

1. In the last lesson, we focused on dealing with those who hate us. The good news is that this lesson is much more upbeat and deals with our personal relationship with God. The three psalms in this lesson focus on "us" versus "them". Since "us" is usually our favorite topic, ☺ I encourage you to read more and learn more about what God desires of us.
 - a) Are you saying these psalms encourage us to be selfish? Hardly. To live the Christian life is all about doing what God desires and not necessarily what we desire. My point is the last group of psalms focused on those who want to hurt us. While there is a little of that in these psalms, the main focus is about us believers, and how God wants to deal with us.
2. One of the important issues we are going to deal with in this lesson is "Christians and the Old Testament law". This is a complicated topic and not just a matter of saying, "We are Christians so we don't have to live under the Jewish law." (See Romans 7:4 as an example.) God still desires Christians to live a life that is pleasing to Him. That does not mean to struggle long and hard to obey all or any of God's laws. It means that we stick close to God by regularly reading His word, thinking about it, praying to Him and spending time to with other Christians.
 - a) What I have discovered is when we do those things we just "naturally" obey God's laws. What am I saying is that when we become aware of sin issues in our lives, we give them to God not only to ask for forgiveness, but to ask His help and His ability to make us better people. In other words, "God, please forgive me of this sin and take over my desire to commit that sin and change me into the type of person you want me to be."
 - b) I have found that when I am most obedient to God's laws is not when I am trying as hard as I can to obey them, but when I am just focusing on loving God (by caring about pleasing Him). Then that the desires for sin "just go away" by themselves.
 - i) I once heard a young man describe the Christians lifestyle as follows: "My early Christian life felt like I was always pushing a heavy car up a hill. Then I realized that car has an engine and God wants us to ride in the car, not push it up a hill."
 - ii) That means to stop struggling with our sin issue and simply give that desire for that particular sin (or whatever) to God and tell Him in effect, "This is now Your problem as I can't handle it." I find that when we sincerely let go of an issue is when God works to change us (on His timing) to make us better.
 - iii) Does this mean we avoid say, medical help to deal with our issues? Of course not. It just means that we trust that God is going to work out the results His way and on His timing when we let go of worrying about that issue.
3. This leads us back to these three psalms. The writer, David spends a lot of time describing letting go of his issues and giving them to God. David also describes the difference between himself and those who don't seek God. Why say these things? Isn't God aware of all things? Of course. The point of prayer is not for God's sake, but for our sake to make us aware of the situation at hand.
 - a) Prayer is about getting our focus right and seeking God.
 - b) These psalms are about asking God what we should be desiring. It is not to brag about how special we are. It is to be aware of our sins and to ask His help to change us to be the type of person He wants us to be. And on that happy note, ☺ I'll start Psalm 15.
4. Psalm 15, Introduction: A psalm of David.
 - a) The only thing recorded is that David wrote it. Why? Maybe he wanted credit. ☺
 - b) The best way to describe this psalm is that it is a description of "what it takes to get into heaven". This psalm is not saying, "do these twelve things (or whatever number) and one is saved. This psalm is saying in effect, "If one is saved, here are examples of the evidence of one's life based on the fact one is saved."
 - i) With that "out of my system", let us start Verse 1.

5. Verse 1: LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?
 - a) The first sentence asks who may "dwell" in God's holy sanctuary". The implication is, "Who is good enough to get to go to heaven?"
 - i) Since no one is perfect, it must be describing either 1) people who are perfectly forgiven or 2) Jesus Himself. Speaking of Jesus, what is interesting is to read this entire psalm and put Jesus' name in the middle. Then try reading it again with our names and we can all see how short we become of doing "these" things.
 - ii) So, is this psalm describing Jesus or those who are saved? The answer is both. This psalm is going to describe how those of us who are saved should act. (Emphasis on "act".)
 - iii) The secret of applying this psalm is to trust in Jesus to work in our lives and not try to do the things this psalm lists based on our own willpower.
 - b) The second sentence says, "Who may live on your holy hill"?
 - i) Is the second sentence as simply a poetic way of repeating the first sentence? Yes, and together they make a point about how our focus should be on our salvation.
 - c) So, if this is referring to heaven, why is it called a "holy hill"?
 - i) First, let me comment on the word "holy": The idea of God being holy is that He has no sin whatsoever. When we say we are holy, it means that we are fully dedicated to serving God. The idea of God being holy includes the idea of Him being perfect and incapable of committing a sin.
 - ii) Next is "hill". ☺ Is God's throne on a hill up in heaven? Is heaven not flat? I don't know. The text could be referring to the Jewish tabernacle (which after the time of David became the temple) in Jerusalem. That structure was up on a hill.
 - a) I suspect David thought of God "dwelling" in that tabernacle.
 - iii) In summary, David calls the throne room of God "a holy hill" may be literal, or it may simply be saying it is a special place and one should consider it "special".
6. Verse 2: He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart ³ and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, ⁴ who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, ⁵ who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
 - a) Psalm 15 is only six verses. Of those six, four of the verses are one sentence. That sentence is verses two through five, which are listed here.
 - b) Scholars count between eleven and thirteen laws that must be observed here. So does that mean this is a complete list of "sins to avoid" in order to be saved? No.
 - i) In fact, Jewish scholars count a total of 613 commandments in the first five books of the Old Testament. Does that mean the eleven (or so) commandments here in Verses 2 through 5 are the most important? I don't think so.
 - c) Now that I've told you what these verses are not, let's focus on what they are: They are examples of what the saved person "does". Does this mean we as saved Christians are required to act this way? It does mean the Christian should just "naturally" act this way when we are focusing on doing what God wants us to do. Let me explain:
 - i) There are two great mistakes that Christians make regarding the Old Testament law. One is to ignore it all together and think that law obedience is not important.
 - ii) The other danger is to "learn all of the Jewish laws and try to keep all of them".
 - iii) What God does expect of Christians is to keep the law not by working hard to obey each of the rules. God wants us to stick close to Him and pray for His guidance. If we do that, we end up "obeying the essence of the law", but by letting God work through us to make a difference for Him.

- iv) Because we as Christians are saved, we should spend the rest of our lives in gratitude to God for that salvation. We stick close to Him because we belong to Him and it becomes our desire to please Him. When we do that, obeying the law "just happens naturally" as opposed to trying to work hard to obey it. When it is our desire to please God, obeying His laws just "happens".
 - a) OK, what about the Levitical food laws? Does that mean I have to eat kosher and avoid certain foods? No, it is acceptable for a Christian, to say, eat shellfish, as those laws are for the Jewish nation only.
- v) So if I as a Christian don't have to obey all the laws, how do I know where to start and where to stop? The good news is that Jesus answered that question for us. He said we as Christians should love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. (See Matthew 12:30 as an example). If we do that, we have "obeyed the law". Let me explain:
 - a) The idea is if we love God as much as possible, we would naturally want to please Him. The way we prove we love God is to do what He commands.
 - b) To "love others as much as ourselves" simply means to put the desires and interests of others as a priority over our own desires. Stop and think how much less we would argue with others if we just desire to put their interests as a priority over our own.
- vi) OK John I get all of that. (I don't always practice it, but I get it. ☺) What does that have to do with the "613" laws of the Old Testament or the eleven or so rules listed in these psalms? Good question. The idea is that if you read through all of the laws say in the book of Deuteronomy, one will notice a pattern where the laws are designed to either get our focus on God or be "fair" in our dealings with others.
 - a) Instead of trying to learn obey all of those laws, if we can just learn to love God as much as possible and learn to love others as much as we love ourselves, then we don't have to memorize a set list of laws.
- vii) Now that I've cleared up "Christianity and the law", ☺ What I have learned is that obedience to God is something He desires, not because I have to earn salvation, but because it is the best way to live. If we are willing to live our lives committed to God as much as possible, help others and trust Him, it is a far greater way of living than anything else this world has to offer.
- d) OK, now that I've got that out of my system, let's discuss the verses themselves.
 - i) Verse 2 says, "He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart." Can you or I read these verses and say we are perfect in this area? Of course not. At the same time, if one is sticking close to God and trusting Him with our lives, it is amazing how in that moment in time, our lives end up being the way these verses describe.
 - ii) This verse says we are to "walk blameless" as if we have no sins. Again, the idea is about sticking close to God so we have the ability to live this way.
 - iii) Verse 3 says, (He or she) "has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman".
 - a) In summary, the topic here is about avoiding gossip. I am convinced that to gossip is a much bigger sin (i.e., more common) than say, theft or murder. It is irrelevant whether or not such gossip is true or false.
 - b) Being a good witness for God includes the idea that we can be trusted. If a neighbor hears us say something bad about someone else, that neighbor could think, "Why should I trust this person with any information about me? Today they are gossiping about others, tomorrow it could be me."

- iv) Verse 4 says, "despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts". The idea is to despise what God despises which is those people who turn from Him, but at the same time to honor those who fear God as much as we do.
 - a) It doesn't mean we hate people, just the specific "bad things" they do.
- v) The last part says "We keep our oath even when it hurts". If we promise not to say, share a secret, then we keep our word, even when it "hurts us" to keep quiet.
- vi) Finally Verse 5 says, he or she "who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent". The idea of "usury" would be like someone making a loan at 100% interest. The general idea here is if we care about others, then we wouldn't make such loans. If we care about others, we won't take a bribe as stated in the last part of Verse 5.
- e) One can see the pattern of these verses is not about keeping a specific list of things, but about having an attitude of wanting to please God and do what is right. These verses list "things" as examples of ways we can be displeasing to God and others.
 - i) The point here is not to read them and say, "OK, I didn't violate any of these specific rules today, good for me." The point is that if we desire to please God and treat others well, then these negative traits should not be a part of our lifestyle.
- 7. Verse 5 (cont.): He who does these things will never be shaken.
 - a) The psalm ends with the idea of, "Live our life God's way and we will never be shaken."
 - b) So what does "shaken" mean? The idea is that if we live our lives in a way that we avoid what is offensive to God, then we are pleasing to God.
 - i) We are mess up at times. Does that mean I am "shaken"? It does in terms that we see where we fall short of God's expectations. Thank God that we as Christians are not judged by these standards. Our salvation is secure just by trusting in Jesus.
 - ii) The trick is, once we make our commitment to Jesus, we should want to live in a way that is pleasing to God. It doesn't mean we have to push ourselves as hard as possible to perfectly obey all of these laws. It does mean we trust in God to let Him work through us so that we do live the type of life that God desires for us.
 - iii) To put it another way, if we wake up tomorrow morning and say, "I will not slander anyone or 'fill in the blank', odds are we will fail. If we say, Lord I have a problem with this sin and I give that sin to You and ask that You deal with it on Your timing as my desire is to be pleasing to You in all that I do.
 - a) When I have prayed that type of prayer, I have watched faults of mine go away over time. By focusing on God and not our faults, He does work in the background to change us in a way that is pleasing to Him.
 - c) In summary, living the type of life God desires of us is about letting go of our sins and actually giving our issues to God to deal with. Giving our issues to God causes us not be to "shaken" over time (as opposed to trying to please God by our own efforts).
 - d) OK enough of that, it's time to move on to Psalm 16.
- 8. Psalm 16 introduction: A *miktam* of David.
 - a) The introduction has the untranslated word "miktam" here. This word is not used again until Psalms 56 to 60, which we will get to in a few lessons. ☺ What "miktam" probably means is praise to God. It refers to the style of the psalm, and that style focuses on praise.
- 9. Verse 1: Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.
 - a) Verse 1 has David asking God to keep him safe. David is taking "refuge" in his prayers.
 - b) Since we can't hide anything from God, the idea is we can be intimate with Him and share with Him what is on our minds at the time. Since God knows these things, how does that help? The idea of a prayer of "safety" is to remind ourselves that God is aware of our situation at the moment and He wants to help us. That is why we take refuge in Him.

10. Verse 2: I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."
 - a) The purpose of this verse is to remind ourselves that every blessing we have in life does come from God. Remembering that all things come from God is a reminder to ourselves that it is "not us, but God working through us". That sort of attitude keeps us humble and reminds us of who is really in charge of our life.
 - b) Let me put it another way: If God took away every blessing of one's life, would one still praise God for who He is? We would probably complain about losing everything, but as Christians we should still remember that God is in charge and if He wants to take it "all away" that is His right to do so and we should still worship Him as God.
 - i) The point is not to pray to lose everything we have. ☺ The point is to remember that taking refuge in God is to remember that He is in charge and we are not. It is to remind ourselves that every blessing we have does come from Him.
 - ii) On that happy note, ☺ I'll run over to Verse 3.
11. Verse 3: As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.
 - a) Over the past few lessons, I have been emphasizing the fact that we should love what God loves and hate what God hates. If God loves those who are "His", then we too should have the same attitude. If God delights in those who have committed their lives to serving Him, then we should delight in those people as well.
 - b) But you may ask, how do I know for sure who are "His"? The answer is to share the joy of one's relationship with God with others who also share that joy. We should desire to go to church with others who desire to do the same. It is the desire to go a good deed with someone else who also desires to do a good deed. It is the desire to encourage others to grow in God just as we let others encourage us to grow in Him.
12. Verse 4: The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.
 - a) Verse 4 is obviously meant as a "contrast" to Verse 3. While Verse 3 tells us that part of our prayer life is to "love what God loves, which are other believers, Verse 4 reminds us to avoid those who avoid God. This verse is the reminder to "hate what God hates".
 - i) Again, the idea is not about hating people, but the evil deeds that people do.
 - b) The second sentence says, "I will not pour out their libations of blood." I would say that expression might require a bit of an explanation. ☺ We don't do a lot of blood offerings of dead animals to "gods" today, but it was more common in that time era.
 - c) The important idea here is that our commitment to God is also about our commitment to avoiding the actions of those who turn from God.
 - i) Let me give a modern example. Let's say we are with friends who do not share our Christian beliefs. Just because we are with such people, doesn't mean we have to "practice what they practice". We should pray for God to give us the strength to say no to activities that we "instinctively" know God does not want us to do.
 - ii) The reason we pray this verse is that we ask God to give us the strength to avoid the temptation of sinful actions. On our own, it is tempting to want to be popular and join with those who want to do something that is displeasing to God.
 - iii) OK enough guilt. Verse 5.
13. Verse 5: LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.
 - a) Let me "translate" this line: God, every blessing I have comes from You. I have eternal salvation thanks to You. The reason I can come to You for safety is because I know that my salvation is secure no matter how bad is the situation around me.
 - b) What one needs to remember is if you believe Jesus died for your sins and He is at the right hand of God, then we can pray this type of prayer, no matter how much one has "messed up". Restoring our relationship with God can always be restored by simply confessing our sins, no matter how bad our situation is.

14. Verse 6: The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. ⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.
 - a) David continues his prayer of "comfort" in God.
 - b) Hopefully by now, one can see the purpose of this prayer: It is to take comfort in God and the fact that He wants to protect us from all harm and we can run to Him for safety.
 - i) It doesn't mean our problems will instantly go away. It just means when we are overwhelmed by life, we can run to Him for our comfort.
 - c) Which surprisingly leads us back to Verses 6 and 7. In Verse 6, David is saying in effect, "I am at peace despite all the bad things that are happening around me. I know that I have eternal security in You and You have a "wonderful future" in store for me".
 - d) Verse 7 is David thanking God for the "council" He gives. It is telling God in advance, "I know that You will guide me and I am grateful for how You will guide me."
 - i) In other words, David is saying, "God I don't know how You will get me through this situation, but I know that You will, and because I know that, I thank You in advance for how You will lead me through this situation."
 - e) Verse 7 ends with the comment that "even at night" God instructs Him. The idea is not that this psalm is meant for bedtime. The idea is to take comfort in the fact that even when we are not in the middle of the "battle at hand" God is guiding us.
15. Verse 8: I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
 - a) There are two ways to read these verses: The first is to see them as being about the coming Messiah (i.e., Jesus) and read them as if they are describing Jesus' life.
 - i) There are some lines here that are directly quoted in the New Testament and those lines are called "Messianic" by scholars. What I mean is that Verse 10 is quoted by Peter and Paul in different places. (See Acts 2:27, 2:31 and 13:35-37). Therefore, this psalm is considered "messianic" because it is quoted in the New Testament.
 - ii) Since we're on the topic of describing these verses as being about Jesus, let's discuss them as such. Think of Verse 8 as being about Jesus in heaven and He is always next to God the Father.
 - iii) The idea of Jesus not being abandoned in the grave is an obvious reference to the fact that Jesus was resurrected. Remember that David wrote this roughly 1,000 years before Jesus. So did that mean that David understood the idea of a Messiah being resurrected from the grave? I would argue yes, based on these verses.
 - iv) So John, are you saying our bodies don't decay in our graves? The bible does teach of a body resurrection. (See 1st Corinthians 15:42 on that topic.) How that actually happens, I have no idea. I suspect God resurrects our DNA (which is our unique "signature" to our "looks") and somehow ties to our new heavenly body.
 - b) Getting back to these verses, I said there was more than one way to read them. The other way to see these verses is from David's perspective. They are describing his life.
 - i) David is saying that he takes comfort in the fact he could speak to God at any time and that is, David's place of refuge. For David to say he is at God's "right hand" may be a poetic way of saying David could speak to God at any time.
 - ii) This leads to another interesting discussion: How can God have multitudes of intimate conversations all at the same time? Part of the answer is to think, "If I can't comprehend that, then my concept of God is too small". A God that exists outside of time has "all the time in the world".
 - a) As I once heard David Hocking say, "Whenever I try to comprehend how big God is, all I do is give myself a headache". It is a waste of our time to comprehend God's "bigness" as it is beyond our ability to think or reason.

- c) These verses finish with the thought that God won't leave our bodies in the grave.
 - i) I suspect David believed that somehow he would be resurrected because of His belief in God. I doubt David had any more knowledge than you or I do about how that physically works.
16. Verse 11: You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.
- a) Finishing Psalm 16, the psalm ends with a line of gratitude. The final line says in a sense, "Thank You God, for making me aware of who You are, filling me with joy because of my relationship with You and I know that I will be eternally grateful for how You, God have had your hand in my life.
 - b) I admit that I have become very aware of how God has had His hand over my entire life, including all of the years before I ever committed my life to Him. The more I realize the things He has forgiven me of, the more grateful I become for my relationship with Him.
 - c) OK John, good for you. ☺ Why should I care? Know that from God's all knowing perspective, He choose us to be with Him long before we ever made that decision to commit our lives to follow Him. It makes us realize how God has had His "hands" over us all through our lives even when we never thought about Him and willfully sinned.
 - i) These psalms are "upbeat" not just out of gratitude for what He has recently done for us, but because He has his "hands on us" all the days of our lives. Just because we realize it more now does not make it any more or less true.
 - ii) Well, this would make a good ending for this lesson, but I still have one more psalm to go before I wrap it up for the week.
17. Psalm 17, introduction: A prayer of David.
- a) So why call this one a "prayer of David"? Well, it wasn't my idea. ☺ Are not all psalms a prayer to God? Yes and no. Psalms can be a range of things including praises to God, pleas for help and even prophetic commentary. The point is this psalm has David specifically asking God for specific things for him.
 - b) The focus of this psalm is not so much on our gratitude for what God has done or what He will do. The focus is on specific requests. There is nothing wrong with asking God for things. We just have to regularly remind ourselves that it is "His will" we want to accomplish. We can pray for what we want since we don't usually know what He wants.
 - c) The other point here is to teach us how to have the right attitude about approaching Him in prayer. OK, enough of that, let's go to Verse 1.
18. Verse 1: Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer-- it does not rise from deceitful lips.
- a) The psalm opens with a plea for God's help.
 - b) Notice the verse says that we should not have "deceitful lips". What does that mean?
 - i) David is saying, I (David) want to please You (God) in all I do, and therefore I come before you honestly. I've asked your forgiveness of all I can think of, and now I can come to You and say what is on my mind." In summary, to not have "deceitful lips" is about coming to God "honestly" and not hiding any sins.
 - c) There are times where I come to God, "rambling" through my standard prayer requests. Verses like this remind me that since we have the privilege of coming to the creator of the world, we should first examine our motivation for approaching God and consider what we pray before we actually give that prayer to God.
 - i) Don't get me wrong. God would rather us give Him "rambling prayers" than none at all. All I am saying that if we pause and consider our motivation for our prayer requests, it may help our prayer requests be granted a "yes" answer.
 - ii) In other words, if we want God to answer our prayers the way we want Him to answer them, then we should stop, consider our motivation and consider any unconfessed sins before we start focusing on prayer requests.

19. Verse 2: May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right.
 - a) To be "vindicated" means to be proven right. David is asking God in effect to grant what he is about to ask, not because of his flattering words. He is asking that God grant his request because he (that is us!) is fully trust in Him. We live to please Him and it is his (our) desire to confess any ways that are displeasing to Him.
 - b) In other words, David is asking God to "check out my motivation" for this prayer.
 - i) Often the things we ask God for, we don't get because our motivation is not right, or there is some unconfessed sin we have to deal with first.
 - ii) Let me put this prayer request another way: We may ask God to help someone get better. If we ask that with the motivation that others can see how our prayer life is helping others, our motivation is wrong. We should ask God to intercede solely for the benefit of helping those in need and not for any personal gain.
 - c) To sum up the first two verses, the point is David wants to make sure his heart is in the "right place" before he even asks God for a prayer request.
20. Verse 3: Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin.
 - a) David is in effect asking God to "probe him" and see that there is no sin inside of him.
 - b) OK, I would say that requires a bit of an explanation:
 - i) First of all, for God to "probe us" does not involve sticking any sort of medical or cooking instruments inside of us. ☺ It does mean that we are asking God to make us aware of any ways we are displeasing to Him at this moment in time.
 - ii) David wants to make sure there is no sin that needs to be exposed.
 - c) Let me personalize this verse another way: It is not necessary to say over and over again, some past sins that we have already confessed. The problem is that we feel guilty about some past sins, so we keep focusing on them as opposed to moving on.
 - i) When we confess our sins, the idea is to say it once we are aware that that we have given that issue to God, and then we turn from that sin. If we make the same mistake again, then we confess it again and then move on from it.
 - ii) My point is God does not want us to "wallow" in past sins. God wants us to let go of that sin so we can move on to a healthier relationship with Him.
 - d) This leads us to our prayer requests to God. Often God may not grant our prayer request, simply because there is some unconfessed sin He wants us to deal with first. Remember that God cannot stand any sin whatsoever. God says to us in effect, "I want to have a closer relationship with you (us) and I want you to trust Me with every aspect of your life. I want to grant your prayer requests on My terms. That requires you (us) to examine our lives and see if there is any way you are displeasing to Me (God)."
21. Verse 4: As for the deeds of men-- by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. ⁵ My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped.
 - a) David is, in a poetic way saying, "I have done what You (God) have wanted me to do, and I have not lived like those who don't trust in You".
 - b) Again, David is not saying that he is perfect. The key difference between David and the unrepentant sinner is simply that David trusted in God for the forgiveness of his sins.
 - i) So John, are you saying that David is a good person solely because he has confessed whatever he has done wrong to God and others have not? No, David also has to accepted God's punishment for the sins he has committed.
 - ii) So how does God punish us? Sometimes He allows bad things happen. We never know for sure if those bad things are the consequences of a sin, just a possibility.
 - a) Usually, those "bad things" are the direct consequences of things that are displeasing to Him. As an example, most of us know the consequences of getting drunk. My point is God will not cancel the consequences of sin just because we have confessed those sins to Him.

- c) Let me explain this another way: I have often found that the main reason people refuse to trust God comes down to the fact that people don't want to change their lifestyle.
 - i) It would be like someone thinking, "God, if I truly am going to follow you, I have to give up doing "this or that". Well, I don't want to give up "this or that", so because I don't want to change, I refuse to follow You."
 - ii) What such people can't see is that if they are willing to give up what they believe they enjoy, God turns and gives us far more than what we gave up for Him.
 - iii) What any devout Christian can tell the nonbeliever is that living the Christian life is far "freer" and brings more joy than any activity you enjoy doing.
 - d) OK John, this is "old news" to me. Why is that relevant here?
 - i) For starters, it is because David is comparing himself to the lives of nonbelievers and David is reminding himself of the difference in lifestyles.
 - ii) David is not saying, "Look God how much better I am than those people over there". David is saying his life (and our lives) are superior to the nonbeliever simply because we do trust in God.
22. Verse 6: I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.
- a) Verse 6 is one of those points in prayer where we remind ourselves that the "God of the Universe" is listening to what we have to say.
 - i) He doesn't care about us because we are better people than others. He does care about us because we are willing to be obedient to Him with our lives.
 - b) I'm a big believer that we can ask God for anything we want in prayer. The point of prayer is to get God's will done and not ours. Since we don't usually know what is God's will, it is ok to ask for anything.
 - i) I am reminded of a story told me many years ago when a man first gave his life to Christ. There was a little something (a wooden toilet seat) that he always wanted, and he never told anyone he wanted that thing. Well, he prayed for it a few times, and then let it go. He started living his life for God and yes, of course that thing literally just turned up on his front door step one day.
 - ii) No, this does not mean we should ask God for a wooden toilet seat right now. ☺
 - iii) My point here is to not be afraid to ask God for something you really want. The point is to bring the desires of our heart to God. I'm not saying God is a "genie in a bottle" to grant us whatever we desire. I'm saying that loyalty to God has its rewards and we should not be scared to ask for things we could get on our own.
 - iv) Sometimes it is God himself who puts those desires for "things" in our heart and if it is His will, He will give us those things on His timing. The point is about letting go of that desire for that thing and truly giving it to God in the sense of saying, "Whether I get this thing or not, is not my problem Lord, but yours. I am letting go of my desire for that thing and if it is Your will, it will happen."
 - v) That is the type of "letting go" prayer that God desires. Again, I'm not saying that God is a "genie in the bottle" who gives us what we want when we want it. I'm saying that God often gives us the desires of our hearts once we truly let go of that desire and give that desire to Him to deal with.
 - c) So what does any of that have to do with this verse? Everything. This verse is David asking God to grant his prayer request, not because he deserves it, but just because it is God's desire to show His love to us by granting us or prayer desires.
 - i) The point is we should not be afraid of asking for anything we want to God. He has every right to say no to our requests, but we never know the answer unless we ask Him in the first place.
 - ii) There is an old Christian expression that angels watch us in shock that we are not getting what we want simply because we refuse to ask God for what we desire.

23. Verse 7: Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.
- a) OK John, what is the "wonder of your great love" mean? It means we are asking God to grant our prayer requests just because "He wants to".
 - i) As I like to state every now and then, God loves us "just because He does". He wants to show us just how much He loves us and that means granting to us what is on our hearts at the moment. At the same time, God cannot stand sin, which is why I discussed the importance of unconfessed sin prior to our prayer requests.
 - ii) At the same time we have to remember that God wants to grant us our prayer requests, not because we deserve it, but just because He loves us.
 - b) Let me try this one more way: Dear God, please bless me today, not because I deserve it, and not because I have confessed my sins to You, but just because You want to bless me.
 - c) OK, John what about the rest of the verse? The part about "saving by your right hand" and the part about "refuge from their (my) foes"? What does that mean?
 - i) First of all, God does have physical hands. To ask God to save us by His right hand is a poetic way of saying "Dear God, a person's right hand (or arm) is a symbol of one's strength, (as most people are right handed) and I am grateful that I am saved and I trust in You due to Your strength and not my own strength.
 - ii) OK, what about the "refuge from my foes". This is a way of saying we can run to God for protection. It is not a physical place to run to. It is mental place where one can run for protection. To use an extreme example, I have read that people who are being tortured can have a mental place where the torturer's can't "touch". That place of refuge is where God says we can run to as a place for comfort.
 - d) Let's put it all together. Why have this verse "here"? Remember that David still wants to make some sort of specific prayer request to God. He is reminding himself here that God can respond to prayer and He is a "mental place" one can run to for safety.
 - i) Often we repeat the same prayers over and over again, and we question whether or not we are wasting our time. Reminding ourselves that God is "there" and He is listening can get us through times when we don't sense God working in our lives at any particular moment.
24. Verse 8: Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings⁹ from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.
- a) Verse 8 is one of those verses that anti-Christian people like to quote and say, "You take your bible literally? Well, what about Psalm 17:8 where it says that God has wings?
 - i) Obviously such references are meant to be taken poetically, and not literally.
 - ii) As to the bible doubters, my standard response is, "I don't take my bible literally, but I take it seriously." The key is to use our brains and logically figure out if a passage was meant to be taken literally or figuratively. Since David is describing God protecting him under "His wings", it is pretty safe to say, that this passage is being figurative.
 - b) OK, enough about doubters. ☺ Let me get back to those of us who do take it seriously. Let me start with the phrase "apple of your eye". The literal translation is describing the pupil of one's eye. Why use this particular analogy?
 - i) The pupil of one's eye is the most sensitive part of the body. Try sticking your finger near the pupil and notice how your body fights in order to protect the eye.
 - ii) The idea here is not that God has eyes and pupils. The idea here is that God cares about those who trust in Him with the sensitivity of guarding one's own eyes.
 - c) Speaking of "caring", the next reference is to "wings". The idea is similar to the "apple of one's eye" reference. The idea of "wings", is like a mother bird protects newborns under her wings is an illustration of how much God cares about us.

- d) OK John if all of this is true, why does God allow suffering for believers?
 - i) Romans 8:28 teaches us that nothing happens to Christians that is not "God ordained". The idea here is not that Christians get to live a pain-free life. The idea is that God is aware of whatever we are going through, and we can run to Him for comfort through whatever we are dealing with.
 - e) This leads us to Verse 9. I combined them as they are one sentence. Verse 9 says in effect that God protects me from those who want to hurt me. Again, God allows "good people" to suffer. The idea here is not about avoiding pain. The idea is about what we can do about that pain, which is giving it to God to deal with as He cares about us greatly.
25. Verse 10: They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance. ¹¹ They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground. ¹²They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover.
- a) From the "focus on God please help me" aspect of the past few verses, we now get our focus on those who are trying to hurt David.
 - b) OK, isn't God aware of who are our enemies? Of course. Then why pray if God knows this stuff? Remember that prayer is not for "God's sake", but to remind us of what God is like and at the same time what God can do and to get His help in a situation.
 - i) The idea is from "God's all knowing perspective", He knew we were going to pray at that moment and then it appears that God "got involved", even though we had no knowledge of what God was going to do at that moment.
 - c) OK, enough of the big picture. I can now describe some of the specifics of these verses.
 - i) The first is a "callous heart". Other translations say "fat". The idea is not about being overweight. The idea of a callous heart is to not care about God. Just like clogged arteries prevent good blood flow to the heart, so a callous attitude about God (i.e., don't care) prevents a good relationship between a person and Him.
 - ii) The interesting thing is the remaining analogies all stem from the idea of not caring about God. In other words, once someone doesn't care about God, then it is no big deal to "speak arrogant things against God". In Verse 12, David describes such people as being like a hungry lion ready to strike at people.
 - d) Again, one may or may not have literal enemies attacking us at this moment. All who are trying to make a difference for God do have demonic forces attacking us. That battle against demonic forces is something we need to pray about on a regular basis.
 - i) OK John, you have been talking about this a lot lately. Tell me again (and briefly as we are running long ☺) why such forces work "non-stop" to make me an ineffective witness for Christ? The short answer is that Satan's time on earth is limited and is based on "x" number of people becoming true believers in Christ. No one but God alone knows how many "x" is before Satan receives his demise. Therefore, Satan is doing all he can to lengthen the time he reigns on earth. To lengthen that time, he has to do all he can to make existing believers ineffective witnesses for Christ. Therefore, through his forces, he persecutes Christians.
26. Verse 13: Rise up, O LORD, confront them, bring them down; rescue me from the wicked by your sword. ¹⁴ O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life. You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.
- a) If you recall, the entire introduction to this psalm just said, "A prayer of David".
 - b) What is interesting is David never makes his prayer request known until Verse 13.
 - i) The actual prayer request of David is for protection from his enemies.
 - c) Let's look at this prayer request another way: Did David believe God could rescue him? Of course. Did David believe God is aware of his enemies attacking him? Of course.
 - i) If that is true, why isn't this whole psalm just saying, "Hey God, I'm in big trouble over here. Do something about it now? Help me!"

- ii) Why first state the issue of unnamed sins? Why list the characteristics of how God loves us? Why state details about those who want to hurt us?
 - a) Sometimes when we are in a desperate situation, all we have time for is a cry for help. There is nothing wrong with that simple prayer request.
 - b) Other times, like this psalm, it is a time to remind ourselves that God wants us to come to him "sin free" and to examine ourselves before we come to Him. We remind ourselves that God cares for us. We remind ourselves that those who don't seek God have "plenty", but still want to harm us.
 - (1) In order for God to help us, it is a good idea to consider possible things we could have done to offend Him such as unconfessed sin.
 - c) Then we can pray, "I don't understand why this person or this group wants to hurt me, but I need your help God."
 - d) To put it another way, I don't understand how this "mess" occurred, but I know that my only comfort comes from trusting in You to get me through the situation. That is the "heart" of this prayer.
 - d) The reason we pray these details is not to remind God what is the situation. It is to remind ourselves that "God is in charge and He is aware of the situation, and He is "bigger" than whatever I am facing.
27. Verse 15: And I--in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.
- a) To paraphrase these verses, "I David, do not know if I will win or lose in the battle I am facing here on "earth". I just know for sure that when I "awake" from living this life on earth, I will be in Your presence in Your world that exists for eternity.
 - b) The Old Testament does not have a lot of references to the next life. We do get a hint of its existence here as David says that when he "awakes" (referring to our life on earth), David will be happy just to be in God's presence.
 - c) OK John, David was struggling and took comfort in knowing God was there. How exactly does that help me through what I am dealing with right now?
 - i) I can't say for sure that God will allow you or me to live on this earth another day. I do know that if you trust in Him, He not only will give you eternal joy in heaven, but He will also give you joy through whatever you are dealing with right now.
 - d) This gets back to one of my favorite quotes about living the Christian life. We are "always joyful and always in trouble". David often had problems in life and as opposed to just sitting there saying "woe is me", David poured out his problems to God and reminded himself that trusting God brings far more comfort than any and all efforts to try to have peace based on our own efforts.
28. There, that is a happy way to end this lesson. If I had to summarize the main points of this lesson it is that 1) God wants us to come to Him with our "issues" of the moment, 2) God wants us to come to Him with a clean heart, which means to confess the sins we are aware of and 3) God wants us to let go of our worries by giving to Him to deal with the problems we face.
- a) Letting go and trusting God to work through our lives gives us far greater joy and a better life than anything or everything we can do on our power. I have found that God has great plans for our lives, but those plans begin and continue when we give ourselves to Him for His service over our lives. With that said, let's pray.
29. Father, thank You for the privilege of allowing us to come to You with our prayer requests. Help us to recall and let go of any and all things that are displeasing to You about our lives. Help us to trust in You that You are working in our lives to make a difference for You. I don't know how You are going to get me through my problems of the moment, but I trust that You will. Help me to let go of my worries and know that You are working in My life. Guide me and use me for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.