

1. In this lesson, we finish a section of psalms all written by David. This is not the last of the psalms written by David, but the end of a group of psalms (that started back in Psalm 25) that all deal in effect with our relationship with God and how we as believers are different from nonbelievers.
  - a) What these psalms do is give us the proper perspective when dealing with problems and sins. David spends a lot of time in these psalms giving God his problems, confessing his doubts in God's ability to help him, and even deals with his lack of trust that God is protecting him from danger. In short David is crying for help through his problems.
  - b) OK so David is struggling in his trust in God. How does this affect me?
    - i) For the Christian, believing in Jesus is much more than believing we are forgiven of our sins and going to heaven. (Yes that is important, but that is only a part of the scope of what God desires for us.) God desires to guide our lives now. He wants to guide and lead us through whatever situation we are dealing with in life.
    - ii) Because we don't know what is going to happen next in our lives, we struggle with God (so to speak) as our Christian life is a constant battle of control between trying to do what God wants us to do versus doing what we think is right.
2. This leads me to the title for this lesson: Understanding how God protects and guides us.
  - a) Let's face it, God does not throw a force field around us to protect us from whatever life throws at us. We as believers deal with difficulties, problems and hardships just as much as any nonbeliever does. The difference between the believer and the nonbeliever is that the believer has the ability to turn to God for guidance and protection.
  - b) Let me describe this from God's perspective for the moment: When we make the decision to commit our lives to God, He is not up there in heaven saying, "OK, add this person to my list and now I can go focus on someone else." When we make that commitment, God in effect, wants to take over and guide our lives.
  - c) You may find it interesting that the word "Israel" literally means to struggle. The idea behind that word is that those who trust in God (In the Old Testament, that would be the Israelites) have to struggle with God all of their lives.
    - i) OK, John, how are we struggling with God? The answer is the constant battle between doing our will versus doing God's will at any given moment.
    - ii) The point is God wants to guide us, as well as protect us through this life, but in order to get that guidance we have to turn our will over to Him. That is where the struggle comes into play, between our desires and His desires for us.
3. This speech about doing God's will does lead me back to the three psalms of this lesson.
  - a) These three psalms have a heavy dose of being "down" as they focus on our faults, our needing God's help and not knowing what to do next. (A lot like our lives.)
  - b) The upbeat point of these psalms doesn't come until the last few pages of the lesson. There is a noticeable change and an emphasis on God's protection and comfort.
    - i) When our lives get us down to the point where we don't know what to do next, what we have to remember is that God not only loves us and wants to guide our lives, but He is also a source of comfort through our difficulties.
4. Before I finish my introduction, let me give a quick word to the veteran Christian who already understands that God is guiding us, protecting us and is a place to turn for comfort.
  - a) What these psalms do is remind us of God's love through both good times and bad times. All Christians need that reminder at times and that is what these psalms teach us.
  - b) It also reminds us how to handle our problems when they come up in our lives.
  - c) The problem is not that we don't get this. Our problem is we don't know what to do next. The struggle of our lives with God is the difficult issue of waiting on His timing.

5. On that confusing note, ☺ Psalm 30: A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David.
  - a) The title of this psalm has more information than the last half dozen psalms or so. It starts off by saying it is a song David wrote to be used for the dedication of the temple.
  - b) The problem is, is that David's son, Solomon built the first temple not David. God told David that he could not build a temple. However, that did not stop David from supplying all of the building materials for first Jewish Temple. (See 1st Chronicles 22:2-4.)
    - i) Given that fact, it is possible that David wrote this psalm in anticipation of the temple that was built soon after his lifetime and wanted it for that purpose.
6. Verse 1: I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. <sup>2</sup> O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. <sup>3</sup> O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit.
  - a) This psalm opens up with David praising God because He (God) has rescued David out of the "depths" (probably some war-battle) and did not let his enemies gloat over David.
  - b) Given the last few psalms, and the emphasis on David being saved from harm, it seems appropriate to say in effect: "This is a song of gratitude when looking back at one's life and seeing how God has been with us."
  - c) In the last lesson I stressed that the reason we thank God for past victories is because it reminds us that if God was there in the "past", why are we doubting God working in our lives at the present moment? I mention that here, as the tone of this psalm is about victory. This psalm gives the impression it is meant to be sung when we realize we have victory over whatever we are dealing with.
    - i) Here is David probably writing a psalm about a temple that has yet to be built. The latest David could have written this, is when there were big piles of "stuff" organized before it was built. David trusted that the temple would be built, even though God said he could not do it. (See 1st Kings 8:19 on this issue.)
      - a) My point is not to get us to focus on an ancient temple. My point is we should realize that we as Christians will be victorious and we can thank God for our victories even if we have to thank Him in advance.
    - ii) When life gets us down, instead of complaining, we need to turn to God and thank Him for the victory He is (not could but "is") going to provide us.
  - d) The question that popped in my head at this point is: If David is talking about how God has rescued him, what does that have to do with the dedication of the temple?
    - i) As best I can figure, the idea here is while all the Israelites are thinking about the new temple (or whatever the building was), the important issue is that they are recalling how God has worked in their past for the benefit of the nation of Israel.
    - ii) The idea is in effect, "If God has rescued us in the past, and here we are as a nation gathered to think about Him, let us all remember that if God is more than capable of working in our lives again if we obedient to what He commands us to do."
  - e) With those happy thoughts in mind, let us get back to the psalm itself:
    - i) Whatever David was thinking about when he wrote these first few lines, it appears to have been a bad situation. Some commentators suggest he may have been sick to the point of death. Others suggest it was about being near defeat in battle. Whatever it was, the point is David got to where he in effect "gave up" and then somehow God rescued David through that situation and kept David alive.
    - ii) Most of us can look back at our lives and remember when we wondered, "How did I ever get through that situation" and we realize in hindsight that the only way we made it was by God's help. All people who believe in God can relate to this concept. Therefore, David thought this was a good idea to bring up that idea in relating to the "goodness" of God.
    - iii) If we are thinking about how God has rescued us either individually or as a group through a particular situation, what do we do now? That leads us to Verse 4.

7. Verse 4: Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name.
  - a) A point here is not that we have to spend all our time praising God, but at the same time there are benefits to our group (again, whatever that group is) praising Him.
  - b) So do we do this for His benefit? Of course not. The point of our group praising Him is not just to get our group thinking about Him, but realizing that He wants to be in charge of our lives and help us. Let me add Verse 5, and then come back to this thought.
8. Verse 5: For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.
  - a) If we have dedicated our lives to serving God, we must remember that we must accept His discipline. Sometimes, God allows us to go through things so He can discipline us to do His will through that situation.
    - i) So when we go through tough times, how do we know whether or not it is God disciplining us, or is it just due to our sins or maybe even our circumstances?
      - a) The point is we don't always know the reason why we are going through a tough time. We just know that we are going through such a time. What we have to remember is, whatever we have to deal with, at the worst, it is only for this lifetime, but God's favor will be with us for eternity.
  - b) The point of this verse is not so much how or why we are experiencing the anger of God (a poetic way of saying we are suffering). The point is to remember to trust God through this situation. His love for us will see us through such times in our lives if we let Him in.
    - i) A good prayer I have learned in tough times is, "Dear God, teach me what You want me to learn from this situation and help me to praise You through whatever I am going through at the moment." It may not make the situation go away in one second, but once we learn what God wants us to learn, I have learned that things do get better as we deal with our problems.
9. Verse 6: When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." <sup>7</sup> O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.
  - a) There is always the real danger of thinking that when all is going well, nothing can shake us to loose of our confidence in God. Our trust in ourselves (versus God's will) is always at its greatest height when our lives are going well.
    - i) I see David feeling that way here. David's pride was growing when things were going well. When life changed, then David got his focus back on God.
  - b) There is a classic joke that goes in effect, "The reason God allows us to go through tough times is that is the only time we ever really communicate with Him."
    - i) When things are going well, we may still believe God exists, but we are not really thinking about God protecting us. It is usually when life is falling apart that we really turn to God. That is what David is confessing in this verse. David realized one reason why he experienced a "near death experience" was that David's pride was growing and he was trusting in himself and not God.
10. Verse 8: To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: <sup>9</sup> "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?" <sup>10</sup> Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help."
  - a) David realized he went through a time of self-pride and cries out for God's mercy.
  - b) David is, or was, going through a time of suffering, and David is begging for relief.
  - c) OK and what does this have to do with us?
    - i) We too, should pray for His mercy. This has nothing to do with our salvation, but just about dealing with whatever we are worried about at the present moment. If we are going through a difficult time, the possibility exists that God may be using that situation to discipline us to trust Him more and more. Asking for God's mercy is in effect, asking Him to teach us what He wants us to learn and bring an end to our bad situation.

- d) David then says something interesting in Verse 9. David cries out in effect, "What good am I when I am dead? Can my dead body praise You? The request is in effect for God to see us through our problems so we can praise Him for getting us through the situation.
    - i) God wants us to praise Him so we can give Him the credit (that He deserves) for rescuing us through our issues. When our bad situation comes to an end, we can then give God the credit and praise Him. The point is that God wants us to be a good witness for Him and to realize that He is working in our lives for His glory.
11. Verse 11: You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,<sup>12</sup> that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.
- a) One gets the impression that David enjoyed praising God and was looking for any excuse to do so. The point is the joy of praising God should be shared with others. That is what David is encouraging others to do and that is what God wants us to do as well.
  - b) Verse 11 says in effect that David's situation changed where his wailing (crying out to God) changed to dancing in that David was relieved his situation was over.
    - i) Footnote: Israelites back then wore sackcloth (an uncomfortable garment) as a sign of mourning. It is roughly the equivalent of wearing black to a funeral.
  - c) Let me put these final two verses of the psalm this way: What would we rather do, dance in gratitude to God or complain about how bad things are? That is the idea here.
    - i) I don't think David asked people to sing such a psalm when they are actually going through rough times. David is asking others (and us) to show gratitude to God when such rough times actually come to an end.
  - d) This leads us back to the title again. It was used at a dedication ceremony. Most likely the psalm was for the temple dedication that David's son (Solomon) built. It could refer to some other dedication ceremony. The point is David wanted everyone singing the psalm to think about how God is "there" to get us through rough times.
12. Psalm 31, introduction: For the director of music. A psalm of David.
- a) Well, if you found Psalm 30 depressing, Psalm 31 may kill you. ☹ In Psalm 31, David is again in some sort of trouble and he is asking God to somehow separate him from those who want to do him harm.
  - b) So before I start this psalm, why does David keep "beating" on this theme of problems?
    - i) Think of it this way: When do we cry out to God the most? It is when things are going bad and we are looking for answers. A purpose of the psalms is to help us deal with our problems and look to God for help through our problems.
  - c) Let me try this one more way: We may be going through a particular situation and pray one psalm. That may help, but we are still thinking about our problems. Therefore, since we are reading, we move on to the next psalm. David spends a lot of time complaining about his issues to God through lots of psalms because that is in effect what we do.
    - i) Having lots of psalms dealing with our problems is good in the sense that we easily get our focus off of God and back on our problems. Therefore more prayer and more psalms are good to keep our focus on God and off our worries.
13. Verse 1: In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. <sup>2</sup> Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.
- a) As I read these opening verses, I can't help but think that how these psalms appear to be getting repetitious. On the other hand, repeating these issues help me (and hopefully you as well) to face whatever issues we are facing in life.
    - i) It is because we as Christians constantly and regularly struggle with life and are desperate for answers. Our lives can hurt and can be very difficult at times. It helps to regularly pour out our situation to God. Frankly, it benefits me to keep reading of the fact I can daily take refuge in God and know that He will rescue me.

- b) I have found that it is easy to describe these psalm verses in an impersonal way. It is another thing to use the psalms to pour out one's heart to God. I am convinced that people never appreciate the psalms until they cry them out in the "first person". What makes them special is when we can pour out our hearts to God in these psalms.
  - c) With that out of my system, ☺ let me get back to Verses 1 and 2. Whatever is going on in David's life at this moment, he feels the need to take refuge in God. Whatever he is going through, he is hurting and he realizes that our only (note the word "only") true place of comfort through our trials is being close to God through prayer.
    - i) In other words, we don't know the specifics of David's problem, but we do know that He is desperately hoping in God to rescue him at this time.
    - ii) This leads back to us: The reason I just talked about personalizing the psalms is that David wrote this psalm not only for himself, but also for the reader to pour out his or her heart to God in the same manner.
    - iii) That is why David doesn't give any specifics about his problems. It is so when we use psalms like this to cry out to God, we can relate to the act type of desperate that David feels about pouring out his pain to God.
14. Verse 3: Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
- a) Whatever it is David is dealing with, it is not getting any better in Verse 3. ☺
  - b) The big thing to notice here in Verse 3 is that David is asking God to help him not based on David's goodness, but based on God's goodness. Let me explain that one a little more.
    - i) If God is working to make a difference in our lives, then we shouldn't be acting the same way non-Christians act. There should be something different about our lifestyle that non-Christians can point to and see something to be desired.
    - ii) With that said, we don't come to God based on the fact we are different. We don't come to Him saying we are better than other people. We don't say, "Dear God, bless me because I am special or because I am better than someone else".
    - iii) The only way to approach God is based on His goodness, not ours. The way to approach asking God for a blessing is to say in effect, "Lord, I represent Your name. Because people know that I take a stand for You, guide my life and help me with the decisions I have to make. Lead me not because I am anything special, but because just You want to and because I am putting my trust in You."
15. Verse 4: Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.
- a) Just because one is trusting in God, does not mean one is free of trouble. Notice that David here, who trusts in God both before and after whatever he is dealing with, is stuck inside some sort of trap. I don't know what that trap is and I believe David is not specific on the details so we could better relate to this line of the psalm.
  - b) Let me put this verse another way, "Lord right now I am in trouble. It could have been due to some trap I feel into, or it could be to something that is no fault of my own. All I know is that You (God) are my only hope of getting out of (or through) this.
  - c) Hopefully, it is sinking in by now, that God wants us to come to Him for help as if we have no other choice in life. God promises to help all of those who fully trust in Him and have dedicated their lives to serving Him.
16. Verse 5: Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.
- a) Let me tell you what this verse is not saying: David is not saying he is about to die and therefore, he is committing his spirit into God's hands for the next life.
  - b) David is saying (note this) that he is 100% dependant on God and in effect, does not know what to do next. It does not mean we don't take whatever steps are necessary to deal with our issues. It just means we trust God with the results, period.

17. Verse 6: I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD.
  - a) This psalm has a lot of "back and forth". What I mean is David at one moment thinks about completely trusting God and the next moment he is thinking about those who trust in other things. Why the "back and forth" dialogue?
    - i) The answer is to remember to love what God loves, also means to hate what God hates. What He hates is the actions of those who turn from Him. Therefore, David is just saying that he desires to agree with God and "hate what He hates".
    - ii) In order to keep our focus on God more than say, five seconds, it helps to remind ourselves what separates us from those who turn from Him.
    - iii) Let's face it, saying we love God is the first step. Putting those words into action is what counts. Remembering what the difference between the two is the point here.
18. Verse 7: I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. <sup>8</sup> You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.
  - a) Whatever David was dealing with, it appears to be over. Did David's life change in the middle of composing this psalm? I don't think so. I believe the point here is David is looking back at his life to date and realize how God has taken care of him so far.
  - b) That's a good thing to do in our anguish. If we just sit here and feel sorry for ourselves that is a waste of time. When our problems appear to be overwhelming, we need to remember that God has gotten us through the past and He won't let us down now.
  - c) At this moment, the world is going through a major recession. I know many people who have been out of work for a long time and are giving up hope.
    - i) If we just sit there and feel sorry for ourselves that is a waste of time. If you were sitting next to yourself, would you rather listen to complaining or praise? That is why God wants us to praise Him even in difficult times.
    - ii) There are lots (emphasis on lots) of people struggling and not knowing what to do to support themselves and their families. Like David, it is essential for us to say in effect, "God, our lives our 100% in your hands. I see the deeds of those who don't trust in You and I don't want to live like that. Help me because I trust in Your goodness and not my own ability."
    - iii) With that prayer stated, we move forward knowing (not thinking, but knowing) that whatever happens to us, is God's will and we can let go of the results.
  - d) This does lead us back to Verses 7 and 8. David is bragging about how God has rescued him out of past situations and God put him in a "broad place". OK, what does that mean? It means that we won't be in trouble forever. There are times when God sees us through our problems and He gives us peace. There were times of peace in David's life and more importantly times where he could relax and thank God for getting him there.
    - i) Whatever we are facing, there will come a time when our bad situations come to an end. We don't know when that time comes, which is why we trust in God with our situation and not our ability to see us through our problems.
    - ii) If God already knows the outcomes of our issues, why do we worry? With that thought in mind, re-read the verses. God has not abandoned us. If we do trust God, we have to let go of our worries.
19. Verse 9: Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. <sup>10</sup> My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.
  - a) Let's say my comments over the last few verses didn't help. We are still facing whatever we are facing. Know that David, after all of his prayers about trusting in God, says here in Verses 9 and 10 how bad he feels about what he is dealing with.
    - i) If David is trusting God so much, why does he describe this sorrow here? Because that is the way we are. We let go of the results and truly give them to God. The next moment we remember our problems are still right in front of us.

- b) What David is saying in effect is, "I'm tired of dealing with this problem. God, You deal with it, because I am too tired to go on like this. I know I have faults and much of the situation I am in is do to my own shortcomings. Still God, I need your help because my strength to face life is gone at this moment."
    - i) Lines like these are what "true surrender" is all about. Turning over the situation to God is more than just remembering that He is in charge of our lives. It is about saying in effect, "I'm worn out from dealing with my issues. I have no choice but to turn the entire situation over to God because I don't have the strength to go forward all on my own."
- 20. Verse 11: Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends-- those who see me on the street flee from me. <sup>12</sup> I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. <sup>13</sup> For I hear the slander of many; there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life.
  - a) When we get to the point in life when we feel that all is lost, we may feel the way David feels at this point of the psalm. David feels here like everyone against him, and even worse, as if everyone around him is conspiring to get him.
  - b) Let me tackle these verses another way: If somebody close to us is feeling down, do we want to be around all of that "negativity" all the time? If we hang around a person and all they do is complain about how bad life is, how long do we want to be with that person? Sooner or later, we don't want to hang around such a person because we can't take all of that negative talk.
    - i) I believe David felt like he was that person at this moment. He can't complain about how bad he feels as no one wants to hear him.
    - ii) So are you saying we should fake optimism around other people? No. Everyone goes through tough times and we can be honest about our situations with others without going on and on about our problems. If we pour out our hearts to God, then we shouldn't have to depend upon others since help comes from God alone.
    - iii) In other words, we can be optimistic in the middle of the worst times because we can live by faith that God will see us through this time. That is the real point of these verses and that is what being a good witness for Jesus is all about.
    - iv) Speaking of such optimism, I present the next three verses:
- 21. Verse 14: But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." <sup>15</sup> My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me. <sup>16</sup> Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.
  - a) Remember that David felt at this moment like no one around him, was willing to help him and it appears like "everyone" is out to get him. When we are emotionally or physically weak, demonic spiritual forces are free to attack us because our defenses are weak. That is why it is so essential to ask for God's help at the times of our weaknesses.
    - i) My point here is when we feel like we can't go on, we must again give that situation over to God to help us. That is what David is doing in these verses. He is saying in effect, "I have no one else I can turn to, so therefore, I am trusting in You God. I (David) don't know how I will get out of my current situation, but I know that Your (God's) love doesn't fail."
  - b) Let me try this "complaining" one more way: ☺ Let's say that we are struggling with someone we have to deal with every day. Remember that we can't fix other people. However, with God in effect, we can gang up on them. All we can do is work on our attitude, as we can't change other people. We should pray in effect, "Lord, that person is your problem. I can't change them. All I can do is trust in You and know that You are greater than that person I am dealing with. Not only do I turn myself over to You (God), but also turn that person I am dealing with over to You. Give me the strength and courage to deal with the people I have to deal with."

- c) OK John, nice speech. ☺ What does it have to do with these verses? Everything!
  - i) These verses are not about praising God because He is God. (Not that there is anything wrong with that.) The point is God helps us through our situations because He loves us and it is His desire to pour that love upon us. We can show love to others because God first puts His love inside of us.
  - ii) David is praying in effect, "I can have joy and face what I have to face, because I know that God is showing His love to me at this moment. I know that I can have joy during the toughest times in my life because I am trusting in God's love to see me through my situation.
  - iii) David is praising God in these verses for the future victory David knows he is going to have because he is trusting in God's love.
  - iv) Well, this would be a wonderful way to end the psalm and this lesson, but David still has eight more verses to give us in this psalm.
- 22. Verse 17: Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave.
  - a) My first issue here is the phrase "put to shame". Whatever David meant by that, he didn't want to be "put to shame", but did want the wicked to be "put to shame".
    - i) I believe David saying in effect, "Lord, let me win this struggle so I can continue to praise You. Don't let the wicked (i.e., those who don't trust in God) go on with their lives, but let their death be a testimonial to Your (God's) power."
    - ii) OK John, so David wishes for an untimely death of the wicked. How do I apply that? Should I wish for the death of those who don't trust in God? No. Let me go on to the next verse and then I will talk some more about this issue.
- 23. Verse 18: Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.
  - a) The verse is essentially saying those who don't trust in God are speaking out against those who are trusting in Him. My question is, "Why is this so bad that David wants it to stop?"
    - i) The point here is that David wants God to win even to the point that all arguments against God come to nothing.
    - ii) OK John, if we believe such people will eventually go to hell for never turning to God, why wish their silence? I don't think it is so much about wishing bad things upon those who are evil, as much as it is a desire to see such people change.
  - b) Any sort of "speak" against God will eventually come to nothing, so we might as well pray it to end. I am convinced that whatever David is going through, things said about him hurt him and we can all relate to that.
    - i) What I suspect this verse is getting at is the idea that we can't stop hurting words by our power, but only by trusting God to either stop it or comfort us through what bad things are being said to us.
    - ii) This comes back to the idea of letting God deal with our problems on His timing, not based on our own strength. Praying to bring the thoughts against God to an end is a way of being dependant on His timing on what ever is opposing Him.
- 24. Verse 19: How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. <sup>20</sup> In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues.
  - a) My translation of these verses: God is a god of comfort. When we are hurt by what other people have said about us or about our Christian lifestyle, then we must remember that God is a god of comfort and He comforts us through our pain.
  - b) We're back to the idea of how to deal with pain. Sometimes even those who are close to us can't relate to the emotional pain we are dealing with.



- c) There are times when I don't want those around me to fix me, but just give me comfort through what I am dealing with. While a hug from someone close to me may help, true comfort comes from God and that is the point here.
  - d) Verse 20 says, "His presence keeps us safe from accusing tongues". Ok, think about that literally for a moment. Does praying to God actually put a literal shelter around us from people saying negative things? Of course not. However, praying to and trusting in God does give us protection from negative speech in a way that is difficult to explain.
    - i) God's comfort brings us peace from whatever words are spoken against us. If God loves us no matter what, what then can people say against us that really hurts in comparison to God's love? That is the key point of these verses.
25. Verse 21: Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city.
- a) It would help to start by explaining what is a "besieged city". In David's time, armies conquered and took over cities. I suspect that those who survived the siege and are living under it would be saying negative things to those who conquered them.
    - i) Whether or not the siege itself is appropriate is not the point of the verse. The point is David took comfort from God in a place where he was not wanted.
  - b) With that said, think of this verse in terms of being in a place that is not comfortable to us. The point is God can give us comfort in an uncomfortable situation or location. God can show His love to us in a place that we don't feel welcome by the people around us.
26. Verse 22: In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.
- a) I have had a few times in my life where I was "down so low" I felt like I was cut off from God. The point is not what caused us to feel so low, as much as it is the knowledge that God heard our cry in that low state and gave us comfort through that time.
  - b) The point is we as believers can be so overwhelmed by our problems we feel like God has given up on us. Yet, somehow David knew that in such low times, God has heard our cry for mercy (i.e., forgiveness of how we sinned or even doubted him).
27. Verse 23: Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. <sup>24</sup> Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.
- a) This psalm ends with the reminder of why we are to love God. It is because God preserves us (that includes the idea of giving us comfort during times of doubt).
    - i) At the same time God "pays back the proud in full." Ok, what does that mean? The essential idea is the proud refers to someone who refuses to turn a situation over to God. How does God pay them back? Essentially by giving such people what they want. I like to think of hell as an eternal separation from God. That is the proper payback for someone who doesn't desire to be with God.
  - b) That comment leads us perfectly to the last verse. It says for the believer in God to be strong (i.e., keep trusting in Him) because He (God) will never let us down. He promises to give comfort to those who ask Him for comfort. I have found that God has never let me down through whatever I have to deal with and I trust that He will see me through the future. That in effect, is the essential point of this psalm.
- c) OK, I'm going to squeeze in one more fairly short psalm before we call it a lesson.
28. Psalm 32, title: Of David. A *maskil*.
- a) Ok what is a maskil? It most likely refers (meaning we don't know for sure) to a musical term. The Amplified Bible says "A skillful song, or a didactic or reflective poem"
  - b) The other clue we have about this title is to look at the psalm itself. I believe the point of this psalm is about the joy over realizing one is forgiven of one's sins.
  - c) Ok John, why bring up this topic here? How does it relate to what we have just finished?
    - i) In the last psalm, David just dealt with the topic of going through internal suffering and wondering "where was God" during that time?

- ii) I suspect that David thought that his doubts of God "being there" was a sin. To not trust in God at any moment in time is about having doubts. If that is true, why confess it as a sin? What God asks of us is to believe in Him and trust Him. When we go through periods of doubts due to our circumstances around us, that in effect is sin because we doubt that God can help us at this moment.
    - iii) Whether or not this theory is true, it does fit in with this group of psalms. I stated in the introduction that Psalms 24 through 32 are considered one group. The focus of these psalms is on dealing with our sins, and the sins of those around us, and asking God to separate us (believers) from those who don't trust in Him.
  - d) If we are praying that type of prayer, then it would follow that our own doubts in God would be considered sin, and that is the reason for this confessional psalm.
  - e) OK John, suppose you are totally wrong about the purpose of this psalm. Then, just read it as a psalm of confession of sin, and the realization that God has forgiven us of our sins.
29. Verse 1: Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
- a) The emphasis is on "blessed". That word can also be translated "happy". If the God of the universe doesn't count our sins against us, what could possibly matter in this lifetime that compares to that fact? That the point of this verse. (In a moment we will we get to how and why God forgives us. For now, let's just focus on the happiness part. ☺)
30. Verse 2: Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- a) Verse 2 is fairly similar to the first verse. The point is to remember that God does not count sin against those who trusts in Him. It is not about being perfect, but is about being perfectly forgiven. That does not mean we should not act differently from nonbelievers, but simply remember that we are forgiven.
    - i) Paul picks up on this issue as well. (See 2nd Corinthians 5:9 and Romans 4:8.)
  - b) OK, time for the "how" question: For the Old Testament believer, forgiveness involved a series of animal sacrifices. Those sacrifices point to the ultimate sacrifice Jesus paid on the cross. Still, how did animal sacrifices help the Old Testament believer? The idea is about making an innocent animal suffer for our sins reminds us that sin hurts the innocent and God taught that through the sacrificial system.
    - i) So why is it that religious Jews don't practice animal sacrifices today? The short answer is because there is no official temple in Jerusalem they practice confessing their sins instead. My response is then, "Well, what about the biblical principal of "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin?" The debate over sin continues from there. (I've learned the hard way you can't argue anyone into God's kingdom. Change has to come from God working through them.)
    - ii) For the New Testament believer it is about trusting in our blood sacrifice, which was Jesus' payment on the cross. That is something we should never take lightly.
  - c) The second part of this verse says, "Whose spirit has no deceit". That does not mean God expects us to be perfect. It means that when we are in trouble, we eventually run back to God and realize that He is our only hope through whatever we are dealing with.
31. Verse 3: When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
- a) My translation of this verse: When I was too stubborn to confess my sins to God, it hurt me on the inside as I was carrying the weight of what I did wrong.
  - b) Let's talk about why we don't confess our sins to God. We may look back at a particular situation and say in effect, "I was right, they were wrong and therefore there is nothing for me to confess as wrong". That is pride. The refusal to look at our part in any given situation is usually where pride comes in and our refusal to confess our part to God.
  - c) Getting back to the verse, do our bones waste away at unconfessed sin? I know that carrying guilt over sin does cause physical damage to our body and that is David's point.

32. Verse 4: For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah*
- a) How do we know when we need to confess some sort of sin? The answer could be as simple as we feel as if God's hand is "heavy upon us". Translation: We have difficulty coping with life because we can't stop thinking about some past situation.
    - i) Often, we keep playing a scene from our life over and over again looking for answers, instead of just confessing it and turning it over to God.
  - b) God wants our problems to become His problem and not worry about it. Sometimes confession is simply to say in effect, "God, I don't know what to do about this situation. I just give this situation over to You and now You can deal with it."
  - c) Aren't there times we are going to have to confess to those we hurt? Sure. The first step is giving the situation to God. Then He will lead us as to what to say next and to "whom".
33. Verse 5: Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*
- a) Before I say anything else, notice the double "Selah". There is one at the end of Verse 4 and another one here at the end of Verse 5. As I've stated in past lessons, that word is untranslated and it essentially means to stop and contemplate what the verse is saying.
  - b) Verse 4 was saying in effect that we are mentally weighted down by what should have been confessed to God. Verse 5 is saying in effect that once we gave our sins and our problems to God we can then walk with confidence that God has forgiven us.
    - i) The point here is that both of these concepts are important enough to deserve a "Selah", which means we should contemplate its meaning.
  - c) Verse 5 is an important transition verse. It is saying in effect, the moment of comfort comes when I actually acknowledged my sin and let it go.
    - i) In the bible, when people confess their sins, one gets the impression God is there ready to forgive them even before the words come out of their mouth. God is so anxious to forgive us, He does not even wait for the actual words to be formed but forgives us just when we have the true thought of letting go of our sins.
34. Verse 6: Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.
- a) Verse 6 is saying effect, confess one's sins while one has a chance (i.e., while one is alive and while those thoughts are on our minds).
  - b) And what does the "mighty waters rising" refer to? It is a metaphor for sins or even the problems that we face. In other words before we "drown" in our problems, those who trust in God should let go of their problems and turn the situation over to Him.
35. Verse 7: You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*
- a) Hey John, didn't we just have some verses about God being our hiding place, i.e., a place of refuge? Yes we did, but it was from the previous psalm. More importantly it is showing that David has the right attitude about dealing with his fears: It is about giving them to God and seeing Him as a refuge. (That is, a hiding place.)
  - b) One cannot literally hide in God, so what does that mean? It means that one can pray to God for protection. The idea is that when the world was too much for David to handle, he thinks of God as a place to run to (in prayer) as protection from trouble.
  - c) How does prayer become a "hiding place"? Time alone with God gives one the strength to face whatever one has to face, so that prayer time is a successful hiding place.
  - d) This leads me to the last part of the verse: It says "songs of deliverance". God does not literally sing songs to us when we pray. ☺ It is possible David is thinking of some bible song (for the lack of a better term) while he was praying. When we spend time in prayer with Him, not only do we feel comforted, but God then gives us the strength and courage to move on. I believe that is what David meant here.

36. Verse 8: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.
- David is saying here that God will guide us in the way we should go. Here was David, scared about something, turning to God for comfort. Now here in Verse 8, David is saying that God will instruct us on what to do next.
  - Does that mean that God will literally talk to us as we pray? I doubt David heard the voice of God any more than you or I do. I find that after we commit ourselves to prayer, God then guides us toward the outcome that He wants from a particular situation.
37. Verse 9: Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.
- The simple point of the verse is to follow what God instructs us to do and not be stubborn. The idea is we look to the bible as our instruction manual of how to live. If we do that and regularly prayer, I find that God does guide us.
  - When we resist God's desire for our lives, we become like a stubborn mule and then God, who still wants His will done in our lives, has to guide us the "hard way".
  - As we get to the end of this psalm and the end of this section of the psalms, we see the wrap up point coming in effect to do what God desires of us and avoid stubbornness.
38. Verse 10: Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.
- One of the common themes of the last group of psalms (again Psalms 25-32) is that David spent a lot of time distinguishing between the lifestyles of those who are saved and those who don't trust in God. In this verse, David summarizes the key difference in that the wicked has lots of troubles, but those who trust in God are surrounded by His love.
  - OK, the last time I checked, those of us who trust in God have just as many "woe's" as those who don't trust in Him. So what is David describing here? The point is those who do trust God have the great advance of being able to trust in, and get comfort from the God of the Universe who created everything, but still has a great individual love for all people who are willing to commit their lives to serving Him.
  - Therefore the "woes of the wicked" is not so much about bad things that happen to them (in this lifetime) as much as it the fact they won't turn to God to help them through it.
39. Verse 11: Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!
- The end of this psalm and the end of this section says in effect to rejoice. That literally means to jump up and down with joy. Isn't David still in trouble from his enemies? Aren't our problems still real and still right in front of us? Yes to both of those questions.
  - The reason we (the Christian believer) can rejoice is not that our problems magically go away by prayer or say reading a particular psalm.
    - What these psalms do is give us proper perspective about our problems in comparison to the greatness of God. They remind us that God guides us through whatever we are dealing with. That is the reason for rejoicing here.
  - The point is we trust in is a great God who loves us, cares for us, wants to guide us. If we know God has gotten us through our past predicaments, then we should also know He will get us through the present one, even though we don't know how. That realization that God will see us through our problems should cause us to rejoice.
40. On that happy note, I'll end this study and go to the closing prayer: Father, there are times where we face things where we don't know what to do. Our continuing trust in You is the only thing we can rely on to get us through whatever issues and problems we face. Help us to remember that You are there, You are guiding us, and You will see us through our situations. Help us with our doubts, guide the decisions we need to make in life and help us to remember that trusting in You is not just about salvation, but about the fact You want to guide and direct our lives for Your glory. Help us make a difference for You as we are Your witnesses to the world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.