

Psalms 26-29 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is, "What does letting go of our problems really mean?" If we just pray for our problems to go away, aren't they usually still right in front of us? How do we actually let go of our worries and trust that God is working in our lives? With that scary introduction stated, ☺ let me summarize the psalms of this lesson and come back to this theme.
2. Let's start with Psalm 26. It's where we last left off, so it's a good place to start.
 - a) Psalms 26 through 28 share a common theme about trusting God through the difficult times of our lives. They are about thanking God for improving our lives so far. Anyone who has been a Christian a significant time probably has noticed that his or her lifestyle has changed for the better. The point is if we realize how much God has worked in our life to date, why are we failing to trust Him with what is in front of us? Why are we still worrying about the outcome of a situation when our lives are now in His hands?
3. This leads me to Psalm 27 and 28: If they continue the same concepts as Psalm 26, why not just make Psalm 26 longer? Why have more psalms about asking God for help on the same topic?
 - a) The answer is once we let go of our worries and give them to God, five minutes later (or whenever) we usually find ourselves worried about the same problems again.
 - i) Therefore, we need to go back to our bibles and read some more about how God is watching over our lives and how He wants to help us.
 - b) The reason the psalms repeat a lot of the same themes is that is how we best handle our problems. We read say one psalm, and then hopefully think about it's meaning. Later we read again, (say the next psalm) and think about how that affects our lives. With more than one psalm dealing with our worries, it gives us lots of opportunities to keep on turning a situation over to God to deal with.
4. Finally we have Psalm 29, the last one we will cover in this lesson.
 - a) The theme is still about God working in our lives, but the emphasis here is on how God is working. This psalm compares God to thunder in that when we hear thunder, it is powerful. Thunderstorms here represent the power of God working in our lives as such storms are visible, but like God working are hard to explain how and why they work.
5. Let me summarize the whole lesson this way:
 - a) We have problems and we want God to help us with our problems. We can remember how God has helped us in the past and we should use that knowledge to know that God is still working at the present moment. We trust that God will give us the strength to get us through our current situation. We let go of the outcome knowing that He will guide us to the outcome He desires. Finally, we should remember that God works in a "mighty way", just as the forces of nature (e.g., thunder) work in a mighty way. There, I just summarized four psalms in one paragraph. ☺ All that's left is describing the text.
6. Psalm 26, introduction: Of David.
 - a) All the title says is that David wrote it. No comments are given about the music or when he wrote it. The psalm is David realizing how much God has worked in his life so far. In that sense, David understood that this psalm is to be read or sung by those who can look back at their lives and realize how much God has worked "to date".
7. Psalm 26, Verse 1: Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. ² Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; ³ for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.
 - a) The first thing to notice is the word "I" is used over and over again. That "I" refers to David and can refer to us. Even though the word "I" is used so much, the real focus of these opening verses is on God Himself. It is about "I" (us) in relation to God.

- b) The first word of this psalm (in the English) is "vindicate". This means to examine oneself and see if we have any unconfessed sins in our life. The idea here is that if we represent God, then we need to occasionally do an internal inventory to see if we are doing anything offensive to the God we represent. If we want God to help us, first we need to approach Him "cleanly" which is again, about confessing any sins on our hearts.
 - c) To paraphrase these opening verses, "I want You (God) to examine me. I realize how much my life has changed since I have dedicated it to serving You. Still, I know there are sinful aspects to my life. Open my heart to those things You still want me to work on, so I can become aware of the areas of my life that are not pleasing to You."
 - d) Let me explain this one more way: A wonderful bible teacher told a story of how he had a bad temper most of his life. He was a Christian since his youth, but he was also aware of how he had a problem with losing his temper over little things.
 - i) The harder he tried, the more he found himself losing his temper.
 - ii) Then one day, he decided that his problem is now God's problem to fix. This man stopped worrying about that problem. His wife commented to him a few months later how much better his temper was and he did not even realize his temper problems were going away.
 - a) The point of this story is not that we can become perfect by just giving our problems to God. The point is that God wants us to be aware of our issues so that we can give them to Him to work on and make us a better person.
 - iii) The way we improve as Christians is to become aware of aspects of our lives that are displeasing to God and then giving those issues to Him and say in effect, "I can't fix these issues. Lord, You deal with them."
 - iv) That in effect, is the key point of the first few verses of this psalm.
8. Verse 4: I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵ I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. ⁶ I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O LORD, ⁷ proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds.
- a) Upon first reading of these verses, it appears as if David is bragging about how much better he is than those who are wicked (i.e., who do not trust in God).
 - b) The correct way to read these verses is to realize that any and all differences between those of us who do trust in God to those who willfully sin without thinking twice about it, is not based on our "goodness", but the fact God is working through us.
 - i) The point here is not that we are good because "we are good". The point is we have become superior to those who do wicked deeds only because God has been and is continuing to work in our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) Once we have that desire to please God, He (God) just changes us and guides us to turn away from sinful areas of our lives.
 - c) OK John, it is sinking in that it is all about giving God the credit for any good deeds we have done in life. ☺ I get that, why should I pray this psalm?
 - i) For starters, it is about remembering that God gets the credit.
 - ii) More importantly, it is about remembering that God has been working in our past. Just because we don't sense God working out our current problems on our timing, do we make the mistake of thinking God is not working things out for us?
9. Verse 8: I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.
- a) One of the themes that runs all through this lesson is that of David's desire to be as close to God as possible. OK, first let me tell you what that does not mean:
 - i) It does not mean David desired to be the High Priest of Israel.
 - ii) It does not mean David desired to kill himself in order to speed up the process of being with God forever in heaven.
 - iii) It does not mean David wants to quit living his life in order to spend all of his days inside God's tabernacle in Jerusalem.

- b) Let me explain this concept another way: It is not God's desire for us to quit our lives and just spend all of our time in His word or in prayer. As important as those concepts are, they are useless unless we actually go out and live a life. We give God an opportunity to work in our lives as we go out and actually practice what His word is teaching us.
- i) I remember years ago hearing about a group of Jewish rabbi's who wanted the government of Israel to pay for their private schools so they could spend full time studying God's word and in effect, "not be interrupted".
 - ii) As one who loves studying God's word, it is tempting to think, "OK, God you just take care of all my needs and I'll just spend all of my time studying Your word".
 - iii) The problem with that type of thinking is we never get a chance to go out into the world and make a difference for Him. My point is praying and learning about God is a waste of time unless we go out and make a difference in the world.
 - iv) Well, what if God calls us to be a full time bible teacher? That's a good thing and hopefully such a person can be a great influence on others. My point is a person should not be so isolated from the world that they can't be used by God to go out and make a difference for Him.
- c) So what does all of this have to do with Verse 8? In a sense, everything. It was David's desire to be with God as much as possible and be with Him forever, but not at the cost of "giving up David's life". In other words, David did not want to quit what God called Him to do in order to be with Him forever.
- i) David understood that God had a plan for His life. David had no idea what God planned for his future just as we have no idea what God has planned for our future. However, if we desire to be with God forever, He does work in our lives to make a difference for Him and to be a good witness for Him in this lifetime.
 - ii) That concept of being a good witness for Him is what David desired and is what he meant by his desire to be with God forever.
10. Verse 9: Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with bloodthirsty men,¹⁰ in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes.
- a) Now we have two more verses that focus on the lives of those who don't care about God. So why does David keep mentioning such people? Does David fear he could instantly become like one of these wicked people described in this psalm? ☺
 - i) I doubt David could go from being a dedicated follower of God to one who is a "bloodthirsty man" overnight. The problem is our ego constantly gets in the way of God's will. The idea here is to pray for God's help to keep us focused on Him as it is easy to get our focus on our problems and try to solve them by our will.
 - b) The reason there is such a heavy emphasis in the bible and especially in the psalms on the concept of "Guide me God to stay on the right course", is that it is so easy for us to wander away from Him. Let's face it we are like the "wandering sheep" of Psalm 23, where it is easy for us to go off the course that God desires for us.
11. Verse 11: But I lead a blameless life; redeem me and be merciful to me.
- a) Verse 11 reads like a contradiction. The first part says that David leads a "blameless life". The next part is David asking God not only to redeem him (i.e., save him), but also to be merciful. The question of the moment is, if David is so blameless, why ask for mercy?
 - i) David is not saying he is perfect, but at the same time David understands he is perfectly forgiven based on his trust in God.
 - b) So if David (and us as Christians) are perfectly forgiven, why do we need mercy? Even though we are eternally forgiven, we still make mistakes and do things that are displeasing to God. He has every right to punish us now for the sins we commit. That is a separate issue from eternal forgiveness. The idea of God punishing us now is not that He is going to swoop down and hit us on the behind. ☺ The more likely idea is God is going to let the consequences of our sins show us where we mess up.

- c) The point David is making is that he is aware of his faults and is in effect asking God to go easy on him as he is aware of his shortcomings before God.
 - i) That in effect, is an acceptable prayer for us to ask God. In effect, asking for God's mercy is for us to ask God to not allow the consequences of our sins take place in our lives due to the sins we know we have committed.
 - ii) How God actually reacts to that request, is up to Him, and not us. The point is, it is acceptable to ask for God's mercy, but it is up to Him to react to that request.
12. Verse 12: My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD.
- a) The final line of this psalm is David saying that no matter what happens, he will stand on "level ground", praising God in the great assembly. I suspect this refers to heaven. It is David saying in effect, "I know that God will have mercy on me, and I know that whatever happens to me is His will. I trust in His complete forgiveness of sins. I trust that I will be in heaven one day praising Him for all He has done and will do in my life."
 - b) To sum up this psalm, we are asking God to examine us and thank him that our lives are different from nonbelievers. We give God the credit for any and all changes in our lives for the better. We realize that it is God who is working in our lives to make a difference.
 - i) Another reason we pray a psalm like this is to realize that we are "God's witnesses to the world". We need to somehow be "separate" from nonbelievers in terms of how we behave. That in effect is what David is asking.
 - ii) David also wants God to examine him and bring to light any issues that are displeasing to Him. Let's face it, if we are to be God's representatives, then we need to regularly examine ourselves and think about any areas of our life that are displeasing to Him. Once we realize what those areas are, we give them to God and say in effect, "This is now Your problem."
 - iii) That in effect is God's mercy in a nutshell: The idea is that God not only forgives us of our sins, but instead of just wiping us out for our sins, works to change us to make us more like the person He wants us to be.
 - iv) On that "heavy note", we can move on to Psalm 27. ☺
13. Psalm 27, introduction: Of David.
- a) Like Psalm 26, all we know of the introduction is that David wrote it.
 - i) So do we read that to focus on David as we study the psalm? No. I think the purpose is simply to tie the surrounding psalms together to see the bigger picture of what David is trying to say to God and to us in these psalms.
14. Verse 1: The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?
- a) In Psalm 27, we are back to asking for God's protection. One gets the impression reading this psalm is that David is going through another period of "fear" and is looking to God for protection and guidance through this time.
 - b) OK, why repeat this type of theme over and over again? We have already had a number of psalms dealing with David's fears and asking for God's protection through those fears. Why have more psalms on effectively the same topic?
 - i) Think of it this way: Do our problems usually go away in one day, or do they linger on and on? Even when we pray for God to take over the outcome of a situation, do we still worry about it? Sure we do, and so did David.
 - c) Now let's look at Verse 1. It starts by David calling God his "light and salvation". The idea of light is that David believes God is guiding his life. David also believes God will bring him to eternal salvation based on his trust in God.
 - i) If we have a healthy fear of God, what else should we, or could we possibly fear? What can possibly happen to us on earth that compares to not being pleasing to God? In other words, if we can learn to only fear the wrath of God, life is not as scary in comparison. On that happy thought, Verse 2. ☺

15. Verse 2: When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.
- a) In these two verses David describes being under attack. Whether this was a real attack or just something David was thinking about, the point is the same. Nothing can happen to us that compares with eternally suffering away from the presence of God.
 - i) David is not saying his enemies are all unbelievers. David is saying that the worst thing that could happen to him is that he could die and not be in God's presence. With that thought in mind, David can go forth in life, fight as hard as he can for his cause, knowing that God already knows the results.
 - b) David is not being suicidal here. If anything, David is motivating himself to take on whatever is in front of him. I'm sure David still had to physically plan for whatever battle is about to take place. God is not anti-planning. God simply wants us to trust Him with the results of whatever we have to face.
 - i) Again, the line to remember is, "If I fear God, there is nothing else I have to fear".
 - c) Even with that being true, our "enemies" (or things we have to deal with), are still right in front of us. The idea here is to fear God, but at the same time, trust that He will see us through whatever we are facing. We have no need to fear what we are about to face as no matter what happens, it is God's will if it is our desire to please Him in all that we do.
16. Verse 4: One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.
- a) For those of you who read my last lesson, you may recall me talking about playing a game of bible trivia. The question was, what did David asks for in life (compared to what his son Solomon asks for)? Like I said in the last lesson, David's desire was to live in God's presence forever. This verse here in the psalms is one of the proof texts of that desire. (My point is David's request is superior to Solomon's request for wisdom. Asking for wisdom is a good thing. Asking to be with God forever is a better thing.)
 - i) That in effect, should be our desire as well. The desire to living a life pleasing to God is in effect, the desire to be with Him for eternity.
 - b) I hold this view that some people will enjoy eternity a lot more than others.
 - i) Some will get to heaven and think, "OK, I've trusted in Jesus for my salvation. Now here I am in heaven. Where is my mansion? ☺
 - ii) Others will get there, and say in effect, "I want to enjoy having a close relationship with God for eternity." That in effect is what David wants and that is what God desires of you and me. Heaven is not just about avoiding hell. It should be about the desire to be with God all the time. That is what David is asking in this verse.
 - c) So what does this verse have to do with the previous set of verses?
 - i) The idea here is that it was David's desire to be victorious over whatever enemies he was about to face. If you study David's life through 1st and 2nd Samuel, David was constantly fighting battles and regularly had problems. There were times he had to run for his life and times he had to fight for his survival.
 - ii) The point is we live to be pleasing to God in all that we do. We go forward, we plan, and then trust that God is guiding us to the results that He desires. In effect, David is saying that no matter what choices he makes in his battles, he cannot lose as long as He is trusting in the God that created him in the first place.
17. Verse 5: For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.
- a) At first glance, it appears as if David is asking God to hide him from his troubles. I believe David is simply reminding himself that God is there to protect him through whatever it was he is facing.

- b) This leads me another interpretation of this verse: One can read the "day of trouble" reference as being about the day when we all face God's eternal judgment. David could be asking God in effect, "Spare me from that eternal judgment and let me be in your loving arms and not have to face such a judgment."
 - i) The bible speaks of two separate judgments: One is for nonbelievers and one is for believers. The one for nonbelievers in effect is when one discovers whether or not they are saved. The judgment for believers is based on our faithfulness to God and determines our rewards in heaven based on our faithfulness.
 - ii) Note what Revelation 20:6 says here: "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them." This verse is saying that God wants us to be part of the first resurrection. That is the one for believers. If one is part of that first resurrection, there is no danger of hell.
 - iii) The point is this verse has David asking for God's eternal protection from evil.
18. Verse 6: Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- a) If my last interpretation is correct, then David is saying here in Verse 6 that he will experience joy from victory over his enemies and David could praise God for that victory.
 - i) I do believe David is praying for a literal victory over whatever enemy he was about to face. I am sure David wanted to win and wanted to be able to praise God after defeating whatever David was about to face.
 - b) Did David see his enemies as non-God fearing people? I'm sure that is true in some cases, but in others, David had to fight against other Israelites. So is David asking in effect, "Give me victory because I am saved and they are not? No."
 - i) The issue here is not the salvation of whoever David was facing in battle. The issue is David trusting in God protecting him and God resurrecting him.
 - c) The issue in this verse is not the "who", but "when". If David is talking about spending eternity with God, then there are going to be people that God is going to have a victory "over" in the time of eternal judgment.
 - i) Does that mean we should cheer over those going to hell? No. David realizes that there is coming a future day when we who trust in God will rejoice over whatever forces (human or otherwise) that choose to reject God. In that day, God wants us to join Him in celebrating and that is what David is thinking about here.
19. Verse 7: Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.
- a) Verse 7 appears to be changing tone. We jump from focusing on God's victories in our lives to asking God to be merciful and answering our prayers.
 - i) After contemplating the ultimate outcome of our situation, David (and us) are still back in the real world, facing whatever is right in front of us.
 - ii) We are asking God to work now on our timing. Since we don't know what is God's timing in any situation, it is ok to ask God in effect to "work now".
 - b) So why ask God to be merciful in connection with helping us?
 - i) The short answer is God cannot ignore our sins. We have to remember that we are not any less sinful (i.e., imperfect beings) than the enemies we face. We ask for mercy only because we are trusting in God to see us through our situation.
 - ii) We are asking God to help us, not because we are better people than those who we have to deal with, but only based on His love for those who trust in Him, which hopefully is us, making the request to God.
20. Verse 8: My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.
- a) How does one know if they have a heart for God? A good sign is when things are going bad, there is this inner feeling telling us to seek God for help. That is what David is doing here and hopefully, that is what we do, when we need help.
 - b) Hopefully, verses like this remind us to seek God "first" as opposed to a last resort.

21. Verse 9: Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.
- a) At this moment, David has a fear of God not helping him. Why would David say this?
 - i) I suspect we all wonder at times, "OK, God where are you? Here I am going through all of "this" and it appears like You are not interested in helping me!"
 - ii) Again this is a prayer for God to "act now". It is up to God to respond to that request, but it is also up to us to actually ask God to intervene at this time.
 - b) Sometimes getting God to respond requires us to get to a point where God says in effect, "I will help you when you have nothing to trust in but Me alone". At that point, often He works. Why is that? So we give the credit to Him and Him alone for the victories of life.
 - i) So does that mean I have to go through all my savings or all my options before crying out to God? No. It just means we have to trust in Him as if (truly) there are no other options we have in life. My point is I find that God works best when we truly let go and trust that He will work things out His way and on His timing.
22. Verse 10: Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.
- a) This is a verse that is best read in context of the surrounding verses. Let me explain:
 - i) The previous verse was about worrying over the issue of God forsaking us. Obviously, God does not forsake us, but sometimes it feels like He does as we don't sense Him working in our lives. My point is to think about that in relation to this verse here. This verse can also be read "If" my parents forsake me.
 - ii) For what it is worth, there is no mention in the bible of David ever being forsaken by his parents. It is possible there was such an incident but it is never recorded.
 - b) When we go through a period when it feels like God is silent, we can also feel like whoever loves us can't help us either. In such low times, we have to remember that God cares and there are people who do care about us, even though they may not be able to relate to whatever we are dealing with.
 - c) This leads to the second part of this verse. Even when it feels like those who love us the best forsake us, God will still receive us and wants to hear from us.
23. Verse 11: Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.
¹²Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.
- a) We are still dealing with David feeling like God and those around him are against him. Now David feels like those who hate him are rising up at this moment against him.
 - i) The underlying point and the reason one should pray this psalm is there are times when we feel like everything is falling apart. Those who love us can't relate to what we are going through. It feels like God is silent and it feels like those who are against us are taking advantage of the situation.
 - ii) We pray this psalm to remind ourselves that He will be faithful to help us even when we don't feel Him helping us.
24. Verse 13: I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.
¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.
- a) David is ending this psalm in effect with the words that he will still see a "happy ending" here on earth. It is simply a matter of waiting on God's timing.
 - b) Just as good times don't last forever, neither do bad times. One has to have confidence that God will see us through bad times. The idea is to wait on God's timing and whatever we are going through will come to an end if we trust in His timing.
 - c) Let me end the psalm this way: I've yet to meet a person in life who is so positive in their outlook that they never struggle with difficult times. Even if we can't relate to this psalm at this moment in time, other times will come when it will help. The point of this psalm is to trust that God will see us through whatever difficulty we are dealing with.
 - d) On that happy note, ☺ let me run over to Psalm 28. The bad news is the theme is the same.

25. Psalm 28, title: Of David.
- a) We get the same very short title for this psalm. I've already talked about the significance of the shortness of this title, so I'll move on to the psalm itself.
26. Verse 1: To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. ² Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.
- a) Let me ask the logical question first: Why have this psalm? If David is still feeling down, why not just make Psalm 27 longer and continue the same theme?
 - i) After looking at all nine verses in this psalm, the difference is that this psalm appears to be more of a "group cry to God", while Psalm 27 appears to be more of an individual plea for help. That will be more obvious later in this psalm.
 - ii) The other thing to remember is pain rarely goes away in a few minutes. Most of the time, when we cry out for God to help, the pain continues. Our circumstances rarely improve immediately. That is why in such times, we often keep reading on to the next psalm, which I believe is the intent here.
 - iii) OK John, you are depressing me with all of this "negative talk". ☺ If that true, stop and think of the last time everything seemed to be falling apart. Usually nothing gets us through such times other than trusting in God to see us through them and that is the underlying point of much of this lesson.
 - b) Meanwhile, let me cover the specific's of these verses. In Verse 1, David is saying that he feels like his prayers are falling on deaf ears. The last part of Verse 2 describe David lifting his hands toward "Your most holy place". It could refer to heaven or toward the direction of wherever God's tabernacle was standing.
 - i) The point is when we are desperate for God's help, we usually try to think of all of little rituals to show God how serious we are. It is as if, "I want God to react now and look at all the rituals I am doing to show Him how serious I am."
 - ii) This is a reminder that we don't have to do little rituals to show God how serious we are about appealing for His mercy and His help. It is just a matter of praying seriously and regularly over the issues of our heart.
27. Verse 3: Do not drag me away with the wicked, with those who do evil, who speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts.
- a) At this point, David is begging God to "separate him" from the wicked.
 - b) OK, what does that mean and how does that help me?
 - i) What is happening is we are back to the idea of being a good witness for God. The idea here is to act in a way that separates us from nonbelievers.
 - ii) One thing we need to ask ourselves is in effect, "Are we behaving in a way that people around us know that we are followers of Christ?" If we are living in a way that is no different from nonbelievers, how are we being a witness for Christ?
 - c) The reason I gave that little speech is that in effect is what David is asking to do at this point. He is asking God to separate me (David) from those who are wicked.
 - i) Well, that may sound obvious to you and me. The problem is we forget God is perfect and His standards are "perfection". The only reason we are not "dragged away with the wicked" is because we are trusting in Jesus' payment for our sins.
 - ii) The reason all of this is mentioned here is not just so we can remember we are saved due to the ultimately price paid for sins, but so we can act in a way that is different from the nonbeliever.
 - iii) This gets back to my main theme of this lesson. If we are saved, we should act differently. Again, it is not by trying harder, but by asking God to work through us so that people will know we are His followers because we "act differently".

28. Verse 4: Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back upon them what they deserve. ⁵ Since they show no regard for the works of the LORD and what his hands have done, he will tear them down and never build them up again.
- a) Reading these verses, it appears that David is not only asking that he be separated from nonbelievers, but David is also asking God to punish those who do wicked.
 - b) So does this mean we should wish harm on evil doers? A better way of looking at it, is to agree with the idea of God's justice. For those who refuse to turn to Jesus for forgiveness, God in effect "gives them what they want", which is to be judged by their deeds.
 - i) I could give a whole speech here on what happens to people who never have heard of Jesus, but I'll save that speech for another day.
 - ii) The point to get out of these verses is that God wants us to love what He loves. That also means to hate what God hates. What He hates are the deeds of those who refuse to turn to Him. God wants all to trust Him and seek Him, but at the same time, it is fair of God to punish those who refuse to turn to Him.
 - c) OK John, practically speaking, how do we hate those who turn from God? If God promises to commit violence on the wicked, then in effect, do we sink to their level? The answer is we must hate the deeds that the wicked do and separate the deeds from the people. We may pray for their salvation, but at the same time, we should pray for their wicked deeds to fail or to not cause damage. In summary, it is ok to hate wicked deeds because if it is something God hates, it should be something we should hate as well.
29. Verse 6: Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy.
- a) Well, while David was crying out to harm those who commit wickedness, in the "same breadth" David is also pleading for mercy for himself.
 - b) The point here is David realizes and we should realize that in a sense we deserve the same punishment as the "wicked". The only reason we get treated better by God than such wicked people is that God has had mercy on us. Let me explain that:
 - i) I hold the view that from God's perspective, He knows all things. A perfect God cannot learn. Therefore, He knows we have chosen to follow Him and therefore He has mercy upon us because He knows that we do follow Him despite our constant ability to sin and do things that are displeasing to Him.
 - ii) In short, the only reason we are better than the wicked is due to God's mercy.
30. Verse 7: The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.
- a) Verse 7 jumps from complaining about the wicked (Verses 4-5) and thanking God for His mercy (Verse 6) to one of happiness due to the victory of God.
 - b) Let me put this verse another way: I doubt David's circumstances in life changed much from Verses 4 to 7. I'm sure he was dealing with the same wicked people in his life that existed before David wrote this psalm.
 - i) The point is David is counting on God's future victories as though they have already happened. That is why David says He trusts in God and his "heart leaps for joy", as David knows that God's ultimate victory is a done deal.
 - ii) What this means for us is when life seems "dark", we can know the ultimate fate of both those who trust in God and those who don't. It is a "done deal".
 - iii) Those who have a hatred of God will eternally suffer for their actions and those of us who trust in God, despite our faults, not only act better in this lifetime (through His grace, not by our efforts), but also get to live with Him forever.

31. Verse 8: The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.
⁹Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.
- a) David broadens the scope of this psalm to all of those who trust in God. In other words David realizes that this psalm is not just for him to sing, but for all who trust in God.
 - i) I don't think David realized the scope of the prayer would one day reach around the world to millions or billions of people, but it did and it does.
 - b) By the way, we have a subtle reference to the Messiah in Verse 8. The term "his anointed one" does refer to the promised Messiah, which we Christians know is Jesus.
 - c) David realizes that this type of prayer (this psalm) is both present tense, and future tense in that God is going to continue to work for those who trust in Him. Life is already a "done deal" in that those who do trust in God are victorious in the end.
 - d) Let me end this psalm with another thought: One thing that we as Christians can count on is the fact that God is consistent through all of history. The way we read of God acting in this psalm is in effect, the same way God acts to our prayers today. The reason we can pray this type of psalm is that God is consistent in His mercy and His forgiveness, and at the same time His lack of forgiveness of those who refuse to turn to Him.
 - e) OK, I'll squeeze in one more short psalm, and then we'll call it a lesson.
32. Psalm 29 introduction: A psalm of David.
- a) We get the same brief introduction as the last few psalms, so there is no need to comment any further other than the fact I do believe this whole section of psalms were designed to be read as a group. (I believe this section runs from Psalm 25 through Psalm 32.)
33. Verse 1: Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.
- a) Psalm 29 is a "different flavor" than the last group of Psalms. (OK John, if you claim that 25-32 all go together, than why is 29 so different? Glad you asked. ☺)
 - i) I believe what is going on here is David realizes that he is "separated" from nonbelievers and David knows that God is going to work in his life (and our life) to glorify those who do trust in Him.
 - b) This leads me to Verse 1. It is asking us to ascribe to God "glory and strength". The idea is about trusting that He will work in our lives. In other words, we as believers will be victorious not because of our strength, but due to God working through us.
 - i) The point here is to not take credit for our victories, but to give them to God.
 - ii) Sooner or later, we will emerge from the troubles that we deal with. The point is during such times of victory, we should not take the credit, but pause and realized that any and all victories do come from our trust in Him.
 - c) Does God need to hear this prayer? Is God's ego threatened if we don't give Him credit? Of course not. The danger is our ego can grow quickly in times of victories or times of relief from problems. By stopping to give God the credit, it reminds us of how we got through our current situation and who deserves the credit.
34. Verse 3: The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.
- a) Verse 3 is the first of six verses where David is describing "God's voice".
 - i) First, I need to explain what these verses are not saying: They are not saying that when God spoke to David, God's voice was louder than say, hard rain fall or thunder. This is not describing how God communicates to David.
 - b) The point in this verse and the next set of verses is that if we wonder whether or not God exists or if He is working in the world, be aware of nature around us to see Him work.
 - c) I suspect that when David wrote this, he just witnessed a hard thunder and rainstorm.
 - d) The idea here is that in all the "noise" that we as humans can make is not as great as the noise that can come from nature. The point is the evidence of His existence is in nature, and even in the sounds of nature, which are more noticeable during thunder strikes.

35. Verse 4: The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
- a) We have two more "voices of God" in these verses. Verse 4 simply says that the voice is powerful. Verse 5 says that "God's voice" breaks the cedar (trees) of Lebanon. David is not being literal, but describing the power behind the way God can act.
 - b) In Verse 5 David is using a local reference. To David, the strongest trees that he can relate to are in forest lands north of Israel in Lebanon. I suspect David is visualizing a thunder storm that is knocking down trees in this forest.
 - i) The point here is not about knowing Middle-East geography. ☺ The point is that the evidence of God's existence is noticeable in "what is around us" if we are just willing to take the time to look.
 - c) OK John, so the evidence of God's existence is in nature. I already believe that God exists. Tell me why I should study this psalm and how does it relate to my life?
 - i) God is working in our lives and it is as evident (key word) as when a major storm does damage to the nature around us. We may not see moment by moment how God is working, but the fact He is working is as real as a thunder storm.
 - ii) The point here is to realize that God is working in our lives and to keep on trusting that God is working to make a difference in our lives.
36. Verse 6: He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.
- a) I had to do some research to understand how a calf skips. The essential idea is the noise of thunder causes animals to jump with nervousness. With that said, let me explain what this verse means:
 - i) Sirion refers to a mountain south of where David was located in Israel. Lebanon is to the north. It is like David saying, "God moves all the way from the farthest points to the north to the farthest points to the south." It might be like an American saying, "One can see God work from Maine to California (with apologies to my readers in Alaska and Hawaii)."
 - b) This leads us back to the theme of this psalm. It is that God is working if we are willing to look. We may not be able to relate to David's points of geographical reference, but we can understand that God is working all around us.
 - c) One technical note before I move on. Let me comment on "wild ox" in Verse 6. The King James Version says "unicorn". David is not describing the mythical creature of a unicorn. The Hebrew word is for some sort of one horned animal. What is also interesting is the same word also means to "look up" which may be a subtle reminder of looking toward the heavens (toward God) in order to explain a thunderstorm.
37. Verse 9: The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"
- a) Hopefully by now, I don't have to explain any more about the idea of God working as being as powerful as a lightening storm. That concept continues and finishes with the first part of Verse 9.
 - b) The strange part of this verse is the last part. We just had about six verses that compare God working to a big storm and the last part of Verse 9 is the sound of God's temple saying "glory". OK, John, please explain the glory reference:
 - i) The good news of a local catastrophe such as a big storm is it gets people to think about God and think about their lives in relation to Him. The fact that people are focusing on their lives in relation to God is a "glorious" thing.
 - a) So does that make up for the damage done and lives lost due to such storms? Probably not, but it does get people to think about Him.
 - ii) The less literal idea is that God works in a mighty way, which is "glorious".

38. Verse 10: The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever.
- a) In Verse 10 we move from thunder striking to a flood. So what does this verse mean by the fact God is "enthroned over the flood"?
 - i) This refers to Noah's flood and the fact that God is "above it all" watching it. The idea is that God is greater than all that nature does and despite the damage and yes, even the lost lives, God is still there and He is ruling over the world.
 - b) OK John, if God is in charge and does rule, why does He allow such disasters to happen in the first place? That's the kind of question we can only get answered in heaven. I can't explain all of the disasters and why God has allowed them to happen. I do know that He still rules despite those events and we can still trust in Him, despite those disasters.
39. Verse 11: The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.
- a) This psalm ends with the reminder that God strengthens those who believe in Him. So does this mean we don't have to take care of our bodies as our strength only comes from God? No, that misses the point. ☺ The idea here is that if we are relying on God to deal with our problems, then He gives us the strength to face whatever we are dealing with at the present time. Our trust in God gets us to let go of our worries and in effect it does strengthen us to deal with our issues.
 - b) The last line of this psalm says that the LORD ("Jehovah", the most holy name of God) blesses His people (us) with peace. Well that sounds nice. How does one get that? Again, the idea is about constantly letting go of our worries and fears, so that we can have a sense of peace about whatever situation we are facing. It does not necessarily mean our problems will instantly go away. It means we can have peace through our situations because we now know the outcome is in God's hands and not ours.
40. OK, John, you have to admit, this is a "downer" of a lesson. We seem to be studying psalm after psalm that says in effect, "Give your problems to God and then everything will be fine". Well, John, as you know, life is not that simple. Praying about a problem is always a good start, but our problems are still right in front of us.
- a) What these psalms are teaching us is about how to let go of our worries. The reason David goes on and on about these issues, is because that is how we are. Even when we have talked out our problems with someone and even after we have thought about all the possibilities over and over again, we still worry. In the sense that letting go of worrying takes time and regular prayer, so many praying through many psalms or many thoughts may be just what it takes for us to get through a particular situation.
 - b) OK John, now that I've given the situation over to God (over and over again), what do I do next? How do I actually face what I have to face? While I don't know the particulars of your particular situation, I do know that we have to trust that God is guiding us through our lives and just as He has worked in the past, we have to trust that He is still there working through whatever we are dealing with at this time.
 - c) If you have prayed about a certain situation and you feel God is leading you to do "x", odds are good that is what you are supposed to do. How do we know for sure? We don't. I usually find that when I mess up, that is God showing me to go in a different direction. The point is the solution to our problems is not necessarily an easy road to take, as much as it is a sense of peace that we are going down the right path.
41. On that confusing but happy ending, let me try wrapping this up in my ending prayer: Father, I know that You have worked in my life in the past. I can see how I am acting differently than how I used to act before I committed my life to serving You. Help me to remember that You have not gotten me this far to stop now. Help me to trust You through what I have to deal with currently. Help me to trust that You are guiding my life and I don't have to worry about the outcome of any particular situation because I am trusting that whatever happens, it is something that You desire for Your glory. Now help us to go out and make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.