
 - e) OK John, I know all of this. Why are you going on and on about this here? ☺
 - i) The idea of this psalm is to realize the "good we do without God" is not impressive to Him. God looks at the good things we do (people in general) without His influence and sees people as "evildoers" because our lives are not perfect.
 - ii) So what does this mean to the believer? It means to let God work "through us" and to ask Him to work through us as opposed to "do it on our own".
 - iii) That in a sense, is a summary of all of these "negative" psalms we have had in this lesson. It is a reminder of the fate of those who reject God and a reminder of the times in our lives when we reject God.
 - f) Meanwhile, we still have three more verses to go.
24. Verse 5: There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous. ⁶ You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.
- a) Verse 5 makes an interesting point. It is referring to the "evildoers" and Verse 5 says they are "overwhelmed with dread". What does that mean?
 - i) I suspect it refers to the fear of being caught. The idea is that deep down, when people commit wicked plans, they know in their heart it is wrong, but other than the fear of being caught, they go forward.
 - b) The rest of Verse 5 says that God is present with the righteous.
 - i) So how are we as Christians "righteous"? The idea of that word means in effect we are living the "right way". It means we are trusting in God and attempting to be pleasing to Him with our lives. It does not mean we are perfect in our lives, only perfectly forgiven of our sins. We are acting better than the nonbeliever not because we are good people, but we are trusting in God working through us.
 - ii) In summary, we are "right with God" as we are perfectly forgiven.

- c) OK John, once again, I sort of get all of that theology. What does it mean practically?
 - i) It means when we are facing some sort of evil plans against us, we need not fear knowing that God is our ultimate refuge against such evil plans.
 - a) It means that when things are going wrong and it appears like everything is falling apart, we can have the confidence of knowing that God is there and He is looking out for us through such times.
 - ii) As I wrote this section, I woke up from a bad night's sleep and I couldn't figure out what was bothering me or what God was trying to tell me. I learn through such times that God is saying in effect, "Keep going forward, and when I am ready to explain it to you, I will. In the meantime, just do what I (God) have called you to do and trust that I am guiding you. (I wrote this section before my introduction comments, which explained what God was trying showing me.) The point is often God will show you what he wants to show you, but on His timing.
 - iii) That is the point of praying this prayer. It is about the realization that those who refuse to turn to God will suffer whether they realize it or not, and those who do trust in God will win in the end whether we realize it or not.
 - iv) On that happy note, I can go on to the finish this psalm and this lesson.
25. Verse 7: Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!
- a) One can read this last line of Psalm 14 (in case you forgot the psalm number ☺) and say it just refers to the future date when the ruling Messiah comes to Israel to right the wrongs of the world. In other words, there is coming a day when Jesus will rule the world from Israel and somehow, someday, evil behavior will no longer be tolerated or exist.
 - b) One can also read this psalm with the idea that God won't tolerate foolish people and He will work through those who are His, to bring down those who turn from Him. How that will work is a mystery where we just have to trust Him and watch the outcome.
 - c) To sum up the lesson, the four psalms of this lesson mostly focus on the "deeds" of those who turn against God. As tough as our lives may be at the present moment or as tough as those who are suffering may be going through, the way we can have joy through tragic times is to remember that there is a God and eventually He will right the wrongs.
 - d) As I like to say, the only suffering Christians will have to deal with is limited to this lifetime. To put it another way, if one had to choose between suffering in this lifetime and suffering eternally, it is much better to choose this lifetime.
 - i) God allows the suffering of the righteous (that's you and me) during this lifetime to teach us things. One day we will get to enjoy God's victory over the evil that exists in this world. So how does that help with my problems today? By knowing that ultimately we will be victorious if we give those problems to Him.
 - e) Well, if that isn't a happy ending to a pretty negative group of psalms (that focus on the evil of this world), I don't know what else to do to cheer you up. ☺ Yes, the problems we face are real and yes it is difficult to get through. I am not taking that lightly. Just like the idea that I don't understand why God allows people to suffer, I take comfort in the fact that whatever suffering we have to endure, it is only through this lifetime.
26. With that said, let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, I cannot explain the suffering that goes on in this world. I cannot explain why good people I know are allowed to suffer while the deeds of the evil appear to go unpunished. It is only the fact that You exist and You give comfort to those who are suffering that gives us the peace of knowing that You will "right the wrongs" of this world. Lord, Help us to be a good witness for You through good times and difficult times. Help us to remember it is not our goodness that impresses You, but it is You working through our lives. Guide us to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.