

1. My title for this lesson is "dealing with unbelievers". Most of the text in this lesson is about just that, dealing with unbelievers. The question is in effect, "What do we do with them?" Do we ignore those who ignore God? Do we just pray for their salvation? Do we just pray for them to stop hurting believers and themselves? More importantly, what does God think of them?
  - a) Let me start with going back to David's life. We do know that David wrote both of these psalms. We don't have any information as to why or when he wrote these. What interests me more is the question of why are these psalms placed here?
  - b) In the last lesson, the focus was on joy. It was about celebrating the victories in life that God has given us and will give us in the future. It is to remind us to have a good attitude through whatever life throws at us. There is an old saying that other people can have control over our circumstances, but never our attitudes.
    - i) Part of having joy in life is to remember that we can't always fix the situation around us, but we can control and have a good attitude through our situations. That is what David taught us in the last lesson.
  - c) This leads us to this lesson. Why would David now focus on nonbelievers? I suspect the reason is after contemplating our own eternal "joy", there is still the question of nonbelievers. What about their fate and how they treat others? What about how they treat believers? What are we to do about them?
2. OK John, enough questions. How about giving some answers? ☺
  - a) First God does want us to care about unbelievers. It is the classical statement of loving the person but hating the sinful deeds that they do. Practically speaking, it means we sincerely pray that such people change. David refers to that principal in these psalms.
  - b) In this lesson, David complains that even though he prays for specific unbelievers, they still harm (or try to harm) him (David) when they get the chance. David isn't telling us that so we can care about his life. He is telling us that because that is what we can expect from nonbelievers even though we make an effort to care about them.
  - c) An underlying point of this lesson is we can't fix people. We can and should pray that the bad deeds they do come to "nothing". We can and should pray for them to change. We have to remember that even though we pray such prayers, the results are up to God and not up to ourselves. All we can do is control our attitudes, as we can't control what the world is doing around us. I suspect that is what David is doing here.
  - d) I also suspect that part of this lesson deals with evil spiritual forces as well. Such evil forces can be (but not always be) behind the evil deeds that nonbelievers do. Remember that such demons can't take away our salvation, but they can and do work to make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. Part of the reason we pray to God for protection is that only He can protect us from such forces.
  - e) Finally, remember that in life we should not isolate ourselves so that we never encounter such unbelievers. God does call Christians to be a witness to the world. If we are going to deal with nonbelievers, we can expect "pain" that comes from dealing with them and that is a purpose that is in these two psalms.
3. With that said, let's read what these two psalms teach us about dealing with nonbelievers.
4. Psalm 35 - Title: Of David.
  - a) The only thing said of the title is that David wrote it. So why preserve that fact? I suspect that it was placed here for a reason. The last two psalms dealt with praising God. Now here in Psalm 35 here is David (and us) back to asking for God's protection.
  - b) I believe the idea is that once we thank God for what He has done in our lives, we still have to deal with our lives and therefore, it is important to ask for His protection. Thus the placement of this psalm after Psalm 34 (also written by David).

5. Verse 1: Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. <sup>2</sup> Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. <sup>3</sup> Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."
- a) Verse 1 seems like a strange request. It is asking God to fight against those who are fighting against David. Does that mean that God physically can fight people or that He takes sides in a battle? Not exactly. The idea of this verse is that we desire to win the battles we face. We are seeking God's help in order to win those battles.
  - b) If you are trusting in Jesus Christ, whether you realize it or not, you and I are engaged in spiritual battles every day. There are demonic forces that don't want us to make a difference for Jesus. Such forces will look for ways to make us ineffective witnesses for Him. How do they do that? By causing problems to occur all around us. We become so busy dealing with our problems that we can't be a good witness for Jesus.
  - c) OK let's go back to David's battles themselves. Does God Himself get involved in such battles? Verse 2 asks God to take up a shield and buckler (a small shield) in order to battle our enemies? Does He use those things and a spear and javelin as stated in Verse 3?
    - i) Know that these are weapons that David could mentally relate to, as they were the common offensive and defensive weapons of David's day.
    - ii) It might be the equivalent of us asking God to get in His tank or drop bombs on our enemies. The point is not the type of weaponry. The point is we are asking God to get involved in the battles we are fighting. In other words, we don't have the power to combat such forces on our own and are asking for His help in order to win such battles.
    - iii) OK John, I am still confused. If "God is God", couldn't He just wipe out those that want to harm us? Couldn't He just end Satan by "saying so"? Why not just ask God to bring such demonic forces to an end? Why ask Him to battle them?
      - a) My daughter asked me that same question a few weeks back. She's not old enough yet to grasp the answer, but let me try writing it out.
      - b) God allows evil forces to exist in the world to keep us close to Him. Since such forces are more powerful than we are, amongst other things, such evil forces are a motivational force to keep us close to God.
    - iv) So John, if that is true, why does evil things happen to good people? There are lots of examples through history of Christians being killed by those who oppose God. Did they fail to pray for God's protection?
      - a) Sometimes God allows "evil" to win battles that somehow are used for His glory. It may be that a Christian's death gets others to pray more and draw closer to Him. I don't know all the reasons why God allows evil to triumph at times. I just do know that ultimately we are dependant upon Him for our protection and somehow God works all of that out for our glory.
  - d) This surprisingly, does lead us back to the verses. So how does God actually protect us?
    - i) I don't know the "particulars" of spiritual battles but I know they exist. I do know there are angelic forces sent by God and demonic forces that fight all around us.
    - ii) I do know that praying for God's protection does make a difference. Maybe it brings in more good angels to fight on our side. There are biblical clues that such spiritual battles exist (see Daniel Chapter 10: 12-14 as an example) and that we ask for God's help in order to win such battles.
    - iii) But David specifically asked for God to take up his shield, javelin etc. If David wanted God to send more angels to help David, why didn't he say so?
      - a) Personally, I figure if we ask God for His help, He can then specify what is needed to actually help us. The point is we should be aware that such battles exist and that God wants us to draw close to Him in order to combat such spiritual battles. That is the purpose of these verses.

6. Verse 4: May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. <sup>5</sup> May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; <sup>6</sup> may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
- a) Did David win all of the battles he fought (as recorded in the bible) because he specifically prayed prayers like this? I don't think so. I believe David won all of those battles, as it was God's will for him to do so. Prayers like this gave David the courage and strength to face what he had to face on a daily basis. Because it was God's will for David to win those battles, I am sure God was working in the background to make those victories possible.
  - b) OK, and how does that bit of historical information help me?
    - i) For starters, we don't know what God has planned for us today, so we might as well ask Him for victories in our life. We can and should ask for God's guidance and ask Him to guide us to victory over whatever issues or battles we face.
    - ii) As I said earlier in this lesson, all Christians are involved in spiritual warfare whether we realize it or not. Satan can't take away our salvation, however he can and does work to make us a bad witness for God. That is why we should pray for God's protection in life. That alone is a good enough reason to pray this psalm.
    - iii) Again, I don't visualize God himself taking up weapons of war to fight demonic creatures. However, I do believe we can and should ask God for victories in the spiritual battles of life, and that is what these verses are discussing here.
  - c) Let's go over some of the terminology in these verses before moving on:
    - i) Verse 4 is literally petitioning God to make our enemies turn back in shame. If it is describing spiritual forces, it is saying in effect, "May my enemies realize they are outnumbered and cannot win this battle." If it is describing a literal battle, it is saying in effect, "May my enemies realize they are fighting against God's will."
    - ii) Verse 5 compares the enemy to "chaff in the wind". Let me explain that: When one harvests wheat, there is a covering over the top of the wheat grain called chaff. If one shakes cut wheat in the wind, the chaff is much lighter and blows away while the heavier weighing wheat just falls back down to the ground.
      - a) David comes from a society that cut it's own wheat and could relate literally to what this verse is talking about.
      - b) The point is just as the chaff is blown away by the wind, may the evil forces we deal with be "blown away" and become useless.
    - iii) Verse 6 asks that their path be "dark and slippery". The general idea is that whatever we face, may such forces fail to see what is ahead of them and literally fall due to the blindness of what they cannot see.
      - a) Whether this is a spiritual battle or a literal battle, the prayer is in effect to let our enemies fall and be blinded by God.
    - iv) Finally, there is a reference to the (not "a", but "the") Angel of the Lord. As I taught in the last lesson, I believe this is a reference to an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. David did teach in the previous psalm (Psalm 34:7) that those who seek God do get the privilege of this specific Angel of the Lord protecting them.
      - a) Are you saying that Jesus leads each of our individual battles? No, but He is in charge. We pray to God the Father through God the Son. Therefore we are petitioning Jesus help in dealing with the battles we face in life. That in the Old Testament is called invoking the "Angel of the Lord". In the New Testament we call that praying through Jesus to ask God's help.
      - b) But the verse asks the Angel of the Lord to pursue our enemies. Personally I see this as God leading the forces that fight against us. I don't literally picture Jesus fighting against spiritual beings as much as it is "God ordained" in whatever forces are used to combat what we have to face.

7. Verse 7: Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, <sup>8</sup> may ruin overtake them by surprise-- may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.
- a) Every now and then I like to say that the "Willie E. Coyote" cartoon character is biblical. If you have seen any of those cartoons growing up, the point is this character constantly creates traps to catch his enemy and constantly gets caught in the traps he sets for others.
    - i) That is actually a good visual picture of what is happening in these verses. David is describing traps being set by his enemies. David is asking that whoever set these traps to be caught in them.
  - b) OK and what does this have to do with us? ☺ Do the spiritual or literal forces that we face literally set traps for us? How often have we thought something like, "Boy, I really walked right into that one"? What is the advantage of having our enemies fall into their own traps? I suspect part of it is for them to literally see the hand of God at work in that the evil they have devised for others is used to catch them.
    - i) Let me put this thought another way: God wants all people to turn to Him. If we are facing a literal enemy that set traps for us, and that enemy literally falls into their own trap, it might cause them to look to God for answers.
    - ii) Let me end it this way: We have no idea what we are going to face in life. We may or may not have to face literal (real people) enemies in life. We as believers do have to face spiritual enemies especially if we are working to make a difference for God in our lives. We don't know what those spiritual enemies are doing to try to get our focus off of God. We should not only ask God for His protection, but to bring down the plans our enemies have for us.
  - c) I also want to bring up for doubters, the concept of spiritual enemies: Try sharing Jesus with someone and watch how things just happen to stop that event. Go make a difference for Jesus and watch as problems just "occur". That is spiritual warfare.
  - d) This is also why I desire the prayers of those reading this study. This ministry is only effective due to the prayers of others like you who are also engaged in spiritual battles.
    - i) OK, enough of my commercial. ☺ Let's get back to the psalm.
8. Verse 9: Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation. <sup>10</sup> My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them."
- a) Verse 9 starts with the word "then". My question is "when is the then" of this rejoicing?
    - i) I suspect the answer is different for every believer. For many, this event does not happen until we get to heaven. For others of us, we can watch spiritual victories occur in our lifetime. The point is these verses are true for all believers at times.
    - ii) There are moments when we can realize that we can stop fighting whatever forces or issues we are fighting and we can rejoice in the victory God gives us.
    - iii) Remember that the word meaning "rejoice" literally means to jump up and down with joy. So the next time you sense that God has lead you to some sort of victory, take the moment to jump up and down with joy.
  - b) In Verse 10, David mentions the "poor and needy". This has nothing to do with a lack of money. The idea of "poor and needy" refers to our spiritual state. Jesus said, "Blessed is the man (or woman) who is poor in spirit". (Matthew 5:3, NIV). The idea of that verse is about realizing how helpless we are without God.
    - i) Verse 10 is saying that without His help, we are "spiritual poor". With God's help, we can overcome all forces that appear too strong for us to handle on our own.
    - ii) Can it literally refer to a battle situation and facing a stronger enemy? Of course. It could even refer to a business situation or a relationship struggle where we are battling something bigger than us. The point is we can have victory in these situations by remembering "God and us" make a majority. That's the point here.

9. Verse 11: Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about.  
<sup>12</sup>They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn.
- a) Have you ever been in a situation like David here when he was in trouble for something that was no fault of his own? As another example, have you ever had to face a battle that you had no desire to face in the first place? That is what David is experiencing here.
  - b) Most of us had to deal with tough situations that we never expected to deal with. We may have contracted a serious illness or an injury due to no fault of our own. We may have a child who suffers from something that we have no idea how they got that way.
    - i) That in effect is David's point here. For example some sort of problem can jump in our lives and we not only don't understand why it is there, but why it is after us in the first place. How do we know if these bad events are "evil"? We don't. We just know we have to deal with those difficult situations in life.
      - a) So what do we do when we face such a situation? For starters, we turn to God to help us deal with that situation. David is getting to that point.
10. Verse 13: Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, <sup>14</sup> I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother.
- a) There are times in the Psalms where David likes to divide the world into "us and them". He understands God separates believers from nonbelievers. David also knows God will eternally punish nonbelievers. David desired to hate what God hates.
    - i) Let's remember what we do when we are angry with someone. Our first thought is usually "it is all their fault" and we did nothing wrong. It isn't until we realize that we can't fix other people that we realize that all we can do is ask God to help us with our issues and it is His job to work on others.
    - ii) Personally, I have found that when I let go of my worries about other people, that is when situations somehow just get better. It is as if God is just waiting for me to let go of a problem or situation so He can step in and improve things.
  - b) Ok John, nice speech. ☺ What does it have to do with these verses?
    - i) The point here is David is describing times when those he considered enemies of his were in trouble themselves. What did David do then? He humbled himself (probably meant he stopped, kneeled and prayed) for those enemies.
    - ii) So why do that? Why pray for those who want to do us harm? I'm sure part of it is so they would stop hurting us. Part of it is that David cared for them and wanted to see them change in a way that is pleasing to God.
    - iii) Praying for those who have hurt us helps to deal with that pain. Praying for the well being of someone who has hurt us helps us to let go of what they have done to us. That is why Jesus taught to pray for our enemies. (See Matthew 5:44.)
11. Verse 15: But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; attackers gathered against me when I was unaware. They slandered me without ceasing. <sup>16</sup> Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me.
- a) David is describing the same person or group in these two verses that he was in the last two verses. The point David is making here is in effect, "The same people who I prayed for and humbled myself for when they were down, are now happy (ecstatic) because I (David) am hurting at the present moment. So, God what do I do about them?"
    - i) David is feeling real emotional pain as he truly humbled himself and prayed for these unnamed unbelievers and when those same people saw David down, instead of humbling themselves before God, they mocked David's condition.
  - b) So what do we do if we face such a condition? If people we care about or just prayed for, make an effort to hurt us or put us down when we are down, what do we do?
    - i) The answer starts with looking to God to help us through such a situation. That is the point of the next verse which we will tackle now:

12. Verse 17: O Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue my life from their ravages, my precious life from these lions.
  - a) Here is David in some sort of emotional pain because of some unnamed problem. The problem is made worse because there are people around him, who not only didn't care for God, but somehow "piled on" David's pain by putting him down at this moment.
    - i) So what does David do about that pain? Simply give it to God and say in effect, "This is too much for me to handle. You (God) deal with it because it is too painful and too big of an issue for me to deal with now."
  - b) I have to admit some of the biggest answers to pray I ever had was when I prayed the single word, "Help". I didn't have the emotional ability to handle what was in front of me, and I simply turn the whole situation over to God and say, "You deal with this!"
    - i) That in effect, is what God wants us to constantly do with our lives. He wants to be in charge and He wants to take over situations. He wants us to realize how much we need Him and how much help He can offer when things seem hopeless.
    - ii) Believing in God is more than trusting He exists and trusting He has forgiven our sins. It is about trusting that He cares about our lives and wants to get involved in our lives on a daily basis and help us with all of our struggles.
13. Verse 18: I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you.
  - a) My first thought of reading Verse 18 in context of the last verse is that David is attempting to "bribe God". The text (in context of Verse 17) is saying in effect, "Dear God rescue me so then I could give you praise in church for what You did."
    - i) God cannot be bribed. We can't ask God to do something so "then" will we agree to praise to Him. On the other hand we can say in effect, "Dear God, I desire opportunities to praise You for what You have done in my life and what You are going to do. If you rescue me out of this situation, it will give me another reason to praise You. However, if You decide not to rescue me out of this situation, I will still praise You for who You are and what You have done in my life."
  - b) I have found that once we truly let go and give God our problems, that is when He best deals with them. Yes it gives us another reason to praise Him and that is the point here.
  - c) The danger here is thinking of God as a "genie in a bottle" who will automatically rescue us just because we asked Him to or because we offer to praise Him afterwards.
    - i) God does work His way on His timing. Still, God wants us to let go of our worries and our issues and let Him work on His timing.
  - d) So how do we know our problems just got better because we stopped worrying about them? How do we know God is behind the scenes helping us? The best answer is when things get better we can see how God has worked. The more we realize God is working, the more obvious it becomes that He is making the difference.
  - e) Meanwhile, David is still in trouble and is begging for God's help here.
14. Verse 19: Let not those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; let not those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. <sup>20</sup> They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land. <sup>21</sup> They gape at me and say, "Aha! Aha! With our own eyes we have seen it."
  - a) In these three verses, David continues to describe in details how some people who he prayed for are now trying to hurt him by their actions.
  - b) Here's a thought: Isn't God aware of all of these details? Why is it necessary to write them out (or pray them) if a God who "knows everything" is aware of the situation?
    - i) For starters, that is a way of pouring our heart out to God. It is a way of us to recall the situation at hand. For us to mentally let go of our problems, often it helps to describe in detail how we are hurt and how we are in pain.
  - c) In summary, God is aware of our problems, but in order for us to give our problems to God, first it is often necessary to state how we are hurt.

15. Verse 22: O LORD, you have seen this; be not silent. Do not be far from me, O Lord. <sup>23</sup> Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord. <sup>24</sup> Vindicate me in your righteousness, O LORD my God; do not let them gloat over me. <sup>25</sup> Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!" or say, "We have swallowed him up."
- a) In the last set of verses, David did not make any prayer request to God, but just listed reasons why he is angry at some people. In these three verses, David is now asking God to help deal with those who consider David as an enemy.
  - b) OK, let's go to the "why" question: Why ask God for help when people are trying to hurt us? To put it another way, here are some people that don't believe in God (either verbally or physically) attacking David. Why doesn't David just fight back himself?
    - i) The underlying point here is that those who put their trust in God can rely on Him to deal with the issues and people we have to face in life. The point is when people or forces are trying to hurt us, the first thing we should do is seek God's help in dealing with these people.
  - c) These verses appear to be asking God to "wake up". David does not sense God helping him at this moment and it feels like God is not getting involved in his problems.
    - i) So can God only help us if we ask Him? If "God is god", He can do what He wants when He wants. Often I have seen God help those who are His even without asking. The issue is not so much getting God to "wake up" as it is for us to acknowledge how helpless we are to remedy a situation without His help.
    - ii) The idea of such a prayer request here is when we cry out to God for help, and then we do see Him work through a situation, we can give Him the credit.
    - iii) In other words, this type of request for prayer is a way to get our focus onto Him to deal with our problems and not trying to fix it by ourselves.
16. Verse 26: May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace. <sup>27</sup> May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, "The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant."
- a) David changes his focus from asking God to intervene to focusing on his enemies.
  - b) David is saying in effect, may those who want to hurt me feel "shame and disgrace". At the same time, may those who seek God and care about David feel the joy and gladness when (not if, but "when") God intervenes to make the situation better.
  - c) So, does this mean that God has to intervene because David asked Him to? The answer is no and we don't know if David's prayer request here gets answered.
    - i) God does want to help those who truly seek Him (and of course, trust in His forgiveness of sins through Jesus). One also has to accept the idea that God works on His timing not ours. An underlying point of this psalm is that we don't know what is God's timing so in effect, we are asking Him to work now.
  - d) OK, why does God answer this type of request for help sometime but not all the times? We all know good people who have had to endure all types of suffering and sometimes to the point of death. Why does God choose to rescue some who pray out to Him and apparently ignore the prayers of others?
    - i) A perfect god (by definition) would hear all prayer requests. To those who it appears as if God is not helping, He is still listening to those prayers and responding in His own way. For example, some people who have been martyred for the faith "paved the way" for others to draw closer to God or are then given the strength to endure what they have to go through for Jesus.
    - ii) Remember that prayer is about getting His will done and not ours. Sometimes we have to accept it is His will for us to go through tough times.
    - iii) I cannot explain all bad things that happen to good people. I just know that those who trust Him can count on God to see them through their specific trials.

- e) OK John, those are good points. ☺ What does it have to do with these verses?
    - i) It is ok to ask God to say, bring harm or just bring down those who want to hurt us. It is also ok to ask God to bless those who are praying for us. Neither of these types of prayers gets God to change His plans. The prayer request is for us to ask Him (God) what He wants. It gets our focus on Him, and not our problems.
    - ii) Sometimes answers to prayers for help come after we acknowledge that He is in charge of this particular situation. To put it simply, we don't know what God is going to do until we ask Him, so we do ask Him. In these verses David is asking God in effect to knock down the plans of those forces or people that want to hurt David and bless those who are standing by Him.
      - a) God may or may not answer David's prayers the way David wants them to be answered. However, praying such a prayer is a method of giving the issues we are facing at any moment to Him. It is saying in effect, "This is now your problem to deal with it as You (God) see best".
17. Verse 28: My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long.
- a) This verse is not (notice the "not") saying that David will only praise God if He responds to David's prayer request on his (David's) timing and his way of dealing with his issues.
  - b) David is saying that He will praise God in effect, "Because He is God" and because David trusts that God loves him and will work out whatever David is dealing with for His glory.
  - c) To put it another way, "God loves us too much to leave us alone". That alone should be a reason to praise God on a regular basis. Sometimes we can sense God working and sometimes we cannot. Sometimes things go horribly wrong and we don't know how or when God will work out whatever we are dealing with.
    - i) We can ask God to work on our timing, as we don't know His timing.
    - ii) David knows in effect, that whatever happens to him in this life, is still "nothing" in comparison to eternity. We can praise God for being righteous (that is, being perfect in all of His ways and perfect in His timing of things) because no matter what happens to us in this lifetime, we can trust in the fact we will live forever.
    - iii) I once heard pastor Jon Curson say in effect, "When one is so low that one cannot think of any solution to one's problems, remember that we will live forever. When one has troubles so bad one cannot think of any good thing, remember that we will live forever. Keep focusing on the "forever" part, will help us deal with the problems we have to deal with in this lifetime."
  - d) The underlying point of this verse and this psalm is we don't know how and when God is going to work, but we can trust Him and no matter what happens in our lifetime, we should praise God for His "righteousness" (doing what is right) and for our salvation.
    - i) On that pretty happy note, I can move on to Psalm 36.
18. Psalm 36 Title: For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD.
- a) Well, we know David wrote this psalm and it was also designed to be sung, which is the reference to "the director of music".
  - b) One gets the impression based on a lot of psalm titles like this one that David and some unnamed person form a "musical team". David writes the lyrics and then the director of music adds the music. It is possible, but we don't know for sure.
  - c) The title also mentions David as a servant of God. OK, why is that here?
    - i) This 12-line psalm focuses on the difference between believers and nonbelievers.
    - ii) To be a believer in God includes the idea of being His servant. A servant willingly does what His master (that is God here) asks of us. OK, God has never verbally speaks to us, how do we know what He desires? That is where regular time with Him in prayer and in His word teaches us what is His desire for our lives.
    - iii) It might be a little easier to explain what a servant of God "is not", and that is what the first few verses of this psalm, does. Which of course, leads us to Verse 1.



19. Verse 1: An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.
  - a) The term "oracle is within my heart", essentially means that David was contemplating (thinking about) something. That "something" is the sinfulness of the wicked.
  - b) Let's start with a tough question: Why should we think about the sins of the wicked?
    - i) Part of the answer is God wants us to "Love what He loves and hate what He hates". If we are to separate ourselves from the wicked, it helps at time to contemplate what drives such people to act this way, as to avoid that behavior.
  - c) This leads to the second sentence that says in effect: There is no fear of God before His eyes. That refers to those people who don't care about God in the first place.
    - i) What starts people down the wrong path in life is that they have no fear of God's punishment. Those who commit sins and never repent of such sins and don't fear eternal punishment.
    - ii) The point for us as believers is to commit ourselves to "fearing God". It is not about fearing to be in His presence, as much as it is fearing not pleasing Him.
    - iii) It doesn't mean God will strike us down on the spot when we mess up. It means that God takes sin "seriously" (for a lack of a better word) and it should be our desire to turn from that sin as quickly as possible.
20. Verse 2: For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.
  - a) The idea of the first half of this verse is about vanity. The point is about loving oneself too much to care about pleasing God or even considering the mistakes one is making.
    - i) If you think about it, almost all sin comes down to "vanity". That is about the desire to do our will as opposed to God's will for our lives at any moment.
    - ii) This verse is not talking about those who desire to please God and mess up. This verse is teaching about those who never care about pleasing Him in the first place.
  - b) At this point in the psalm, the purpose is not to describe the final outcome of such people, but just to think about their actions so we can learn to avoid acting like them.
21. Verse 3: The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. <sup>4</sup>Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.
  - a) The point of Verse 3 is in effect, "The person who doesn't fear God or cares about pleasing Him will be evident by his actions." Since we don't know what a person is thinking, we can only tell if he or she has a heart for God by what that say and do.
    - i) If someone's words are "wicked and deceitful" as stated in Verse 3, then we should not trust what they say. If we are not sure, we should hold off judging them until we know more about them. Eternal judgment is up to God. Judgment of how we interact with other people is up to us. God does call on us to judge behavior.
    - ii) When someone says to us, "don't judge", we can respond with, "Aren't you judging me with those words? We make judgments all the time and are called to judge actions for this lifetime, not for the next one."
  - b) Verse 4 takes the actions of evil people one step further. It is saying in effect, "It is not enough for evil people to do what is sinful. They even think about doing what is sinful while lying in bed, that is, prior to acting out their sins.
    - i) Why is David writing all of this out here? Isn't God aware of such evil deeds? David's point here about discussing evil is so that we know what to avoid. If we find ourselves planning to do what we know is wrong or actually acting out in ways that are sinful, we can then realize we are going down the wrong path for the moment and need to change.

22. Verse 5: Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.
- a) OK, it appears that David can't take any more negativity at this point and speaks about God's love and faithfulness. The point is we realize that despite all of the evil that exists, God is greater in power than all evil. He is faithful to preserve us through such evil and rescue us (in this lifetime and in the next one) from such evil.
  - b) David is contemplating that the world is full of evil people. We as believers, by ourselves (without God's help) cannot overcome such evil. That is one motivation to stay close to God, to help us deal with nonbelievers in the first place.
23. Verse 6: Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. <sup>7</sup>How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- a) In these two verses, David is "letting it out" how much he respects God and realizes just how much love God has for those of us who do trust in Him. These verses are describing attributes of God in terms David (and hopefully us) can relate to. Let me explain:
    - i) David calls God's righteous "mighty mountains". The idea here is that while the evil people can't help sinning, God does what is right. God being perfect in doing what is right is as "vast in size" as mighty mountains.
    - ii) David calls God's justice like the "great deep". How God works things out for our glory is "deeper" than what we can understand.
    - iii) Verse 6 says God preserves man and beast. Obviously people and animals die at different ages, so what did David mean by that statement? David is saying that God allows both types of species to continue to live and survive despite the evil things that happen in this world. It is not about individual lives, but about specific species to continue to live by His will.
  - b) This leads us to Verse 7. If God is beyond comprehension in being "right" and "just" and He allows people and animals to keep on surviving, what does that mean to those of us who are trusting in Him for our eternal rewards? The point here is simply that we can trust in God. Those of us who trust in God can "sleep at night" knowing that He is faithful in His love for us. David in his own poetic style is saying that we as believers can trust in Him to see us through this life.
24. Verse 8: They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. <sup>9</sup>For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
- a) It would help to remember here that David is talking about believers. The term "they" at the start of the verse refers to believers. Therefore, we as believers somehow "feast on the abundance of your (God's) house". Let me discuss this term for a bit:
    - i) Does this mean that all believers eat well in this lifetime? This is not about food. This means that those of us believers who trust in God get to enjoy pleasures that nonbelievers cannot relate to. To me "the abundance of God's house" is about enjoying God's word, and more importantly enjoying our relationship with Him.
  - b) There should be nothing boring or repetitive about our relationship with God. One reason I don't believe God encourages repetitive prayer is that He wants our relationship with him to be "full" of conversation and understanding.
    - i) Jesus in effect taught the same thing when He said, "And when you pray, do not heap up phrases (multiply words, repeating the same ones over and over) as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their much speaking. (Matthew 6:7, Amplified Bible)
    - ii) Are we closer to God now, than we were, say a year ago? If we are not, then we are not drawing on the abundance of love that God has for us.
    - iii) Even if you or I have been a Christian for many years, we can and should continue to draw close to Him for the good things He provides for our lives. That is David's point here in his own poetic way.

- c) I also want to comment on the last part of Verse 9. It says, "in your light we see light".
    - i) The bible often compares God to light. This goes back to the first few verses of Genesis. Part of the idea is that God "brightens" our life just as light does.
    - ii) His "light" is what makes us understand "right from wrong".
    - iii) In other words we can learn about His attributes and what He desires for us. Again, the idea comes back to the concept that seeking God is never a waste of time, nor does it ever grow boring. It is a lifelong experience of growth as we continue to look to God as a source of "light" for our life.
25. Verse 10: Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- a) Verse 10 is a prayer request to ask God to continue showing His love to those who know Him and desire to seek Him.
  - b) OK, why this prayer request here? Isn't God unchangeable by definition? If God doesn't change, why pray for Him to continue showing His love to those who trust in Him?
    - i) The more I study this psalm, I think this verse is a poetic way of saying in effect, for us to keep on trusting in God so we can keep on growing in Him and keep on trusting in His love. In the same sense the last few verses remind us that having a relationship with God never gets old or tiresome, so here in this verse, we should continue in that love.
    - ii) This verse is for us to remember, not for God to remember. It is to remind us to keep trusting in His love for our lives.
    - iii) Not only can we pray this for ourselves, but it is a way to pray for those we love and know also believe in God to keep on growing in that relationship.
26. Verse 11: May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. <sup>12</sup> See how the evildoers lie fallen— thrown down, not able to rise!
- a) The final two verses of this psalm focus on nonbelievers. In Verse 11, a prayer request is made on the behalf of believers so that the "feet and hands" of those who don't believe in God will in effect be driven away from us. So what does that mean?
    - i) In short, it means we should not be caught up in the things of this world. Stop and think about how easy it is to be drawn away from God's desire for our lives.
    - ii) I am reminded of an old Christian saying: "God does not want to be #1 on a list of ten things. God wants to be #1 on a list of 1." That doesn't mean we can't have hobbies or interests. It means we get God involved in every aspect of our lives. For example, if we are going shopping, we can in effect take God with us. If we enjoy a certain type of music or art, share with God the beauty we see in that art.
  - b) In summary, the point here is for us to stay close to God all through our lives and not let those who don't care about God to draw us away from Him.
    - i) We have to be careful about anything and everything that can possibly draw us away from God. The way we stick close to Him is to make Him part of every aspect of our lives.
      - a) That may be as simple as quietly asking Him to join in an activity we are doing. The point is the "love of God" should be within us and affect every aspect of our lives.
      - b) OK you may say: What if I don't feel the love of God at this moment or say, ten minutes from now? Then, think of Him and let His light and His love shine upon us so that we can make a difference for Him.
  - c) I have to admit, I think most about God first thing in the morning or when I am around others who I know are believers. I struggle with people I know are not believers in God. I am not saying every moment we have to be preaching the Gospel to nonbelievers. I am saying that we have to be careful when we are with nonbelievers not to be too "caught up" in their activities. That is what David is trying to get us to avoid in these last two verses.

- d) Verse 12 is the reminder of the ultimate fate of nonbelievers. It is the reminder that they are destined for hell. That does not mean we should be condemning nonbelievers. If anything, we should be using our opportunities with them to help them see the light.
  - e) I think the biggest mistake Christians make with nonbelievers is too often we try to hit a "home run" when a "single" would do (to use a baseball analogy, taken from Greg Koukl.) The point is we don't have to explain the Gospel message to every nonbeliever. Sometimes just asking how we can pray for them or simply giving them something to think about is a better witness than explaining the whole Gospel message.
    - i) What I am getting at is we should not see nonbelievers as people who it is too late to help. Only God the Father knows who is and who is not saved. Our job is to reach out to all people and lead them down the right path so they can avoid the ultimate downfall.
    - ii) For example, when I am talking to someone who is a Mormon or a Jehovah Witness, I never say anything negative about his or her beliefs. Rather, I like to give them something to digest about their faith. Also remember that they are more willing to hear about your beliefs if you are willing to hear about theirs.
  - f) OK, enough witnessing tips for one lecture. ☺ Let's wrap this up for the week.
27. This lesson focuses a lot on the Christian relationship with nonbelievers. Not only does it talk about the faith of the nonbeliever, but the proper attitude the Christian should have them.
- a) In this lesson David complains how the people he has prayed for in the past are now attacking him in some way at that time. The lesson for us is not to understand David's history. It is to know that when we pray or do something for a nonbeliever, don't expect them to return the favor. There will always be those people who don't care for our faith and will use times when we are down against us.
  - b) I think what David is reminding us in this lesson is in effect:
    - i) Keep on being a witness to nonbelievers.
    - ii) Don't expect their kindness in return. Those who don't have a heart for God may take opportunities to use that hatred against us. Don't take that hatred personally. When people don't have a heart for God, then in effect they don't get the fact they are being used by Satan and His followers whether they realize it or not.
    - iii) In life we often have to deal with people who don't trust in God. We still should pray for them and when possible, be a witness to them. We don't know who is and who isn't saved. All we can do is pray for God's protection and deal with such people as best as we can.
    - iv) We also have to remember that we can't win people over without God's help. As the saying goes, without God "we can't", with God, we make a "majority".
  - c) Let me also end this by discussing tough situations with nonbelievers: What if we have to deal with someone who is trying to hurt us? If we can run away, we should. Ask God's help on how to deal with such situations. Remember that in this psalm David was really hurt by people that he took the time to pray for. In that sense, David is reminding us that God can relate to the pain we deal with in bad relationship situations. In short, I don't have the answers to face the problems we all face. I just know that God provides both the protection and the relief we need in dealing with those types of situations. OK, on that downer of a note, ☺ let's go to prayer.
28. Let's pray: Father, we are often hurt by situations and people through no fault of our own. Help us to remember that we can't fix people. All we can do is trust You to see us through our lives and help us deal with others. Help us to remember everyone's ultimate destiny. Give us both the strength and the wisdom to be a good witness for You through whatever we are dealing with. Guide us and help us use our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.