

1. In this lesson, we finish the "ascent" psalms. Remember from the last lesson this is a group of 15 psalms recited as Jews traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate specific holidays. They are relevant to Christians as together they form a pattern to show us how to draw close to God. Does this mean I have to recite these psalms in order to draw close to Him? Of course not, but together they form a pattern that give us a wonderful perspective about life and our relationship with Him.
 - a) To explain further, know that each psalm has a unique purpose. They were written by at least several different authors. They were eventually combined in a way that teach us about how and why God wants us to draw close to Him. In this lesson, we are covering the last four in this series. Three of these final four are only three verses long. The other one is Psalm 132, which has 18 verses. What is amazing is to know how much there is to learn and appreciate in psalms that are this short in length.
2. At this point, let me quickly review some key points about this whole section of the fifteen psalms and then I can explain how they tie to the last four psalms in this lesson.
 - a) As I have explained, we have been covering a group of 15 psalms in the last two lessons known as the "song of ascents". The title is part of every psalm in this group. These psalms were sung or recited, as religious Jews would travel at least a 3,000-foot uphill journey up to Jerusalem to celebrate specific holidays. The word "ascent" is effectively short for the concept of ascending up a mountain.
 - b) The psalms are not just about traveling to Jerusalem to worship God. "Ascending to God" describes a pattern one develops in order to draw close to Him. Know that the emphasis is on group worship as opposed to say, private or individual prayers to Him.
 - c) These psalms form a pattern where one psalm leads well into the topic of the next one. That is also why they "ascend" as they lead us step by step closer to a close relationship with God. In effect they remind us of what He desires of us as we seek Him as a group.
 - d) A few of the psalms also list an author, but most do not. My point is simply that I don't think when these psalms were written the authors realized how each of them would eventually be combined to form this "ascent" pattern. It is another example of how we never know how God is going to use us if we are willing to commit our lives to Him.
 - e) Let us also remember that we are in the fifth and final book of the Psalms. For the sake of newcomers, know that the entire book of Psalms is divided into 5 books. This fifth book has the common theme about how God expects us to live. This group of 15 psalms teaches us how He wants us to draw close to Him in order to live out our lives.
3. OK, enough "ascent" talk. ☺ Let me talk a little more about these last four psalms:
 - a) Again, three of them are only three verses long. The 4th one (#132) is 18 verses.
 - b) Two of them are credited to David and one was most likely written during his lifetime.
 - c) Since we are close to finishing this "ascent to God", it would be logical that the focus of these psalms are on the issue of what does one do when one is (big "is") close to God. This leads to the title of this lesson: "Appreciating drawing close to God". This is not about the end of our life here on earth. This is about the effort we make to seek Him and what God desires of us as we as a group (think church or community) do seek Him.
 - d) With that said, here is a brief summary of these brief psalms:
 - i) Psalm 131 is about not worrying about things that are beyond our control.
 - ii) Psalm 132 is about "arriving at our destination" and appreciating being with God for the purpose of worshipping Him.
 - iii) Psalm 133 then follows on appreciating how we are united as a group of believers.
 - iv) Psalm 134 then finishes with the thought of telling us to praise Him.
 - v) Why we praise Him is the topic of the next set of psalms and the next lesson.

4. John, you have to admit this is a bit anti-climatic. After all of this "travel" to draw close to God, it ends with the concept of just praising Him. Explain why I should make this spiritual journey:
 - a) Treating all of our life as a journey, we as believers need to constantly realize that it is up to Him to guide our lives. It is about realizing that at any given moment in our lives, we can choose to do His will or our will. Focusing on Him helps us to do His will.
 - i) My pastor calls it the "mind as our swing vote". This is about how we mentally choose at any moment to do our will or God's will for our lives.
 - b) This leads me back to these psalms. The point of these psalms is about coming together as say, a church or a group for the purpose of seeking Him. Once we mentally get there, our focus is no longer to ask Him for things, but to appreciate how He guides our lives.
 - c) We praise Him, because we realize His will for our lives is also the best thing for us. Our moment-by-moment choice to follow Him is the best decision we can make for ourselves.
5. Time for a related question: If it is God's desire that we draw close to Him, why not just take a moment and pray to Him? Why this big dramatic "15 psalm process?" ☺
 - a) The answer is usually that we have to clear our minds of things in the way before we can truly appreciate all He has done for us. This series of steps helps us to get our focus right.
 - b) OK John, I sort of get all of that. Still, why make this big group effort, as oppose to just taking these steps by myself? The answer is about appreciating what God has done for us as a group of believers as opposed to just allowing Him to help us as individuals.
 - i) Setting aside our differences (beliefs, hobbies, backgrounds, etc.) in order to grow and trust in Him, as a group is what life is all about. Yes that means getting along with people we disagree with at times. Yes it means getting along with people from different backgrounds. The point is God does not want a bunch of solo efforts for His sake. God wants group work, despite the difficulty of having to work with people who have different ideas about how things should be done.
 - c) As I have finished working my way through all of these psalms, I have learned that it comes back to the simple issue of "trusting Him" and trusting that He is guiding us.
 - i) As simple as that sounds, it often takes working through a lot of steps in order for us to truly appreciate how God is working in our lives. That is why there are fifteen separate psalms. This last group hopefully, will make us all appreciate all the more to explain why God wants us to draw close to Him just as He desires to draw close to us. That is what we get out of these psalms.
 - d) OK, enough of the "how and why" talk. Let's start on the psalms themselves.
6. Psalm 131, title: A song of ascents. Of David.
 - a) Besides the usual "ascent" reference, the title says that David wrote it. To explain why it is significant to mention David's name, I need to give a little background about David's life.
 - i) David started off as a "nobody". What made him special is that he always trusted in God for his guidance through his entire life. The bible describes his life in detail including many mistakes he made.
 - ii) As a young man, he got the opportunity to work for the King of Israel. That king, Saul, had the great fault of trusting in his own abilities to succeed and not trust in God to guide him. Through much of the book of "1st Samuel", David was on the run for his life as Saul hated David's success. Imagine spending years of one's life being a government fugitive and then still trying to trust God with one's life.
 - iii) Eventually Saul died and David became the next king. David conquered most of the enemies that surrounded Israel. David moved the location of the center of worship to Jerusalem. This location became it's permanent home until many centuries later where the entire nation was taken into captivity by the Babylonians.
 - iv) As a king, David brought Israel to its peak of power. Despite his mistakes and faults, God recognized how he trusted Him, and God told David that future kings, including "the king" would be a descendant of David.

- b) OK, that is interesting ancient history. However, I don't understand how any of this is relevant to my life other than the fact David is an ancestor of Jesus. To explain how this is relevant, let us move on to Verse 1 of this three verse psalm:
7. Verse 1: My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.
- a) David could look back at his life and wonder, "How is it that I, David, who came from an ordinary family, could spend years of my life on the run from a king, eventually be a king, be guilty of an affair and killing people, and yet still lead Israel to it's peak of power.
 - b) Now let me personalize this question: If we are trusting in God for our salvation, we are special in that we have been chosen by Him to be with Him forever. That alone deserves a shout of praise to God, but that is only the beginning of a lifelong journey. The amazing part is to watch how God intertwines the events of our lives for His glory. It shocks me to consider how much God has used me to make a difference for Him as in effect I am a "nobody" as much as David was. Anyone who trusts in God can make the same claim if they are simply willing to be lead by God all of their lives.
 - c) OK John, nice speech. What does it have to do with Verse 1? The point is, David could not explain how he got from being a "nobody" to being a king. We can't explain how God has guided our lives to present moment, but He has. Stop and consider that aspect of how God has guided our lives, and re-read Verse 1 again. (It's ok, I'll wait here. ☺)
 - i) The point is David refuses to say in effect, "It wasn't my great abilities that got me where I am today. It wasn't me that lead all the great things that happened in my life. I need to give God the credit for things that are too wonderful to explain.
 - ii) Let me get a little negative here for a moment: Suppose we feel like we have not done anything great in our lives. Supposed we are saved and that's it. First of all, give God the credit that one is saved as eternity is a lot longer than this life.
 - a) Next, be willing to commit one's life to make that difference and simply watch God work to make that difference for Him.
 - iii) Just as God chose David who was a "nobody", so He can and does chose nobodies today to make a difference for Him. I'm not saying we will all rise to be kings of our country like David. I am saying God can and does raise us up to make a difference for Him if we are willing to trust Him with our lives and be willing to be used by Him to make that difference for Him.
 - iv) Then what? To explain, let me share one of my favorite questions to ask young adults. It is, "If money was irrelevant, what would you want to do all day?" I then say if you can't do that "thing" now, work toward that goal of what you want to do. Then, use whatever one enjoys doing and find a way to combine that love with making a difference for God with one's life. That combination brings more joy to one's life than just say, making money or any other goal. The point is God desires to use us to make a difference for Him and usually it is God who puts that desire in us to enjoy what we enjoy doing anyway.
 - d) With that stated, I can now get back to the verse. The idea of this verse is we can't explain how God works. We just know that He does. The reason this psalm was recited or sung as the Israelites traveled to Jerusalem was to remind them not about David's life, but about the fact that God can and does use anyone and everyone willing to trust Him with their lives in order to make a difference for Him.
 - i) This verse is saying in effect, "I can't explain all things. I can't explain how a God I can't see and doesn't speak to me out loud guides my life, but I know it is true. I can't explain how and why God wants to use me, but I trust in His ability to guide my life and I will keep on trusting in Him despite whatever is going on at my life at the present moment.
 - ii) OK with that speech of encouragement done, I'm actually ready for Verse 2.

8. Verse 2: But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.
 - a) To paraphrase Verse 2: "Now that I realize God is in charge of my life, I trust that He is guiding me like a very young child depends upon his or her mother.
 - b) Let me quote Jesus: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3, NIV)
 - i) Jesus said in this verse we couldn't be saved unless we become like little children. This is not about acting immaturely or never leaving our parents. It is about trusting in God the same way a young child trusts in his or her parent for survival.
 - ii) Let me put it this way: One can go through their whole life and ignore God's desire for their lives. One can never be saved and make a difference for God unless one learns to depend upon God like a little child depends upon parents.
 - c) This leads back to Verse 2. This psalm verse is making the same point Jesus made in Matthew 18:3. The idea is David was used greatly by God, because he trusted in God to guide his life the same way a child trusts in his or her parents for guidance.
 - d) OK John, get practical for a moment. If God doesn't speak to us audibly how does He actually guide our lives? How do we depend upon Him this way?
 - i) First, let me explain why God doesn't speak audibly to us. Suppose God spoke audibly to someone. We would then be saying, "Look how special he or she is because God spoke to them audibly." I should also add, "God can do whatever He wants since He is God". That means if He wants to speak in an audible way to someone, it is a possibility. I've just never heard of it done in my lifetime.
 - ii) So now that we know why we don't get audible messages, let me explain how He does guide our lives. First, let me make my usual point that His word gives us guidelines of how to live our lives. Then as we seek Him in prayer both as individuals and as a group, we develop desires to "want to do things" that we believe are pleasing to Him. We know they are good desires if they don't violate other principals taught in the bible. These desires are used to bring Him glory.
 - iii) So if we get this "feeling" to do something, how do we know it is God's will? Besides checking if that desire doesn't violate any biblical principal, the answer is to follow through on that desire and see if it leads to God's glory. This comes back to the principal that God is always looking for people willing to be used to make a difference for Him. If we, like David are willing to make that commitment, God will guide our lives in a way that will make that difference.
9. Verse 3: O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.
 - a) Remember that the original intended audience for this psalm were Jewish people traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate specific religious holidays.
 - i) Now consider the fact that as the nation of Israel was traveling to this city, they were reciting this psalm that says in effect, "trust in God forever".
 - b) So John, does this mean the church is now "Israel"? Let me tackle that question here:
 - i) My view is that God made unconditional promises to the Jewish nation that the land of Israel would always be theirs. That promise was not conditional upon them accepting or rejecting Jesus. It was an unconditional promise made by God.
 - ii) Today we are living in the "church age". Paul himself said, in effect that there are only believers and non-believers, not Jews or non-Jews. (See Colossians 3:11.)
 - iii) That leads me back to God's unconditional promise to the Jewish nation. Since He made that promise, and today there is only "saved and unsaved", there has to be a future day where once again He will focus on that nation. That is why I believe that during the "church age", one can read the word "Israel" and think of the church. There will also be a future day "post-church era" where once again, God will just focus again on the nation of Israel. (See Romans 11:25-26 as support.)

- c) Now that we know that the word "Israel" can be used to describe either the nation of Israel, or anyone who trusts in the God of the bible, let's look at the rest of the verse.
 - i) The rest says, "put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore".
 - ii) To paraphrase the whole psalm, "I can't understand how God has used my life to get me where I am today. I can't explain how He used me to make a difference for Him. I just know that He has done this. Therefore, I ask that you, the reader of this psalm, put the same trust in God that I David did, when I wrote it. I'm not saying that everyone who reads this will be king of Israel or some high political office. I am saying that trusting God to guide our lives is the greatest thing one can or should do with one's time on earth."
 - iii) Well, that was a lot for three verses. It's time for a longer psalm. Hopefully I can get through the next one quicker or we'll never get through this lesson
- 10. Psalm 132, Verse 1: O LORD, remember David and all the hardships he endured.
 - a) This psalm has the standard title of "song of ascents" and nothing else. It does not appear that David wrote it, as Verse 1 describes David in the third person. There is speculation this was written during David's lifetime, and I'll explain why that is so later in this psalm.
 - b) With that statement out of my system, let's look at Verse 1. This verse tells us to consider all of the hardships that David endured.
 - i) Yes I can once again, describe the years David spent on his life being on the run from King Saul. Yes I can describe how David's son led a rebellion to overthrow him as a king. Yes, I can talk about his affair and how God said he would have to suffer based on that affair. (I've just summarized much of the books of "First and Second Samuel here in this paragraph.)
 - ii) With all of that in mind, tell me why I should remember David's hardship's as this verse instructs me to do? I believe it is about understanding that just as David had to endure hard things, so does all people who trust in God.
 - iii) OK, why is that? Why does trusting in God mean we have to endure hardships in order to have that trust? For starters, it is because that trust in Him brings demonic resistance and we have to accept that fact and deal with that resistance.
 - a) Next, we learn best from our rough periods. It is human nature to learn more from our mistakes and our rough times then through our successes.
 - iv) The point of this verse is not just to recall how David suffered hard times. It is about understanding that if we are going to be used by God, we have to accept the fact that we usually have to go through tough times to be used by God.
 - c) Let me explain this principal another way: I can't think of a bible character who had it easy all of their lives and then was used by God in a mighty way. All the tough times God allows us to go through, ultimately is used for His glory. It may not be for our own glory, but will definitely be used by Him somehow.
 - i) I was trying to think of the most unexplainable tragedy I could think of for a believer. What about those who die young or die a martyr? They won't benefit any more in this lifetime by their tragedy. However, the story of their lives usually benefits other believers and that is how focusing on the bad stuff reminds us that God is in charge and leads us to good things by trusting in Him.
 - ii) Not every tragedy is made famous. As long as someone knows that story, I am convinced that believers use bad events to somehow make a difference for God. I have watched people give their lives to make the lives of other believers or other communities better. They do this because that is what they believe God has called them to do: "Live to improve the life of others".
 - iii) My point is God uses the tragedies of our world somehow to bring Him glory. I'm watched this too often in my life to be convinced otherwise.
 - d) OK, I'm still spending too much time on one verse. Let's move on.

11. Verse 2: He swore an oath to the LORD and made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob: ³ "I will not enter my house or go to my bed-- ⁴ I will allow no sleep to my eyes, no slumber to my eyelids, ⁵till I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."
- a) These four verses are describing the desire of David to bring God's "tabernacle" to Jerusalem. This requires some explanation:
 - i) When the Israelites left Egypt, God gave them instructions to build a portable structure called the "tabernacle". This is described in detail in the last half of the book of Exodus. From the time of the construction of that tabernacle to the time of King David was roughly 500 years.
 - ii) One day, David as a king thought about the fact he lived in a great palace, but the worship of God was still based at this portable structure. David decided he wanted to build a permanent structure to replace this portable structure. God in effect told David he couldn't do this, because of the sins he committed. However, God did say that a son of his would build that structure. This is partially fulfilled in that David's son Solomon did build the first temple. It will also be completely fulfilled when Jesus returns as the "long promised Son of David" to rule the world from Jerusalem. This is based on the events as described in 2nd Samuel, Chapter 7.
 - b) All of this leads back to these four verses. I spent some time searching my bible, trying to find a verse that says David could not sleep until he built a house for God. Let me save you some time: There are no literal references to these verses elsewhere in the bible.
 - i) That is one reason why scholars speculate this psalm was written around the time of David. The idea is that it was common knowledge that David desired to build a house for God, even though God told David he couldn't do this.
 - ii) In fact, even though David couldn't build it, God never told David he couldn't do the "footwork". Therefore, David spent a lot of money and time organizing the materials to build the house that his son eventually built. (See 1st Chronicles 22:5.)
 - c) OK John, this lecture on ancient history is interesting. How does it affect my life?
 - i) Just as David couldn't sleep until he found a place for God's "tabernacle" to be placed in Jerusalem, so God desires that we don't rest until we spend time focusing on Him and what He desires for our lives. Let me remind us of what God desires of us: A relationship with Him. God won't force us to love Him, as if He did, then we would not be having a relationship based on our "free will".
 - ii) So why does God want a love relationship with us? If He were perfect, then He wouldn't need anything. However, if we love to say, paint or play a musical instrument, we do it out of love, not out of necessity. God decided that people are His chosen way to show that type of love He has. That is why He loves us.
 - a) Therefore, it is God's desire that we willfully choose to draw close to Him. Just as David couldn't sleep until he has drawn close to God (through prayer and worship) so He desires that we draw close to Him as well.
 - b) Bottom line: God desires we draw close to Him as individuals and as a group. Therefore, we shouldn't rest until we have fulfilled that desire.
 - iii) But John, don't we still have lives to lead? Of course. The Israelites were not required to have a year round "party with God". They were required to celebrate certain times of the year. So God does not desire we spend every moment in prayer or study, but simply to dedicate some time to strengthen and build up our relationship with Him. That is the idea of this verse and the "ascents".
12. Verse 6: We heard it in Ephrathah, we came upon it in the fields of Jaar:
- a) This verse requires a little more history. The tabernacle that was the original center of worship for God contained the most holy Jewish "object" called the "ark of the covenant". Essentially this was a footlocker-sized box. With that said, I'll come back to why the ark is significant in a moment. Next, I need to talk about "Ephrathah" and Jaar".

- b) Let's start with the word Ephrathah. This in effect is another name for David's hometown of Bethlehem. (See Ruth 4:11 or Micah 5:2 as a proof-text of that fact.)
 - i) Let me explain further: The previous verse spoke about David not wanting to rest until he established a permanent home for the ark. David as their king and leader, was from Ephrathah so therefore, when the text says "we", think of David as the leader of the "we". Just as David who came from Ephrathah desired to have a permanent place to seek God, so the "we" in this verse refers to others who also desire a permanent place (think "heaven") to seek Him as well.
 - ii) OK John, tell me why this place is so important. Just as "we" have heard that David desired to have a place for everyone to seek God, the starting place where we travel to seek God is in effect where we are from. David was from this place called Ephrathah. We were not born with a desire to seek Him, but we developed this desire as God has called us to Him. Therefore, this location represents our own starting point from where our desire to travel to seek Him to be close to Him.
 - c) With all that said, we still have one more reference to discuss: The "fields of Jaar".
 - i) To make a long story short, this was where the Ark of the Covenant was located prior to David bringing it up to Jerusalem. We don't know if the entire original tabernacle structure was still in tact 500 years after it was built, but we do know the Ark of the Covenant was still around. That was the object that David brought from "Jaar" to Jerusalem.
 - ii) OK, John, give me another quick "so what" lecture: ☺ Just as the central location of where God was worshipped was moved to Jerusalem, so He wants us to seek Him as a group where He could be found. That means we travel to wherever we meet (e.g., a church building) in order to seek Him as a group. Since Jerusalem represents where God can be found, when we travel as a group to seek Him, we go to that place where we collectively seek Him to be with Him.
13. Verse 7: "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool--⁸ arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.
- a) The "call" to worship continues here in Verse 7. Every now and then the bible refers to our world as His footstool. That requires another explanation: A footstool is a place to rest one's feet. If one is using a footstool, that means one is probably resting. The idea here of traveling to meet God is that it is a place of rest as we meet God.
 - b) But John, you said it was a 3,000-foot uphill climb to Jerusalem. It was. Therefore arriving at the destination is the concept of getting there, so now we get to rest.
 - c) This of course, does not mean that God can only be found in Jerusalem or say in our church. The point here is that our time with God should not be a struggle, but a time of rest. I guess that means it is ok to fall asleep at a bad sermon at church. ☺ More likely it refers the concept that God does not want us to struggle in our time with Him.
 - i) Let me put it this way: There is nothing we can say to God that shocks Him. If by definition, God is perfect, then He knows everything. Therefore, we rest in our time with Him as it refreshes us to be with Him.
 - ii) This comes back to the idea that seeking Him is showing gratitude for what He has done for our lives. The idea of God helping us with whatever troubles us are intertwined concepts with our rest in Him. The point is we can have a sense of peace being with God no matter what we are dealing with in our lives.
 - d) I want to wrap up this verse with a little more history. The "ark of the covenant" was never out in public display. It was kept behind a curtain and only the high priest got to see it once a year. Given that fact, some suspect this psalm was first used to bring the ark to Jerusalem during David's lifetime. That is because the verse is describing the ark at arriving at its resting place. Again, it comes back to the theory that this psalm was written during David's lifetime when the ark was moved from "Jaar" to Jerusalem.

14. Verse 9: May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy."
- a) A reason I just gave that little historical speech about the ark being moved to Jerusalem is that it fits Verse 9 as well. Visualize a big procession as this ark was moved from wherever it was to Jerusalem. Visualize the priests carrying the ark leading the parade. The parade included a lot of people praising God. That is in view here.
 - b) With that stated, let me talk a little more about the terms "priests and saints":
 - i) We tend to think of "priests", as a Christian term. However, it is used here to describe Jewish priests. My point is simply it is an Old Testament term as well.
 - ii) As to "saints", in the Roman Catholic Church, one is not considered a saint until one has past inspection (so to speak) and officially declared to be a saint by their church leaders. Truthfully, anyone who trusts in Jesus for complete sin payment officially a saint. OK, go ahead, pause for a moment, and say the word "saint" in front of your name. It may be uncomfortable, but we can use that title.
 - a) Further, Paul commonly called all Christians saints. (For example, see 2nd Corinthians 13:13 or Colossians 1:4.)
 - iii) With that said, let me talk about the Jews, before Jesus time and "saints": Back then, Jews or anyone, were saved based on their trust in God to guide their lives. The key difference between then and now is simply that we trust in Jesus complete payment for our sins. Given that acceptance, we then should desire to spend time with God, as to guide us and protect us as we live to do His will.
 - c) Finishing the verse, notice the saints "sing for joy". Yes it may be describing a parade, but the point is we can and should sing for joy to God for the great things He has done for our lives. If you can't think of anything else, at the least one should be grateful for one's salvation and that alone deserves some singing on our part.
15. Verse 10: For the sake of David your servant, do not reject your anointed one. ¹¹ The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne--
- a) If you haven't noticed by now, this is one of those psalms where understanding the background is helpful to explaining what the psalm means. In this verse, the key is to understand what "anointed one" means: It is a term to describe Jesus as the coming king.
 - i) Think of it this way, just as it is "key" for a Christian to look back at what Jesus did on the cross, so the Jews of David's time looked forward to the Messiah's coming.
 - ii) But John, I thought the Jews don't believe in the idea of the Messiah dying for their sins. That is correct. They think of the coming Messiah as one who will rule the world from Jerusalem. That event is what many Christians including myself consider to be the Second Coming of Jesus. To steal an old joke, when Jesus returns, the Jews will ask, "OK, is this your first visit or your second trip?"
 - b) All of this does lead me back to the verse. We are reading a prayer request here in effect saying, "Dear God, you made a promise to David that a descendant of his would rule forever. Well that hasn't happened yet, so don't forget about that promise."
 - i) Ok, if we believe God is perfect and His will be done, why pray for the "anointed one" (i.e., Jesus) to return? The idea is about praying for the Messiah's rule over the earth "now". Let's face it the world would be a lot better off if Jesus ruled the world from Jerusalem and we would have world peace with that action.
 - ii) If people have been praying for this event for thousands of years, how do you know it is still going to happen? The answer is God is waiting for as many people as possible to be saved, so therefore, the time frame is very long, but not forever.
 - iii) God does not want us to forget about this promise, so it is part of their and our prayer life to remember this promise. When we pray "Your kingdom come", as part of the "Lord's prayer" (Matthew 6:10 or Luke 11:2) that is a request for Jesus to return, so it is part of the Christian vocabulary as well.

16. Verse 12: if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever."
 - a) Verse 12 is an interesting statement. It is a reminder that the descendants of David will sit on David's throne forever. Obviously people don't live forever, so in that sense this verse is not being literal. Think of it as poetry and saying to a good king, "May you continue to reign for a very long time". That is one way of translating the poetry of "ever and ever".
 - b) Another way is to look at this phrase is to say, may the children of David continue to be kings "forever and ever". Notice that this promise is also conditional. Verse 12 also says that if the descendants of David "keep my covenant and statutes" then and only then will they reign "forever and ever".
 - c) Yes this verse is also a call for a specific descendant to reign forever, but in the meantime, David's descendants did reign for centuries, until the Babylonian captivity occurred.
 - d) It is also important to state that all Jewish birth records were destroyed in 70AD. If somebody comes along today and claims to be the "Messiah" and a descendant of David, the problem is there is no way they could prove that, as the birth records are long gone.
 - e) Finally, just as Jesus rules over the hearts of believers, so one of David's sons is ruling forever. One day He will literally return to rule from Jerusalem as I have preached.
17. Verse 13: For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: ¹⁴ "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it--
 - a) Speaking of Jesus returning and ruling from Israel, I present these two verses.
 - b) It's time for me to expand on my view of Jesus' return. I believe a lot of saved Christians are wrong on their view of Jesus' return. There is a popular view called "Amillennialism" that says in effect Jesus returns and in effect that is a wrap up of the world as we know it. That view teaches that Jesus will not (key word "not") literally rule the world from Jerusalem for 1,000 years as taught in Revelation 20, among other places.
 - i) Among the many reasons I believe in a literal rule of Jesus for a 1,000 years from Jerusalem, is due to God's unconditional promise to the Nation of Israel. To believe in the literal view of Jesus ruling there, means Verses 13-14 here will literally come true one day.
 - ii) Think of it this way: When Jesus came 2,000 years ago, He never ruled. One promise made to Mary was that Jesus would rule from David's throne. (See Luke 1:32.) That event has never happened historically, so I see it as a future event.
 - c) Let me finish this verse by reminding us that "Zion" is a name for the nation of Israel and is used in the sense that God desires this specific location as His worship center on earth. Speaking of God choosing "Zion" as a place of worship let me talk a little more about the City of Jerusalem. For those who have traveled around parts of the world, the city is not as physically beautiful as other locations. So why did God pick this city?
 - i) I heard Jon Curson tell a joke that God told a few angels to distribute the rocks around the world when it was created. One angel got lazy and just dumped out his whole bag over Jerusalem. That joke refers to the great number of rocks there.
 - ii) Jerusalem is a city with no natural resources and in effect, has nothing worth having. The question is then, why did God pick this place as a center of worship? I believe it is because one does not see the beauty of God from the outside.
 - iii) To explain "beauty on the inside", let me describe the original tabernacle structure. If you see a model of it from the outside, it didn't look like much. Only in the inside does one see its beauty. That same concept applies to our relationship with God. It is only when one draws close to Him that one appreciates the beauty of how He works in our lives and appreciates the benefit of trusting in Him.
 - iv) This leads me back to the city of Jerusalem. The only way that city survives and prospers is by visitors coming to seek God. Therefore God picked this place as in effect it is only "His beauty" and not the city itself that draws us to Him.

18. Verse 15: I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food. ¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy.
- Speaking of God blessing Jerusalem, I present these two verses. The idea here is despite the lack of natural resources for this city, God will provide and protect it.
 - OK John, good for God and Jerusalem. I don't live there. How does this affect me? ☺
 - The idea is far greater than God blessing this city. The idea is that God blesses the lives of all of us who trust in Him.
 - So does this mean I can stop working, be lazy and God will provide me with food, clothing and provisions so I can just sing to Him all day? Hardly.
 - The way I describe it is, "We should work as hard as one can and at the same time trust that He does exist and watch Him bless our lives."
 - But John, what about Christians who die as martyrs or other tragedies? Then we have to remember such people get blessings in heaven for their trust in Him.
 - My conclusion is these verses are describing eternal rewards for trusting in God, but they are also describing for most people, the blessings we receive now for trusting in Him.
 - Remember again, that people are reciting these psalms as they travel to Jerusalem in order to worship God for specific holidays. They are saying in effect, "God has provided me with enough stuff that I can take the time off to praise Him for providing me with what He has given me and I am grateful for Him."
 - This comes back to the reminder that joyful people show gratitude. If we want God to bless our lives, we show gratitude for how we have been blessed in life.
19. Verse 17: "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one.
- Let me start by explaining "horn grow". The text is not saying a horn will grow out of David's head. It is poetic way of saying just as some animals grow horns as their source of power, so God will display His power in the descendants of David. That power will be shown David's descendants will lead to the Messiah (Jesus) coming to rule the world.
 - John, if there are no records today of David's descendants, how do Jewish people today claim they will recognize the Messiah? The common response is that the Messiah will lead Israel to rebuild the Temple. I think they are in for a big shock when they realize who actually shows up one day in Jerusalem.
 - If you have ever wondered why so many people don't want Jewish people to live there, one has to understand the demonic aspect. Satan knows that Jesus will return there one day to rule over Israel. If Israel is "not there", Jesus can't rule.
 - This leads back to this verse. It is an unconditional promise by God that one of David's descendants will rule there forever. Again, remember that the term "anointed one" refers to "the" descendant of David (Jesus) ruling there forever.
20. Verse 18: I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown on his head will be resplendent."
- This psalm ends with a comparison to the anointed one's "enemies" in comparison to the anointed one Himself. The point is simply that this "anointed one" will be crowned with a "king's crown" and will rule forever, whether people are willing to accept it or not.
 - OK, John, let's go back to the fact this was written thousands of years ago. Let's also remember that the Messiah has not literally ruled over the world yet. Why should we pray for event to literally happen, as opposed to just trusting in God to guide our lives?
 - In other words, has this promise failed as people have waited so long? The short answer is that just because God has waited thousands of years for this event to occur, does not mean life will go on forever as it is. Just as the world as we know it had a beginning, so it must have an ending one-day. Think of all the suffering that believes have had to put up over the millenniums. Having trust in the promise of the "anointed one" ruling holds out a promise of hope for the future.
 - So how do we know this promise will come true? My answer is if I know that the bible has a 100% correct track record so far in history, I trust that God knows the future as well.

21. Psalm 133, title: A song of ascents. Of David.
 - a) The bad news is we still have two psalms left to cover. The good news is that both of these psalms are only three verses in length. We will get them done in this lesson.
 - b) The title of this second to last "ascent" psalm mentions that David wrote it. The psalm has no mention of David's life or any events in his life. I believe it simply shows that David trusted in the "group effort" to worship and he uses poetry here to describe that event.
22. Verse 1: How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
 - a) David is saying here in effect that it is a good thing when believers unite in order to worship God. Does that mean such believers never have any differences? Of course not. Just as different denominations today have different views on worshipping God, we are all united under the common banner of our belief that Jesus is God and His payment is all that it takes for the complete payment of our sins.
 - b) I am reminded of the expression, "In essentials, unity, in all other doctrines tolerance". That means that we as believers tolerate differences in non-essential views, but there is no compromise in areas that we don't allow compromise.
 - i) For example, as much as I disagree with the view of Amillennialism, I do believe these Christians are saved and we should live in unity with such believers. This doesn't mean we all have to go to same church every week. It just means that we trust in the same God and the same payment for our sins.
 - ii) Speaking of Jon Curson, he summarized "unity" very well. He said he doesn't have to get together with his actual brother to have unity with him. They know they are part of the same family and that is all they need to know to have unity.
 - iii) In summary, believers agree in the essentials where God calls to agree. That is how we are unified. As to our differences, we agree to disagree peacefully. It doesn't mean we all have to go the same church to be unified as believers.
23. Verse 2: It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.
 - a) Here's another verse where understanding a little historical background is helpful.
 - i) When a new high priest or even a new king was ordained, they would pour oil on their head as a public sign of their ordination. The symbolic idea is that God has chosen this person to be our next leader and here is how we recognize that fact.
 - ii) The first time this was done, was for Aaron, Moses' brother, who was the first High Priest of Israel. (See Leviticus 8:12 for this ceremony.)
 - b) OK then, how is "brothers and sisters uniting in their trust in God" similar to the oil running down one's beard and onto the collar of one's robe?
 - i) Think of the oil as the "spirit of God" flowing over all believers. The way believers are united, is "God's spirit flows over us and draws us to worship Him." The same way a pastor or priest leads our worship service, so the power of God is at work through our leaders just as was Aaron, and his descendants to draw us to Him.
 - ii) In summary, the picture of oil flowing down Aaron's beard has nothing to do with Aaron himself, but that of God working in our lives so we can be "unified" in our worship of Him.
24. Verse 3: It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.
 - a) For a short three-line psalm one has to admit, it is full of strange word pictures. In Verse three it is in effect describing snow melting that eventually becomes dew on Mount Zion. Somehow that strange reference is compared to God showing His blessing on us.
 - b) The idea is Mount Zion adjoins Jerusalem. Remember that this psalm was recited as one travels to Jerusalem. The water supply of that city is dependent upon the water collected from a higher mountaintop that come from Mt. Hermon.

- c) OK John, you have to admit, this is a strange word picture. The idea is that just as Jerusalem is dependent upon a higher mountain for its life support, so we as believers are dependant upon a "higher source" for the blessing of our lives.
 - i) In other words, this is a colorful way of saying we as believers are dependant upon a God that is much higher in stature or location than we are.
- 25. Psalm 134, Verse 1: Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD.
 - a) We now come to the final psalm in this group. The title only mentions the "ascent" aspect, and by now we know that this refers to spiritually drawing close to God.
 - b) Notice Verse 1 encourages those who work the "night shift" to praise God. OK, I would say that requires one more background explanation: I believe the point is Jewish people start a new day at sundown as opposed to our reckoning, when we use midnight. Therefore, this verse is saying, "It is now a new day. Let us use this new day to unify and praise God for all the good He has done for our lives."
- 26. Verse 2: Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD.
 - a) OK, does this mean we have to get "Pentecostal" and raise our hands as we worship? My view is that if one feels like raising up one's hands as one worships do so. If that makes one uncomfortable, then don't do it. Let God work through our heart as to our style of worship and never worry how the person next to us is worshipping God.
 - i) At the same time, I don't think God wants us to do things in church to draw attention to ourselves as opposed to focusing on Him. My point is simply about not doing things that make us stand out in church over all other worshippers.
 - b) The real point comes back to my introduction. I said that the purpose of these "ascent" psalms is all about drawing close to God and praising Him for the good things He has done for our lives. Now that we are a verse away from finishing these fifteen psalms, the point is that God wants us to draw close to Him and one way we do that is by praising Him along with our group of other believers.
- 27. Verse 3: May the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.
 - a) Notice in this final verse, there is an emphasis that the God of the whole earth is the one that will bless us from Jerusalem. Hopefully by now, we get the idea that one does not literally have to travel to Jerusalem in order to be blessed by God. At the same time, we need to understand that He has established Jerusalem as His center of worship on earth, and one day God Himself will rule our world from this city.
 - b) Therefore, the call of this verse is not that God actually bless us, but that we be willing to receive His blessing on our lives. It is about our trusting in His existence, His complete payment for our sins and our trust that He will return again to rule over this world.
 - i) Yes there are also blessings on our individual lives. We are blessed in that we get to enjoy that close relationship with Him and I do believe God blesses our life because we have in the spiritual sense, made that journey to draw close to Him.
 - c) This comes back to the idea that if "God is a God of love", He desires someone to show that love to. He chose us humans to show that love upon us. Therefore, what God desires of us, is that we out of our free will, choose to love Him back for the great things He has and will continue to do for our lives. That blessing is in effect, my closing prayer for all of our lives, and may God continue to bless us from "Zion" as we continue to trust in Him.
 - d) Let me also end this lesson with the point that just because this 15-psalm journey is done, we still should tackle the question of how and why do we worship God. That just happens to be the subject of the next lesson and the next group of psalms. With that said, thanks for reading and I'll talk to you again at the next lesson.