

1. This is a lesson where the title just hit me right off the bat: "Protection from persecution".
 - a) To explain why that is important, we have to see this lesson in light of the last one. We are currently going through a series of psalms all written by King David during various times in his life. These psalms were combined, here near the end of the book. The big question of course is why are they here and why should I care? Let me explain:
 - i) In the last lesson when we started this series, the main point was the realization that God knows everything about us (i.e., understanding the fact that a perfect God cannot by definition learn anything) and therefore, we trust in a perfect God.
 - b) This leads to a logical question: If God is perfect, and He knows all things including all things about our lives, how do we draw upon that information? What do we specifically ask Him to do to help us with our lives? Further, why does He allow us to go through really difficult situations if He loves us as the bible claims He does?
 - i) In short, how does God protect us from bad things? Thus my lesson title.
2. So far, I've given lots of questions to ponder, but very few answers. Those answers in effect are in the psalms themselves. They discuss why God works the way He does in our lives. Let me try to summarize this concept a little here:
 - a) Psalm 141 starts with David asking God to notice him and protect him. This psalm is essentially saying, "I (David) am in a lot of trouble. I realize that God knows everything about my life so therefore, I am crying out for Him to help me. I want Him to help me to say and do the right thing. Help me to remember the results of my life are His problem."
 - i) In short, it is about needing God to guide us as to how to best live our lives.
 - b) Psalm 142 was most likely written before David was a king. This was when he was a fugitive and hiding from King Saul. The point was that David was in such bad trouble he realized that his only help was from God Himself to rescue him at that time.
 - i) It is describing a time of such darkness one realizes that unless God Himself helps us there is no other solution. It is like saying, "I am sure I am going to die in this situation in a bad and painful way unless God rescues me."
 - ii) This reminds me of the classical Christian expression that goes in effect, "I don't fear death. It's the painful part before death that I fear greatly." I suspect that is the type of fear David had at this point. David is crying out for God's protection because he didn't know what was going to happen to him and he feared the worst.
 - c) Psalm 143 describes a similar time period where once again David is in some sort of real trouble and he cries out to God to help him. David's prayer request in this psalm is that he do God's will and in effect his enemies be cut off by God.
3. OK, John, this seems like a very upbeat lesson. ☺ Why should I get depressed and read further?
 - a) There have been lots of psalms in this book where David is in trouble and asks God for help. So why have a few more here, near the end of the book? What is so special about these psalms that we read of David in effect crying out to God a lot? Again, the secret is to see them in context of the surrounding psalms. Remember that all the psalms are divided into five books. This fifth and final book focuses on how we are to live as believers. Part of that belief is the acceptance that God knows all things including knowing about the future. Another part of that belief is we can draw upon God for guidance through all of the good and bad things He allows to happen to our lives.
 - b) Therefore, the purpose of these psalms is not to remind us how difficult David's life was. The purpose is to teach us that through all the trials and difficult things we face in life, God is still there guiding us and He is a source we can turn to for comfort and guidance.

4. Think of these psalms this way: Do we have the ability to praise God right now? If we are alive, the answer is yes. If we have been through our own dark times where we didn't see any solution, psalms like these remind us that He was with us during those times. The fact that we are still living right now, means that God has His own way and on His own timing gotten us through those situations. The point is if we can trust in God to get us "this far", we can also trust in Him to get us the rest of the way through our lives.
 - a) The point is not only we can trust in God to guide us through (not avoiding, but through) difficult times and the reason He allows us to go through such times is because there are things He wants us to learn by going through those particular situations.
 - b) I have learned many years ago that I can't explain all the horrible things that happen in this world. I just take comfort in the fact that there is a God who knows all things and because He knows all things, we can draw upon Him for comfort as well as trust in the fact that there is a judgment day coming for all people.
 - c) In summary, we can have joy in our lives through the best and worst of times knowing that there is a God who knows all things and knowing that He has a purpose for all the things that happen in our lives and our world. We may not understand why such things happen in our lifetime, but we trust in a God that does know all such things.
5. Let me end this introduction with a favorite quote by a great bible teacher named Chuck Swindoll. He believes the only word he will get out of his mouth when he gets to heaven is the word "oh". He stated that he wants to ask God why He allowed this or that event to happen. When God gives an answer, the only possible thing Chuck could say in response is "oh".
 - a) It's a little like the end of the book of Job, when Job wanted to question God. God told Job in effect, "Where were you when I created the universe? You don't know everything". Job's response in effect was also "oh" effectively apologizes for asking God the question.
 - b) With that stated, we can get back to David asking for God's protection in these three psalms. Hopefully, we can understand a little why God does and doesn't do things we desire while we go through suffering as we study these psalms.
 - c) OK, that's enough of that. Let's start the psalms.
6. Psalm 141: A psalm of David.
 - a) I've already stated in the introduction that David wrote all the psalms in this lesson. For the sake of the newcomers, the word "psalm" simply means that David understood this poem was God inspired and it was designed for us to contemplate its meaning.
 - i) Also for the sake of the newcomers, David was the second king of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus. This was written around 1,000 BC in the Hebrew language.
7. Verse 1: O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you.
 - a) Think about the fact that "God is everywhere". If you and I realize that fact, I am sure David did as well. With that thought in mind, how and why did David ask God to come to him quickly if God is everywhere?
 - i) The answer is to realize that this psalm is a prayer for God to respond to David.
 - ii) It is saying, "Dear God, I need Your help right now, so please answer me."
 - iii) This is a good time to remember that the purpose of prayer is not to get our will done, but to get God's will done. Since we usually don't know God's will at any given moment in time, it is ok to ask for our will assuming that our requests do not violate any principal as taught in His world.
 - b) When we ask God to hear us, it is not that He can somehow ignore us and now He is paying attention when we are praying. It is about our realization that we can and are communicating with the God that knows all things and cares about our lives.
 - i) Therefore, this opening prayer request is not to make God aware of our situation. It is a prayer that God help us in the sense that we don't know what to do next and therefore, we are asking for His guidance in what to do next.

8. Verse 2: May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.
 - a) This is one of those verses where it helps to know the historical context to explain it.
 - i) When God explained to the priests how He is to be worshipped, He explained that those priests were to offer animal sacrifices daily. The idea is to remind the priest that He desires to forgive our sins. He wants us to remain close to Him because we can come to Him "perfectly forgiven". Incense is what the priests offered up to God with their specific prayer requests. (See Numbers 28:1-8 on this principal.)
 - ii) OK John, and your point is? The point is the priests performed these rituals regularly, diligently and "did it like they meant it". What David wanted was his own prayer life to be as diligent and as regular as those rituals.
 - b) So John, are you saying God only responds to our prayers if we pray diligently and regularly? Does God notice us more if we pray this way? The benefit is not for God, but for us. If we are asking requests of God, it is up to Him to respond His way on His timing. The benefit of diligent and regular prayer is that it keeps our focus on Him.
 - i) The idea is that we want our life to be committed to serving Him. Therefore, because we care about Him, we do make the effort to seek Him this way.
 - ii) But John, isn't that "works and not faith"? This comes back to the idea that if we have faith, we "put our money where our mouth is", and follow up that faith with our works. This is a New Testament concept as well. (See James 2:14.)
 - iii) So how hard do we have to work? Think about those priests who made those ritual sacrifices. God gave them a job to do that was not impossible to do, but at the same time showed their commitment to serving Him. David still had time to do his kingly duties. The way I summarize it is we make time for God first, and then He provides the time to accomplish whatever else we need to do in our lives.
9. Verse 3: Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.
 - a) Stop and think of the last time we said the wrong thing. Often the best thing we do in life is when we just be quiet and listen. In the business world, an expression goes that "90% of selling a product is just listening to one's customers." In other words, be quiet and listen.
 - b) In context of this verse, does this mean that God wants us to be quiet so He can speak to us? I've beaten the point home that if "God is God", He can speak to us whenever and wherever He wants to no matter how loud we are talking. The point in context of the psalm is that we still have to go through life and odds are good we will say the wrong thing often. Therefore, a simple prayer here is that God guards what we say not only to Him, but also in our dealing with others. When in doubt, be quiet and listen. That is what is taught in the business world and that is what we all need to do at times.
 - i) There is another cliché that goes, "Some people have something to say, and other people just need to say something." The point is all of us, myself included need to spend more time silent so God can talk to us through His word and we can listen to what He and others are trying to say to us.
10. Verse 4: Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.
 - a) Speaking of avoid doing the wrong thing, I present Verse 4. The point here is that we are easily drawn away from God to do the wrong thing. One reason people are compared to sheep in the bible is that sheep easily turn away from where they should go. It takes a shepherd to constantly keep the sheep traveling the right direction.
 - b) That in effect is the point of this verse. Without God's guidance, it is very easy for any of us to wander away from God and what He desires for our lives. The related point is that evil deeds do exist in this world whether we accept it or not. We can't fix this world, but we can choose to get away from where we know God does not want us to be at moment.
 - c) Remember this lesson is about "God's protection". This verse fits well into that theme.

11. Verse 5: Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.
 - a) There is a biblical principal that if a good person strikes (rebukes) us, it is a good thing. Think of it as someone who also fears God telling us, "What you are doing in this situation is wrong. Here is what you should be doing." So how do we know if such advice is good? Again, we compare it with biblical principals.
 - b) The point here comes back to the theme of God's protection. Let's face it, God does not reach down from heaven and slap us around when we mess up. ☺ However because He cares about us, He will send people in our lives to keep us on the right track. That is the sentiment of this verse. When we get such rebukes from others who fear God, we should not curse them because they put us down, but appreciate the good gesture.
12. Verse 5 (cont.): Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; ⁶ their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken.
 - a) This is a good spot to remember that the verse numbers are not part of the original text. They were added many centuries later for our reference. I state that here because I am convinced the latter part of Verse 5 goes better with Verse 6 than with Verse 5.
 - i) My point is Verse 5 and Verse 6 go together as the idea is to contrast how those who fear God may rebuke us when we mess up, but at the same time, those who's hearts are bent on doing evil are always a problem.
 - b) So John, is this verse saying that we should pray against people who do evil? Should I pray for God to throw such people off cliffs like the verse says here? You have to admit, this does not sound very Christian like. Please explain:
 - i) First, remember that we are reading a prayer for God's protection. We are reading about asking a God that knows all things to work against those who are trying to accomplish evil things in this world. Yes it is important to pray for repentance for those who are wasting their lives turning from God. What I see in these verses is requests for God to make those who turn from Him realize the errors of their way.
 - ii) Let me explain it another way: Sometimes in order for people to turn to God, their ego has to die a hard death. I am convinced that miracles are not enough to get people to turn to Him. People have to want to change from the inside. If such people see their own aspirations fall apart, it may get them to realize that trusting in God is the only way to live in this world.
 - iii) That does lead me back to this verse. When David prays for rulers to be thrown down from cliffs, he made be literal speaking of his enemies. His point is if those people bent on doing evil fail, it may get others to realize the error of following them and their lifestyles if they see the ultimate end of those who do such evil.
 - iv) As an example, there is someone close to me that I've been praying for, for years. I have been watching his life fall apart. I realize God is trying to get his attention. However, sometimes people have to truly hit "rock bottom" to realize that there is a God that desires to guide our lives. My prayer is that this friend realizes he is at rock bottom and turn to God to guide his life for His glory.
13. Verse 7: They will say, "As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave. " ⁸ But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge--do not give me over to death.
 - a) David continues to write in "contrasts". He is saying in effect, that those who don't trust in God will eventually come to nothing. At the same time, I (David) realize that not only is there a God who knows all things. I realize He desires to guide my life and therefore, I won't worry about the fate of the nonbeliever other than the fact I will pray for them that they realize the errors of their ways.
 - b) Verse 7 is saying that the bones of those who ignore God will eventually rot to nothing because they have ignored Him. In the meantime, I (David) am trusting in His guidance.

- c) At the end of Verse 8, David is praying that God not give him over to death. Doesn't David want to be with God forever in heaven? Yes and that is not the issue here. The issue is about wasting time not doing God's will for our lives at any one moment.
 - d) When David prays to "not be given over to death", yes it is a prayer to life longer, but it is also a prayer that our life be useful to God. To not be given over to death is a prayer that one uses their life to make a difference for Him. Anytime we are doing things that in effect are not His will, we are being given over to death.
 - i) OK, and how do I know if I am doing His will? Start by asking Him. Start by spending time regularly in His word. I find that as a believer, it becomes obvious to us when we are doing the right thing. Sometimes it is simply a matter of just going forward and trusting that He is guiding us. This does lead us back to this verse. If we are praying for God's protection, then we ask that He guides us down the path He desires for our lives. That is point here.
14. Verse 9: Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers. ¹⁰ Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.
- a) There is a term that David uses a lot in the psalms, and that is translated "traps". It could refer to physical traps, but I suspect it could just as easily be traps of words. Remember that David spent a good portion of his life on the run to stay alive. If there was one man in history who understood the danger of falling into a trap, it was David.
 - b) OK John, I don't see any nets out to catch me in my life today, ☺ so what traps do I have to fear? This comes back to another of my favorite themes. If we are living to make a difference for God, I can guarantee that there will be efforts made to not make us a good witness for Him. As I also like to say, "If you don't believe the devil is real, try opposing him for awhile and watch what happens."
 - i) So are you saying I have to quit my life and go be a witness for Jesus all day? No I am saying we continue to do what God has called us to do and in that life we are, a witness for Jesus. It means we take the opportunity when we see it to put the needs of others before our own needs and live to make a difference for others.
 - ii) For example, if God calls us to raise children to trust in Him, that is making a difference for Jesus and even then, we have to be aware of possible traps
 - iii) This concept comes back to God's protection. We don't know what traps are out there. A God who knows all things and desires to guide us do His will, will also make us aware of those traps and guide us to pass in safety. That is what is being taught in these two verses.
 - c) With that happy ending stated, we can move on to the next psalm, which also deals with the issue of trusting in God for protection.
15. Psalm 142, title: A *maskil* of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer.
- a) The word "maskil" is an untranslated word. The idea is David had these thoughts and wrote them down. He also understood that God inspires the words of this psalm. David also understood that these thoughts are also a prayer that we too can pray to Him as well.
 - b) So why mention the fact that David wrote this in a cave? I don't know for sure, but if you know me by now, that won't stop me from speculating: ☺
 - i) David's life is told in detail in 1st and 2nd Samuel. In those books, there are several references to David hiding in caves. We don't know if this psalm reference is the same event, but the point is the same. The idea of hiding in cave is that one is scared to come out into the open. One is scared for one's life. The point of this psalm is that whatever David was going through, he realized that only God could rescue him from the darkness that he was facing at this moment.
 - ii) Speaking of describing darkness, let's go through this seven-line psalm, and see how we can trust in God through the dark times in our lives. With that said, let's move on to Verse 1 of this psalm.

16. Verse 1: I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.
- a) One gets the impression that whatever pain David was dealing with at this moment, he realizes that God Himself provides the only solution to his problems.
 - b) Think of the prayer this way: David did not say, "Maybe I should just give up, face death and surrender to whatever is outside this cave." David realized that as long as God exists and desires to guide our lives, it is never over until He says that it is over.
 - c) Notice David is using the most holy name of God here. Remember that the word "LORD" in all capitals means in effect, "I am that I am". My point is that a perfect God that knows all things and knows and cares about what happens to our lives is more than capable of rescuing us out of whatever "cave" we are in at the moment.
 - d) So why is David asking for mercy here? Did David do something wrong to get in that cave in the first place? I don't believe that is the point. The point is David is asking God for help, but at the same time David realizes that he is not perfect. The point is David wants God to forgive him of whatever sins he has committed so that David could live another day outside of that cave.
 - i) The idea in effect is that "We are suffering at this moment, but if it is Your desire for me to go on, first I need Your mercy for my mistakes. Then and only then can I be used by You to continue for another day.
 - e) Does this mean that praying this prayer guarantees our rescue from our own "caves"? The idea of accepting God's will means just that: Acceptance. It may be God's will to stay in our particular situation for a longer period to teach us more things or it may be His will to end our "cave" experience. The point is about true surrender. We have to let go of our will in order to deal with whatever darkness we face in that cave. If we belong to God, then we trust in Him and His timing to end the darkness of the "cave" we face.
 - f) Meanwhile, it's time for Verse 2. ☺
17. Verse 2: I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.
- a) Notice that David is not talking directly to God in this verse, but in effect he is talking to us. David is stating the obvious here (in case we miss it) that the solution to David's dark times in the cave is to tell God the details of his problems.
 - b) Think about it this way: If God knows all things, isn't He already aware of the "cave" we are in? Why bother to tell God our problems if He already knows all things?
 - i) The point is we don't do it for His sake but for ours. Sometimes we can't listen to what He desires for us, until we let it out of our system what is going on.
 - ii) Remember I said earlier in business meetings, "That some people have something to say and other people just need to say something?" That in effect is the point here. Often we need to let out of our system what we are going through by telling God in our own way what it is what we are dealing with.
 - iii) Again, it is not so that God can know our situation, but just so that we can let out of our system our problems and then we can listen to what He has to say.
 - iv) Remember in the last psalm how David wanted God to silence him so he could listen to God? Often we have to speak our peace so we can then listen.
 - v) Another thing one learns in life is often we can't speak to others until others know they have been heard. I've heard this called the "Jack-in-the-Box" technique. That is because when one goes through a drive through restaurant, the employees repeat back one's order. It is to make sure we are heard correctly. My point is the reason we describe our situation to God is so that we can let go of what we have to say in order for God to respond to our requests.
18. Verse 3: When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me.
- a) Speaking of "God knows all things" I present Verse 3. The point is that even if I am weak from what I have to deal with, God knows all things, including what it is I have to face.

- b) The point of this verse is that we can go through times where we are weak from dealing with issues or other people in life. Just because we get worn out, that doesn't mean God is slaking on the job. It just means we are worn out from dealing with stuff.
 - i) I have learned that nothing refreshes me when I am worn out like doing what God has called me to do. A valuable lesson I have learned from my wife is that when I am feeling sorry for myself for some particular reason, if I make the effort to do something good for someone else, it refreshes me. As another example, when I spend time working on these lessons, it physically refreshes me to face other things I have to deal with in life. Yes we still need physical rest and our bodies are designed to refresh themselves by sleep. My point is I have found that by doing things God has called us to do, does physically refresh us as well.
 - c) The point as it relates to this verse is that we all have to deal with difficult stuff in our life. The idea is to be aware that God is aware of those things and He is guiding us through what we have to deal with. We can count on His guidance during such times.
 - i) But John, what if I have no idea how to deal with what I am dealing with? Besides praying one's way through the situation, besides doing the things God has called us to do, sometimes it is a matter of trust that God is guiding us. Often it comes down to just making the best decisions possible and trust that He is leading us whether we realize it or not.
 - d) Speaking of feeling like we are not getting any help, I present Verse 4.
19. Verse 4: Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. ⁵ I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."
- a) Verse 4 is a feeling most of us know at times. It is that "small violin weeping just for us". It is thinking that no one cares about my problems. I think most adults at times feel like no one cares about our lives or understand our problems. The truth in life is most people are so wrapped up in their own issues that they don't reach out to help others.
 - b) Remember that when David wrote this verse, he was hiding in a cave. Most likely he was trying to save his life and hiding out from people sent from the king trying to kill him. It's hard to get lower than that. My point is one can see why David was feeling like no one was concerned with his life at this moment.
 - i) David's solution to this loneliness was to take that pain and give it to God. This lesson and these psalms remind us that if God is perfect, that means He knows all things and He is aware of the fact we are stuck at times in our own "cave".
 - ii) Does this mean that we each only need God and not other people? Of course not. As I once heard, "If God was all that Adam needed, God never would have created Eve as a companion for Adam." (I credit Dennis Prager with that quote.)
 - a) The point is that God does want us to seek other people. At the same time, even our closest companions don't really understand our lives the way that does God. That is why we cry out to Him. If He does know all things about our lives, that is a source of comfort. We can share whatever good and bad moments we have in our lives with Him because He understands.
20. Verse 6: Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. ⁷ Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name.
- a) I suspect it is one thing to sit here at my computer and try to relate to the pain David is feeling from being stuck in that cave and fearing for his life. It is another thing to actually be in one's own "cave" and truly realize that our only help is from God.
 - b) Let me come back to my "violin" reference. I once heard a quote on a television show I remember. A woman said to a friend, "This is the world's smallest violin and it is playing just for you. Know that we all feel lonely at times and feel like no one cares about our life and our problems. The truth is we are all alone and we all have to deal with our issues." What she failed to add is that God is more than willing to guide us through such times.

- i) This story leads perfectly to these verses. David felt like he was stuck in prison with no end to the risk of being caught. All David knew is that God understands the pain he was going through at that time.
 - ii) The idea is that we have the greatest resource in the world available for the asking when we don't know what to do next. Is God aware of our problems? Of course. Does God want to guide us through what we are dealing with? Of course. Can God give us a sense that "He has it all under control during such times? Of course.
 - iii) The big question is whether or not we let go of our problems and said to God in effect, "Whatever happens in this situation is Your business not mine. I'll keep making the best decisions possible, but the results are Your business because I belong to You and I trust that You know what is best for my life."
- 21. Verse 7 (cont.): Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.
 - a) The psalm ends on a positive note. The final line is about David still stuck in a cave, realizing that one day he will be gathered around other people that also trust in God.
 - i) Let me put it this way. Did David know at this point that he would be the next king of Israel? I doubt it. Did David know for sure he would get out of that cave alive? I doubt it. All he knew is that God knows all things and He is well aware of the predicament David was in at the moment. Notice that God never prevented David from being in that cave in the first place. God promises to guide us through our issues. He never promises that we avoid problems in the first place.
 - b) This leads back to the verse ending. David is saying in effect, "I could die here and end up with other believers in heaven. Or God could rescue me through this situation and then, before I know it, I could be gathered with other believers praising His name. Either way, I will be with other believers praising Him and that is a good thing. Therefore, whatever happens to me is God's problem because He knows all things and He already knows the outcome of this situation. I (David) won't give up, but at the same time, I trust that whatever happens, is His problem. I will end up praising Him no matter what is the outcome of what I am dealing with at this moment.
 - c) Well, it is good to end such a tough psalm on a positive note. ☺ I still have one more psalm to cover in this lesson that deals with "God's protection". So let's keep moving.
- 22. Psalm 143, title: A psalm of David.
 - a) The only thing the title states is that David wrote it and it is a psalm. Since I've already explained what a psalm is, we will just move on to whatever this psalm is discussing.
 - b) I was thinking about why this psalm was placed here, and I realized the key is the last line of the last psalm. In that last psalm line, David commented how the righteous will gather around him. Obviously it refers to those who are saved. However, David felt the need to expand upon that thought of who is "righteous" (i.e. in good standing) before God.
 - i) At this point, let me go into Verse 1, and I'll explain "righteousness" some more.
- 23. Verse 1: O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.
 - a) Let me first "translate this verse": Dear God, I am not a good person because I "am" a good person. I am in perfect standing with You (that is what "righteousness" is) solely because You have completely forgiven me of all my sins.
 - i) The idea is that David knows that he makes mistakes and he is far from perfect in his life. David is not trusting in his own goodness to approach God, but in the fact that God has perfectly forgiven him and us of all of our sins.
 - b) OK John, I get the idea of humbling ourselves before a perfect God. The question to ponder is why should we try to be good, if we are completely forgiven by faith alone? The answer is God wants us to be a good witness for Him. The answer is that it is the best way to live our lives. Still, even with that realization, we still need to remember we require His mercy because we are imperfect people.

- c) Think of this psalm and this prayer this way: Why cry out for God's mercy if He already knows all things about our lives? The answer comes back to the fact that yes, God knows all things, but we don't. We should make the effort to be pleasing to Him, and that is why David asks for God's mercy in this opening verse.
 - d) What each of us deserves for punishment of our sins is eternity away from His presence. I once had a pastor explain it to me this way: One person may jump off the edge of an ocean pier and land 2-3 feet away from that edge when that person lands in the water. Another person who may be more "righteous" goes off the end of the pier driving a motorcycle. Because of the momentum of driving a motorcycle, that driver may get 10-15 feet from the pier when they land in the water. The problem is God is "across the ocean". No matter how far we can make it, it is still far short than His standard of perfection to be in order to be with Him forever.
 - i) My point of this silly illustration is that no matter how hard we try we can never be good enough for God. Therefore, we are fully dependant upon His mercy in order to bridge that gap between joining Him forever in heaven.
 - e) So why should we ask God for mercy if He knows we are imperfect people?
 - i) One thing I get when I read my bible is the realization of how short I come up to His standards of what He desires for my life. Therefore I should ask for mercy. That is, to tell God not to give me the punishment I do deserve for my sins.
 - ii) It is like saying, "Dear God, don't go harsh on me because I am aware of my shortcomings before You. It is not necessary for You to show me more at this moment of what I need to do. Therefore, God, guide me in terms of what You want me to do without being too rough on me at this moment."
 - f) In effect, I can summarize this whole speech about asking God for mercy with Christian song line that goes, "humble yourself in the site of the Lord and He will lift you up."
 - g) Now that I am drained from talking about humility before God, let's look at Verse 2.
24. Verse 2: Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.
- a) Verse 2 is another reminder that no one is right before God. This comes back to my silly illustration of trying to jump across an ocean from the end of a pier. We may make it two feet or 20 feet, but all people are imperfect before God. Therefore, in order to avoid His judgment, our dependency is upon His mercy, not our own ability to "jump".
 - b) Let me also add a side note here. People always wonder about babies who die. How can God say they are "imperfect" before Him? The answer is that I trust in a God that judges all people fairly. I can't explain all tragedies. I just know that there is a God who judges all people fairly and that allows me to sleep despite all of the bad things that happens.
 - i) My view on this is that heaven is not just for those who trust in Jesus. Don't get me wrong, I am not denying faith in Jesus' payment for our sins is necessary. I'm just saying God will judge people based on how much information they do have about Him and judgment is based on how we acted on that knowledge.
 - c) Meanwhile, I'm still on Verse 2 here. David has a prayer request that he is about to make to a God that knows all things. David is contemplating that even though God knows all things, David can only approach God based on the fact we are perfectly forgiven.
 - i) So does this mean I can't make a prayer request to God unless I first ask for His mercy and realize I am not a perfect person? The answer is it is a good thing to contemplate His mercy every now and then, but it is not necessary to recite this exact prayer in order to get God to answer our prayer requests.
 - ii) Remember that we are asking, not requiring God to respond to our request for help. Therefore, we should approach Him on His terms, not ours. That simply means we realize we are in right standing before God solely because He has completely forgiven us of our sins and not based on any "works" that we do.
 - d) OK, onto David's specific prayer request:

25. Verse 3: The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead.
- a) As I have been stating through this whole lesson, David has spent a majority of his life dealing with enemies. Be it the years of his life running from King Saul or be it fighting with enemies of Israel as a general (kings in those days were often army leaders too). My point is David understood very well having to deal with people who wanted him dead.
 - b) OK John, too bad for David, who lived 3,000 years ago. How does this affect me?
 - i) Remember that this psalm and this group of psalms focus on the idea of desiring God's protection for our lives. It is about the realization that a perfect God knows all things and desires to guide our lives for His glory. While that may be all "good and nice", we still may be facing our own issues.
 - ii) OK John, as best I can tell no one is trying to kill me at the moment and I get all of that "spiritual enemy" stuff by now. The idea is to comprehend what is our end if we fail to trust God with our own lives. A reason we do seek and give praise to Him is to consider the fact we are still alive at this point. We have all survived to reach a point where now, today we have the opportunity to show our gratitude for God for not allowing us to be killed "so far".
 - iii) In other words, we may or may now be facing real danger at the moment or not. The only reason we are still living at the moment is in effect that God is not through with us. If He knows all things, He knows how long we have to live. Therefore, He knows if, when, and how we will be victorious over whatever it is we have to face. Therefore, we don't have to fear whatever our enemies can do to us, because we have God as a resource that is greater than those enemies.
 - a) But what do we do practically? Yes we pray for His guidance and help and realize it is up to Him to guide us. Then what? Then we make the best decisions possible with what we do know and trust He is guiding us.
 - c) Meanwhile, David is still suffering at the hands of some enemy. Let's read on:
26. Verse 4: So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. ⁵ I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.
- a) If you have ever wondered if David grew "weak" from facing problems, Verse 4 is your answer. He was human like the rest of us and he too was worn out at times from having to deal with his own problems. So what was David's solution when he was too tired to go on? Did he just get go and get a good night's sleep? Doubt it. Verse 5 is the answer:
 - i) David thought about how God has worked in the past and that gave him the mental energy to go on. To put it another way, the reason the bible and the psalms spend so much time reviewing history is not for us to learn history, but to remind us that if God has worked to rescue people in the past, so He can and does work to help us in our distress through whatever we are dealing with at this time.
 - b) Yes you might say, but I'm not a biblical hero like David. God may have rescued David because he was famous but I'm a "nobody". Why would God want to work in my life?
 - i) Remember I recited the Christian hymn line of "humble yourself in the site of the Lord and He will lift you up". (Written by Bob Hudson.) Notice the word "will" in that hymn verse. The point is God cares just as much for you and me as He did for David or any other person one can name in the bible.
 - ii) Do I know how God will get us out of our latest predicament? Of course not. I just know that the God I worship is perfect and therefore He knows all things. He cares for me and therefore, I can trust in Him to guide my life.
 - iii) This leads me back to Verse 5. The point is when we are worn out from dealing with whatever we have to face, thinking about God's great works as told in the bible reminds us that through His strength, we can face whatever it is we have to face in life and somehow He will lead us through those situations.

27. Verse 6: I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*
- a) I've always been a big believer that there is no official way of standing, sitting, kneeling or laying down in order to pray. God wants us to talk to Him. I think the important point is our attitude before Him. The important idea that we come to Him humbly. The idea is that we come to Him desperate for Him to answer us because we need Him.
 - i) I made that little speech here because David's style of prayer was to spread out his hands in order to prayer. I don't believe that means we must literally spread our hands out the same way. If that style of worship makes you comfortable do it. If not, it is just one style of prayer. That is my point.
 - b) What is far more important is that we come to God humbly and desperate for Him to help us. I am convinced God does His best work in our lives when we say in effect, "I am all out of options. My only hope is to put it in Your hands." As I have learned, God does not like to share His glory with anyone else, including us. That is why I believe He does His best when we say in effect, "Dear God I am desperate for Your help, because I have no idea what else to do unless You guide me through this situation".
 - i) That desperate prayer is in effect Verse 6. When David says that his soul thirsts for God like a "parched land", it is a colorful way of saying how desperate he is for God to answer his prayer request.
 - ii) Does that mean God only speaks to us when we pray when we are that desperate for an answer? God can do what He wants when He wants. However, I have found that when we are fully dependant upon Him, in His own way and His own timing, He does guide us through tough situations for His glory.
 - c) As I have stated earlier, "Selah" is untranslated word that simply means to think about what was just said. To consider David's desperate plea is in effect a "Selah".
28. Verse 7: Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.
- a) Remember that it is ok to ask God to work on our timing. That in effect is David's prayer here in Verse 7. David is saying in effect, "Dear God, I am about to die here and I don't have the strength to go on. Please help me now, as I am desperate for your help".
 - b) We have to accept the idea that God will respond His way and on His timing to our requests, but we are free to ask all that we want. An interesting question to consider is, "If God knows all things, and He desires to guide my life, why pray for His presence?"
 - i) The answer is not to make God aware of our situation. It is to remind ourselves how dependant we are upon Him to guide our lives. Prayers like this are not for His sake but for ours. It is about reminding ourselves that we trust in a God we cannot see or sense, but at the same time, He is there and it is His desire to guide our lives through the best and worst of situations.
 - c) On that pleasant note, I'm ready for Verse 8.
29. Verse 8: Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.
- a) My loose translation: "Dear God, I want tomorrow to be a wonderful day. I want to bring to an end to these troubles. Show me what it is You want me to do in this situation and I will praise You for rescuing me out of my predicament when it comes to an end."
 - b) Obviously it does not mean our problems will magically end when we pray this prayer. I don't think David's situation dramatically improved the next morning. I think he simply got his perspective right about who is guiding his life and who he is trusting in.
 - c) I heard a quote recently I really like, "I find that God doesn't speak much, but that He does answer our sincere prayers through actions and circumstances." (I don't know the source of that quote, and I'm butchering the words anyway. ☺) My point is God does not verbally answer our prayers, but we can watch Him work by watching our life unfold, ultimately for His glory.

- d) To say it another way, I don't know how David got rescued from the cave. I do know that he died peacefully of "old age", so God did rescue him here. (Source 1st Kings 2:10.)
 - i) So does that mean if I pray regularly, I too will die of old age? Of course not. If we trust in God, our life is in His hands and therefore if and when we are rescued, it is His problem, and not ours. Our job is to do His will and therefore, we trust in His outcome for whatever we have to deal with in our lives.
30. Verse 9: Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you.
- a) David is asking here to be rescued. I don't know how David got rescued, but given the fact he died of old age, I trust that he was rescued. The point for us is that God is capable of rescuing us out of the worst of situations if we are willing to trust His guidance.
 - b) How does one hide in God? It is simply a poetic way of saying we trust in Him for the outcome of our situations. Since I've already beaten to death the concept of trusting God for the results of our situation, I'll move on.
31. Verse 10: Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.
- a) So how we learn God's will? It is mostly by studying His word, and sometimes He directs us from what we learn from other people and sometimes directly through prayer. My point is simply that God does direct us if we are willing to listen to that direction.
 - b) Notice the word "Spirit" is in title case. I'm guessing it is not that way in the original text. The point I'm making is this is a subtle reference to the spirit of God (i.e., Holy Spirit) working to guide our lives. Without getting into a big lecture here about what is the Holy Spirit, the important thing to know is that it is the Spirit who guides us close to God the Father. The Spirit tells us when we hear things that are godly wisdom. Then we should apply that to our lives. David is specifically asking for the spirit of God to draw close him to God the Father. Did that mean David understood the theological aspects of the Holy Spirit? I doubt it. I just know there is a "Spirit of God" that guides us by making it obvious to us what is His will at any given moment.
32. Verse 11: For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. ¹²In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.
- a) David wraps up this prayer by repeating that He trusts in God's righteousness and not his on ability to get out of trouble. David trusts in God's ability to bring his problems to an end. In effect I can sum up this whole lesson by saying we trust in a perfect God that knows all things, including the good and bad parts about our life. He is more than capable and willing to guide our lives and protect us as we trust in Him. Therefore, since we trust in His protection, and it is our desire to do His will, we go forward in life making the best decisions possible and at the same time trusting in this perfect God to guide us.
 - b) With that said, I'll try to summarize this in my closing prayer.
33. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are guiding our lives. We realize that You know all things and cannot learn anything. Therefore, we depend upon You to guide our lives for Your glory. We don't know what is going to happen to us today or tomorrow, but You do. We ask Your help to guide us through our problems. We ask that You rescue and guide us. We trust that You are working even though we can't see You work. Lead us to live our lives that we make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.