

1. If the last lesson wins an award for the most personal lesson I've written in a while, this one wins the award for being the most depressing. The main topic of Psalm 38 is about dealing with and confessing our own sins to God. The main topic of Psalm 39 has to deal with the realization of how short life is. In fact Psalm 39 is commonly sung at funerals.
 - a) In short, if these two psalms don't get you down, nothing will. ☺ However if you read through this message, we will find that it does bless us if we apply what it teaches.
2. Let's start with Psalm 38. That's a good place to start as that's where we left off.
 - a) Why have another confessional psalm? We've had a few psalms already that deal with the confession of our sins to God. What is so special about this one? To answer that, it would help to remember where we left off: If you recall, the last Psalm (#37) compared and contrasted the lives of believers and nonbelievers.
 - i) Since we can't fix other people, what the last psalm did in effect was to make us think about our relationship with others and what we can do (pray for them) and can't do (fix others). That psalm went on to discuss such concepts as what do when we try to help nonbelievers and they, in turn hurt us when we were down.
 - b) OK John, so what does all of that have to do with Psalm 38? Glad you asked.
 - i) Thinking about the shortcomings of other people should get us to think about our own faults as well. All of us sin at times and make mistakes. The key difference is that those of us who care about God make a conscious effort to try to please Him in all we do. That means to avoid sin as much as possible. To put it another way, thinking about how the sins of others affects our own lives should make us think about our own sins, period.
 - ii) However, this psalm is more than saying in effect, "Lord I have sinned and here is what I have done wrong today". What this psalm gets into is the idea of wanting to draw close to God. In order to do that, we need to eliminate from our lives things we do that are displeasing to Him. Thus, a need for a confessional psalm here. I'll discuss the idea of sin confession in this lesson.
3. OK, and what about Psalm 39? Why is the subject of death next in line after a confessional psalm? Is it just a coincidence that the next topic after a confessional psalm deals with death?
 - a) Of course not. I don't believe anything in the bible is a coincidence. One thing I have come to realize as of late is just how short life is. Life should be viewed as having an unknown period of time (not knowing when we die) to make a difference for God in our lives. Since we don't know how long our lives are going to be, the only thing that will count (in effect) for our next life is whatever we do now to make a difference for God.
 - b) With that "heavy" introduction completed, let us turn to Psalm 38.
4. Psalm 38, introduction: A psalm of David. A petition.
 - a) Besides the fact that David wrote this psalm, the title also says that this psalm is a petition (prayer request) to God. This is a good excuse to discuss just what "is" and "is not" prayer:
 - i) We as Christians have this tendency to think that all prayers are petitions to God to do specific things. We have this bad tendency to pray only when we need something done, or else we wouldn't bother God.
 - ii) What God wants from us is a relationship with Him. That is what eternity is going to be all about. Therefore, God wants to communicate with us as much as possible. That does not mean that every prayer session must be a prayer request for something. Sometimes it is good just to pray to tell Him how much we love Him or how grateful we are for some specific reason of the moment. Certainly the psalms are full of comments about our gratitude to God for our lives.

- b) This leads us back to the psalm title. Sometimes prayer is a specific request to ask God for certain things. In this psalm, the request is in effect for God to go easy on us. In this psalm, David realizes that he is guilty of some unnamed sin. He realizes that God has every right to discipline him (and us) as a "loving father".
 - i) The question becomes, do we ask God to not punish (discipline us) for something we have done? Or is it best to just tell God to "do what He thinks is best" and help us to learn what God wants us to learn? That is David's petition in this psalm.
 - ii) So, is David saying in effect, "All right God, let me bend over now so you can paddle me on the behind?" ☺ No, the point is we want to be the type of person God wants us to be. In some cases, that means we want to accept whatever punishment God wants to give us in order to teach us some lesson.
- 5. Verse 1: O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.
 - a) David starts this psalm in effect by asking God to go easy on him for some unnamed sin.
 - b) The underlying point here is that David is aware that somehow or someway, he has done something to sin against God. The other point of this prayer request is we don't know what God has planned for us so it is ok to ask God in effect to go easy on us.
- 6. Verse 2: For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me.
 - a) The text says that God's "arrows" have pierced David. Obviously God is not up in heaven firing arrows at us. Nor does He have hands that literally slap us. David is being poetic here and is describing the feeling he has of the guilt over whatever his sin was.
 - b) David is saying, "I know I did something wrong and I can sense God being angry over that. You God, don't have to punish me more than this, as I am already aware of my sin."
 - c) So how does any of this affect me? The first point is we need to be conscious of the sins we have committed and not ignore them. One of the advantages of reading through our bible is we become aware of what does and does not offend God about our lives. As we become aware of issues that are displeasing to Him, we can bring those issues to Him.
 - d) Let's start with the assumption that we are Christians and it is our desire to live with God forever in heaven. Therefore, when we sin, do we desire to ignore it and hope that God ignores it too, or is it our desire to put that issue in God's hand and let Him deal with it?
 - i) If I confess my sin to God, why does He have to discipline me for it? I thought that if I confess my sin, God immediately forgives me of that sin. If a child of ours does something wrong, we may immediately forgive them, but we still punish them, because punishment (hopefully) encourages that child not to repeat that act.
 - ii) I have young children at home. They regularly ask me for forgiveness as to avoid being punished. They don't mind confessing their sins. They hate being punished for their sins. That in effect is what we are asking God for in this psalm: to ease up on how we deserve to be disciplined.
- 7. Verse 3: Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. ⁴ My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.
 - a) David continues to pour out his pain to God. So is David hoping that by showing God how much pain he is in, that God will "lighten up" in punishing him? Is avoiding God's discipline a matter of showing how guilty we feel about what we have done wrong?
 - i) I keep thinking about my kids here. They will plead hard to get what they want or avoid being punished for something they have done wrong. The reality is we often punish our children to calm our anger over what they have done. In effect we are pleading with God to "calm His anger" over some issue.
 - ii) Does this mean God has emotions? Can He physically act as if He is surprised by something bad we have done? The truth is a perfect God is already aware of all things and already knows what is going to happen, including any discipline that we will receive. The point of prayer here is not so much to "calm God down" as much as it is to prepare us for whatever God desires to do with our lives.

- b) A related question here is, do we deserve to avoid being disciplined for what we have done wrong? Even if we are aware of our sins and have already suffered like David has here in these verses, should we be exempt from God's discipline?
 - i) This whole prayer has nothing to do with God not forgiving us of our sins. The idea here is "God loves us too much to leave us alone". Trusting in Jesus' blood (death) payment for our sins, means that we are completely forgiven of all of the sins we commit (past, present and future), not just the ones we are aware of, nor just of the one's we commit before giving our lives to Jesus.
 - ii) The issue here again is discipline. A sign of God's love is the fact that He does discipline us. God wants to discipline us because He wants to change us to be the type of person He wants us to be. Often that requires some sort of discipline in order for us to learn what God wants us to learn.
 - c) So just how does God discipline us anyway? He doesn't literally paddle us on the behind, so how do we know when God is disciplining us? We don't. We may be going through some sort of rough period in our life. We don't know if the reason we are going through it is due to some fault of our own, spiritual warfare, or the discipline of God. All that we do know is that we may not like what we are going through at the present moment.
 - i) In difficult situations a great simple prayer is, "Dear God, help me that the lessons not be wasted that You are trying to teach me at this moment."
 - ii) It doesn't matter why we are going through some sort of suffering as much as it matters that we learn what it is God is trying to teach us at that moment.
 - d) I'm sure David did not know for sure why he was suffering at that moment, but he suspected it was due to some sin he had committed. To put it another way, "Lord, I do not know why I am suffering at this moment. However, I do know I feel the strain on my body due to the guilt of what I have done wrong. Therefore God, I ask that this strain be lifted because I am trusting in Your forgiveness and that I have learned what You want to teach me from this situation."
8. Verse 5: My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. ⁶ I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. ⁷ My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. ⁸ I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.
- a) One gets the impression from reading these four verses that David was in a lot of physical pain due to some unnamed sin he has committed.
 - i) Most of us understand that guilt can physically wreck our bodies. When we carry the guilt we have over some issue, it can physically damage our body. That is one reason why God desires we "release to Him" the burden we carry over sin issues.
 - b) God loves us too much to see us in pain. He wants us to let go of our worries over our sins. If that is true and David gets that idea, why is David in so much pain here?
 - i) Is David suffering on purpose in order to show God how much he has suffered already for the sins he has committed? Does this mean we should make ourselves suffer to avoid the wrath of God? There are people who teach that we should "take in" suffering in order to relieve ourselves of the guilt we feel over our sins.
 - ii) I believe that God allows suffering in order to discipline us, but He in no way wants us to punish ourselves for the sins we have committed. In other words, God is more than capable of disciplining us, and He can do a much better job than we could ever do on ourselves for the sins we have committed.
 - iii) God would much rather we confess our sins to Him and let Him decide whatever discipline we deserve for such sins. Life is hard enough as it is, we shouldn't add to our burdens by purposely punishing ourselves over some sin we committed.
 - iv) All of this does lead us back to David. All we know is that David desired to lighten up on that pain. In order for that pain to go away, the first step is to give that pain to God, which in effect, is what David is doing in these verses.

- c) So why do these verses list the details of David's pain? Isn't God aware of all the suffering that David has gone through? It is not so that He can be aware of our pain, but so that we can give the specifics of our pain to Him. In other words, it is like saying to God, "It hurts here and it hurts there, so please take away those specific pains from me."
 - i) The reason God encourages us to pray in specific prayer requests is so that He gets the glory when such pain comes to an end.
 - ii) Speaking of God being aware of our suffering, I present Verse 9. ☺
- 9. Verse 9: All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.
 - a) It may help here to remember the purpose of this psalm: It is a petition to God to go easy on any discipline God desires to give David for his sins.
 - b) This verse is David saying in effect, God, look how much I have suffered already. What will disciplining me do to me that I have not already done to myself?
 - i) David is saying in effect, I am aware of the damage done by my sin and therefore, I petition You God, to not discipline me further as I already get the fact of how much pain I (David) have caused You (God) by my sin.
 - c) OK John, good for David. ☺ What does this have to do with us?
 - i) The next time we are suffering due the consequences of some sin, we can say to God, "Look at how low I have gone due to the affects of this sin. Hold up on any more punishment as I get how I have suffered for this sin I have committed."
 - ii) There is an old saying that a person has to hit "rock bottom" before they realize how bad they have messed up and want to turn that issue over to God. David in effect is saying, "I (David), am in tremendous pain and have hit rock bottom. Please God help me to learn what You want me to learn from this situation."
 - iii) Hopefully, for us, we don't have to hit "rock bottom" before we realize how we have offended God in some specific situation. By the way, I am not against any sort of medical treatment when one is in need of such treatment. The first thing we need to do is give situations over to God and then get whatever help is necessary to deal with the situation at hand.
 - iv) OK John, suppose the reason I am hurt is due to someone else and not me. Then ask God to help you (and me) learn what He wants us to learn from situation and help us to deal with the pain we are currently dealing with.
 - d) I warned you in my opening comments this was a depressing lesson. ☺ However, sometimes we need God's discipline in order for us to grow closer to Him.
- 10. Verse 10: My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.
 - a) As you can see, David is not lightening up on himself in Verse 10. David's description of his own pain mentions how he is aware of his own heart pounding and David does not even have the strength to go on. It even feels like the light that is around him doesn't help David to see clearly. This is David's "rock bottom".
 - b) You may, or may not be able to relate to David's description of himself at this point. What is important is that we become aware of the sins that we commit, not so we can focus on them, but we can give them to God so we won't go any "lower".
 - i) God does not want us to suffer any more than we have to. Therefore, God wants us to give Him our specific pains, which is what David is doing here.
 - ii) This is David saying in effect, "My heart hurts from pounding, my strength hurts from failing and my eyes hurt because I can't see clearly." Dear God, please help me to regain my strength so I could better praise You with my life.
 - iii) A point here is that it is ok to ask God to rejuvenate us. Yes David is aware that his pain is due to some sin he has committed. Notice that David does not want this pain to go on. That alone tells us that God does not want us to "suffer on purpose" for our sins, but to give our pain to Him for what we have done.

- c) But, isn't the purpose of this whole psalm to get God to "ease up" on disciplining us? If we do take on our own suffering, won't that get God to avoid punishing us further? Won't self-discipline help to make us a better person?
 - i) First of all, self-discipline is a tool to help us stay on the right course in life. However, self-discipline is only a tool, not an end unto itself.
 - ii) The point here is not the amount of suffering. The point of this psalm is about learning what God wants us to learn from a specific sinful situation.
 - iii) Asking God to "ease up" here is not about God punishing us less because we have suffered enough. It is about telling God we understand the pain caused by our sins and we have learned our lessons here. We have not learned because we have suffered, we have learned because we are aware of what we have done is displeasing to God and what He desire for our lives.
11. Verse 11: My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away. ¹² Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception.
- a) These next two verses describe how others around David are affected by this situation.
 - i) Verse 11 focuses on David's friends, while Verse 12 focuses on David's enemies.
 - b) It would probably be good to mention somewhere in this lesson (this is a good a place as any ☺) that not all situations cause David to feel like all of his friends abandoned him.
 - i) The specifics of the situation (i.e., when it happened in David's life is unknown). All that is known is that David committed some sort of sin, he realized at this point in that he is guilty of this sin, and now that sin is affecting his relationship with both his friends and his enemies.
 - ii) It is also unknown whether or not David has confessed this sin to God yet.
 - c) OK John, now that I get how David is affected, explain how these verses affect me?
 - i) The danger of sin is that it affects the relationships of those around us. We can commit some sort of sin and think in effect, "I'm the only one affected by this." Well, if you think that, you are wrong. It affects our relationships with our family, friends, our neighbors and even our enemies.
 - ii) The biggest fault I have witnessed with sins (both of my own and of others) is how much it hurts the people around the one who committed the sin. Often the person who is guilty of a specific sin is unwilling or worse, doesn't care who around them is hurt by such a sin. I remember hearing a testimony in church not too long ago of someone who used to suffer from a drinking problem. What stopped him was watching his young son grieving over his former condition. Often it takes the testimony of those we hurt and we love to help us change.
 - d) Notice in these two verses, that there is no confession to God at this point. These verses say in effect, "here is how my sin affects those who care about me (such people are avoiding me) and here is how my sins affect my enemies (they plot to destroy me)".
 - i) So, if David is aware of how his sins are affecting those around him, why state these facts? Why not just confess the sin and move on? The issue here is not confession about a sin, but the realization of what the sin does to those around us.
12. Verse 13: I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; ¹⁴ I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply.
- a) The point of these two verses is that David realizes how guilty he is of some specific (unnamed) sin, but is "quiet about it" to those around him. OK, why the silence?
 - i) Think of it this way, do we go around telling others of the things we have done wrong or do we just keep it to ourselves? Yes as Christians we confess it to God, but we still are silent about our faults to others.

- b) James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another. Why is that important? Why can't we just confess our sins to God? Why should we confess our sins to other believers?
 - i) (In case you are interested, that is the biblical basis for "confession").
 - ii) Part of the reason we as Christians are called to confess our sins to one another is so that we don't "hold in" our guilt about sins as David is doing in these verses.
 - iii) Another reason is for accountability. When we are accountable to a group of other Christians, that helps to keep us in line against committing that sin further.
 - iv) Finally, one must remember that we cannot defeat sin by just "trying harder".
Having others praying for us does give us the spiritual strength to face our issues.
 - c) This surprisingly, does lead me back to these verses. One has to read this whole psalm as a confession of what David is doing wrong. I am convinced David is saying he "held in his sins" simply because he was afraid to tell others what he did wrong. After all, David is an important king, and he didn't want his poll numbers to drop. ☺
 - i) Let's apply that reference to a king to us: We think that we are important people because (fill in the blank) and therefore, why share our "dirty secrets" with others?
 - ii) The answer comes back to James 5:16. The way we overcome sin is not only by confessing it to God, but also to other Christians we trust. Not so that other believers can put us down or say, "I can't believe you did that", but so those others can pray for us. Again, I have come to learn that the only way to overcome any and all sins is not only by sticking close to God, but also (as James says) to confess one's sins to one another so that others can pray for us as well.
 - d) Meanwhile, David is still suffering over his sins.
13. Verse 15: I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God. ¹⁶ For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips." ¹⁷ For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me.
- a) At this point in the psalm, David explains why he has kept his silence. He is waiting for God to answer about his sin. David is in pain because of some sin he has committed and he is asking God for protection from his enemies during this period of time.
 - b) Let's face it, even if we confess our sins to God and have the strength to confess our sins to those believers we trust, we still may have enemies who want to take advantage of our weakness. What do we do about enemies, is the question here.
 - i) The answer is to give that worry to God. That is what David is "waiting on God" for at this point in the prayer. David was not afraid to confess his sins to God, as he knew that was the right thing to do. David was afraid to go public with his problems as he was afraid of what his enemies might do if knew what he was going through at the moment.
 - a) Let me give some examples of this: A politician may be afraid to confess his or her mistakes as that politician is afraid of what their enemies will do with the fact that person has sinned. Athletes may be afraid to speak out about their fears as the competition might use those fears against them. We may be afraid of being ostracized (that means being outcast) because of what we did wrong. In short, the fear of our sins being "found out" causes us to keep that information to ourselves or just our trusted friends.
 - c) Given the reality of the fear of being hurt by confessing our sins publicly, what do we do with that fear? We give it God. Believe it or not, that is what David is doing here. David is waiting on God's timing before going "public" with what he did wrong.
 - i) Giving one's fears to God is more than just saying, "I am afraid of this or that". It is about waiting on His timing to deal with the issue. Whatever David did, he was in a lot of pain over it. By confessing that fear to God, David is saying in effect, "This is Your (God's) problem, and I will wait on Your timing to deal with it."

14. Verse 18: I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.
- a) Here is the point in the psalm where David actually turns his sins over to God.
 - b) Here is my question of the moment: Why did David wait 18 verses to recite this line?
 - i) Why isn't this psalm of confession one line long, with David just saying in effect, I know what I did and I confess that sin to You (God).
 - ii) In effect, David wanted to turn the sin over in "Verse 1", but David needed to talk out his sins, before doing that. Think how natural that is to us: When we have done something wrong, or think we may have done something wrong, we first need to think it out or talk it out with God. We look and see how others around us are affected by this situation. We may see our friends turn from us or we may see our enemies get a chance to have a victory over us.
 - iii) In a sense, David is crying out here, "I can't handle this anymore God. You deal with it. I confess what I did wrong, and now it is up to You God, not only to forgive me, but help me deal with the issues caused by this sin."
 - iv) Remember that Verse 1 was David asking God to not rebuke him (discipline him) for this sin. So if David in effect, confessed it in Verse 1, why confess in Verse 18?
 - a) I suspect what is happening at this point in the psalm, is David is letting go of the whole situation. David is saying in effect, "You God, do what You know is best. I am letting go of the whole situation and putting my life, my problems, my issues etc., all in Your hands."
 - b) That is what God desires of us. Not a "Verse 1" prayer for God to go easy on us. God desires that we say, "OK, God this sin is your problem. I know that You love me and I am trusting in You to deal with it as You see best."
15. Verse 19: Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous. ²⁰ Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good.
- a) If David truly let go of the whole situation in Verse 18, why is David complaining about his enemies in Verses 19-20? If David in Verse 18 said in effect, "This problem is too big for me to handle, You (God) take over". So why complain about his enemies here?
 - i) The short answer is David still had enemies to face and is now saying in effect, "God, I know You have forgiven me of my sin and I know that You may punish me in some way that I probably deserve. However, I still have enemies to deal with and I can't face them without Your help."
 - b) Let me put these two verses in modern English: "Lord, I can handle You knowing about my sins and You dealing with disciplining me in what I deserve. However, I still have fears about other people and what they might do once they find out what I did wrong."
 - i) Continuing, "I don't fear being punished by God but I have real fears of what other people might say or do about what I did wrong. These people know I follow You and I am afraid of what they would say if they knew of my secret sins. These enemies would use this opportunity to denounce me and my trust in You."
 - ii) These verses are a cry out to God to deal with one's enemies. We may say, "Lord my sins are now in Your hands and my enemies are now also in Your hands. Help me to be a good witness for You over and above what I have done wrong. At the same time, I am trusting in You to deal with those who want to see me harmed."
16. Verse 21: O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. ²² Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior.
- a) The final two lines of this psalm cry out in effect, "God, Help me. You are in charge of my life and You are my savior. You are the one who does forgive my sins and You are the one who gives me victory over those who want to harm me."
 - b) As I like say, sometimes my favorite prayer is simply, "Help Lord, I am in trouble and I need Your help here." That in effect is what David is doing in these last two verses.

- c) The same way David says "all of my problems are now Yours (God) ", that is what God desires of us. He wants us to say in effect, "I have sinned by (fill in the blank). I confess that sin to You. I still have to deal with the world around me, and that includes my enemies. I don't know what is going to happen because of this situation, but I don't want to worry about it anymore. God, it is now Your problem."
 - i) Once we truly let go of the sin and the possible results of that sin is when God works best in our life. Even when we repeat that sin, many times, it is still a matter of saying, "God, I need Your help in dealing with this sin, so take over."
 - d) OK, now that I've cleared my conscious, ☺ time for Psalm 39.
17. Psalm 39: For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.
- a) While Psalm 38 focused on our individual sins, Psalm 39 says in effect, "My life is short in comparison to eternity and it is going by so fast. With that in mind, help me to deal wisely with my time and not turn to things that can draw me away from You."
 - b) Just so you know, Psalm 39 has commonly been read or sung at funerals. It is not done so we can remember the dead in a good or bad way. It is sung at funerals so that we can remember that life is short and therefore, we should use our time wisely for God.
 - c) The title of this psalm mentions by name, David's director of music, Jeduthun. He is referenced a number of times in the bible. (See 2nd Chronicles 5:12 and 35:15 as examples.) So why did David mention Jeduthun by name in the title?
 - i) If the purpose of the psalm is to describe in effect how short life is, why mention it is for the director of music? To ask another question, many of the psalms we have read so far have stated in effect that they are to be put to music. What makes this psalm so special that this man named "Jeduthun" had to be listed by name?
 - ii) The only clue we have is that in 2nd Chronicles 35:15, this man is also called David's "seer". That means the man had a gift from God to be able to interpret signs from God. So why mention his name in the title? Maybe David respected this man's ability to understand the brevity of life, which is a key point of the psalm. OK, enough speculation, lets move on to the actual verses of this psalm.
18. Verse 1: I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence."
- a) Verse 1 is a prayer request. To paraphrase, "God, help me to keep silent or not let me say the wrong thing, especially when those who are my enemies are close to me."
 - b) To put it another way, "I David am a king. I have to deal with people all day long. I don't always know who is on my side and who isn't. Therefore, God, please guide what I say and help me not to say the wrong thing, especially when there are enemies around.
 - i) When one is in a position of power, one has to be careful to avoid saying the wrong thing. Even a misinterpretation of what we say can be used against us.
 - c) OK John, what about the rest of us? All of us know the danger of saying the wrong thing or speaking up when we should just be keeping our mouths shut. The amazing thing is we rarely think to ask God to help us in what we say or when to speak up.
 - i) The older I get, the more I tend to stay out of debates. I will often listen to different arguments, but I will hold my tongue from actually speaking out over issues. I have learned that only God can change people, and I can't convict anyone (yes, anyone) into seeing the world the way I see it. All I can do is teach God's truth, which is far more important than any and all opinions I have to offer. Which surprisingly does lead me to Verse 2:
19. Verse 2: But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. ³My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:
- a) When we are silent for a long period of time, the urge to say something usually increases over time. The problem is not speaking out, but of the danger of saying the wrong thing.

- b) What we have to remind ourselves is what we have to say may help us to clear our minds, but it won't necessarily help out the situation at hand. David as a leader had to be above getting involved in arguments and had to make decisions like a judge. I believe what David is praying for, is for God to give him the wisdom to say the right thing, not only in "judging situations", but also in life as well.
 - i) As I read through this psalm, it occurred to me how little time I spend asking God to help me with what I say and what I don't say in life. I'm not saying we have to pray this prayer, say daily. I'm just saying that "watching our tongue" is an issue we need to give to God as to minimize the damage it does to our lives.
 - ii) In the New Testament book of James, a big topic is the danger of our "tongue" and the damage it can cause by saying the wrong thing. That is David's prayer here.
 - c) In Verse 3, notice David was getting angry over something that was said. When do we say the wrong thing? It is usually when our emotions take over, we say the wrong thing out of anger. That is what David is trying to avoid and asking for God's help.
 - d) John you said that this psalm is commonly used in funeral services. Why is this issue about what we say used in funerals? Think of it this way: When we look back at our lives and the mistakes we make, those mistakes usually start by saying the wrong thing. David is praying in effect, "Dear God, guide my tongue so I won't regret it latter".
20. Verse 4: "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. ⁵ You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. *Selah*
- a) Speaking of funerals and the "shortness of life", I present to you, verses 4-5.
 - b) If you talk to older people who are near death, a common comment made is how short life really is. They will mention how fast it all went by. It makes one think about the things one has done to make a difference and the things that were a waste of time.
 - c) I have to admit, that lately, I have been thinking of my life that way too. I have become aware of how God has had his hands on me all of my life. I also realize all of the things I have done that were in effect wastes of time.
 - d) Suppose you think, "I am young. I can worry about this later." Then remind yourself that life can always end at any time. If the purpose of life is to make a difference for God, then what am I doing now? If you feel called by God to do something different tomorrow or later in life, let Him prepare you for that and focus on what He called us to do today.
 - e) Realizing how short life is, makes us stop and think about what is really important.
 - i) You can see now, why this is called the funeral psalm.
 - ii) I am convinced that life is not about how much money we make, or what we have accomplished for ourselves, but how much of a difference we have made for God. My sister in law once said she believed people are here on earth to make a difference in the world. I agree with that statement. However, I also understand the importance of trusting in a God that is willing to forgive all of my sins. I also disagree with her in the sense that I understand that in order to really make a difference, it is about letting God work through us as opposed to trying to do things all on our own.
 - f) But John, you might say, the world is full of people who have done good or great things who do not believe in God. What about them?
 - i) God has created all of us for a purpose. There are people who have and use great gifts, but never acknowledge the God who gave them those gifts. For all we know, God may still use those people and those gifts for His glory, even if such people never turn to Him with their lives. The danger of course, is being impressed with ourselves, and not the God who gave us our gifts.

21. Verse 6: Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.
- a) You know, it seems like David can't go more than a handful of verses without taking the focus off of believers and saying what nonbelievers think and do. Remember that David is not making such claims for their sake but for our sake so we know how to separate ourselves from those who care about God.
 - b) Spending my life in the business world, I have met a lot of people who are mainly focused on making lots of money and having a busy life. They use their free time to go do fun things with the family or with their friends. Please remember that none of these things are bad unto themselves. The question being implied in this verse and what we should ask ourselves is, "How are we making a difference for God?" If we spend all of our time focusing on just providing for ourselves and our families or using our spare time for enjoyment or learning, what purpose will that serve at the end of our lives?
 - c) OK John, let's say I'm not doing anything for God. Where do I start? Start with prayer. Ask God what you should be doing to make a difference for Him. Ask believers who know you well what talents God has given you to make a difference for Him. At the least, just try different things and see what one enjoys doing. Half of the fun of making a difference for God is figuring out how and what He wants us to do. We never know unless we take a step forward in faith and try one or more things.
 - i) How does one know when one is doing enough? Let's put it this way, if we are so busy making a difference for God, that we have no time for ourselves or say our families, then that is a sign one is "out of balance".
 - ii) God asks us to do what we can, but at the same time He does not want us to ignore our responsibilities that He has also called us to do.
22. Verse 7: "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.
- a) Verse 7 is a reminder that our hope is in Him. The question is what are we doing with that hope? How are we living to make a difference for Him?
 - b) I've said for years that I am not impressed with people who claim they are Christians. I am impressed with people who do something about that faith. If we do hope in God, what are we doing about that hope? If you are already called to some specific ministry and you feel a sense of comfort that you are doing what God called you to do, then please, don't let me make you feel guilty as if you are not doing enough.
 - i) It's not my job to convict people, it is God's. My job is to explain what the bible is teaching and let God work on all of our hearts from there. Like this verse says, our hope is in Him, not in any specific person.
23. Verse 8: Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.
- a) Let me ask a question: Do you believe David believed God has forgiven him of all of his sins? If the answer is yes, then why pray for continuing forgiveness of all of our sins (transgressions, which is ways we have offended God). Why keep asking for forgiveness? To answer that, one has to understand that "salvation" has more than one definition.
 - i) On one hand, we are eternally forgiven once we commit our lives to Jesus.
 - ii) On the other hand, God wants us to grow and mature in our knowledge of Him and our lives. If we are to do that, we must stick close to God and ask for His help continuously in fighting against sin. That is the point of this verse.
 - b) Know that the biblical definition of a fool is simply a person who doesn't care about God.
 - i) Wait a minute. Didn't Jesus teach that we are not to call anyone a fool? (See Matthew 5:22.) Yes He did, but Jesus point is that we don't know who is eternally saved and who is not. Only God can judge people's hearts, we only judge actions.
 - ii) With that stated, David is not focusing on fools (those who turn from God). David is simply pointing out that we should have a heart for God and not be the scorn of fools who can accuse us for the mistakes we make in life.

24. Verse 9: I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this.
- a) To understand Verse 9, one has to read it in context of the whole psalm. Verse 1 states that, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." Verse 2 then says in effect that David couldn't stand it no more and spoke out against those who he thought acted foolishly. I'm speculating that David learned at that moment what a waste of time that was.
 - b) So given those two opening verses, what does Verse 9 mean? Glad you asked. ☺
 - i) I suspect that David was looking at the behavior of specific people who were living their lives for their own pleasure. Now instead of speaking out against them, David was keeping silent, thinking about their future and realized that God was not only the one who keep David silent, but God is the one who allowed such fools the freedom of choice to choose to ignore God.
 - ii) Are you saying we shouldn't witness to nonbelievers? Of course not. That is what Jesus taught us to do. We just have to accept the idea that many people simply don't care about the "things of God" and nothing we can say can make a difference in their lives. If that is true, how do we witness to others?
 - a) The answer starts in prayer for others. The best evangelist I personally know constantly starts up conversations with strangers to see where they are at "spiritually". She then asks them how she can pray for them. She understands she can't witness to others without praying for them first.
25. Verse 10: Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand.
- a) David was feeling God's "scourge" at this moment. If you don't know what that means, hopefully we can all relate to the expression "blow of your hand".
 - i) Did God literally slap David around here? Of course not. Did God somehow literally reach down from heaven to hurt David in some way? I don't think so.
 - ii) What I believe is going on, is David saw the futility of people who turned from God. David understood the waste of a life when one lives for things other than God. David understood how and why "sin" is offensive to God and how sin hurts us just as it hurts God when someone He loves turns from Him in sin.
 - iii) It occurred to me that I never gave a title for this lesson. The sentences in that last point (number "ii") pretty much summarize the whole lesson.
 - iv) The reason this lesson is a "downer" (as I said in the beginning of the lesson) is not because is not because the topic is depressing, but because the lesson focuses on the danger of turning from God either in our own sins or watching the wasted lives of people around us.
26. Verse 11: You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; you consume their wealth like a moth-- each man is but a breath. *Selah*
- a) The first phrase of Verse 11 was discussed with Verse 10. The key point is that there is a God and he does both rebuke and disciple men (and women) for their sin.
 - i) What does that mean? It means there is a price to pay for the sins we commit.
 - ii) For the unbeliever, the price of that sin is eternal separation from God.
 - iii) For the believer, sin harms our relationship with God, which is why He desires for us to turn from sin. God disciplines believers so that we can see the danger of living with our sins. The reason David eventually accepts whatever discipline God has for him in the last psalm is because he realizes that the discipline of God is a lot lighter punishment than whatever man can do to him.
 - iv) David stated the truth about "God's discipline" late in his life. 2nd Samuel 24:14 reads, "David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.'" (NIV)

- b) The second phrase says that You (God) consume their wealth like a moth.
 - i) Moths eat away at clothing. The point is God can in effect "eat away" at our wealth. Further, we can't take any of our wealth with us into the next life.
 - ii) I have met people who has accumulated so much wealth that their children never have to work for a living. The question then becomes, is the lives of one's children really better off that way? Do our children appreciate life more if they never have to worry about money? The older I get, the less I see that is ever the case.
 - c) The final phrase is "each man is but a breath". This comes back to the idea if you ask older people how fast life went by, they will say it feels as long as a "breadth".
 - i) Over the last few years, my wife and I (along with our daughters) visit a cemetery once a year on the birthday of my mother in law. I admit I spend a lot of time there staring at graves and looking at how long or how short people have lived.
 - ii) There is a classic saying that one's gravestone usually has the year we are born, the year we die and a "dash" in the middle. The greatest purpose we can have in this life is to use that "dash" to make a difference for God.
27. Verse 12: "Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping. For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were.
- a) In the final two lines of this psalm, David sums up his feelings of helplessness. He says he is (or was) weeping and was crying to God for help. What is David talking about here?
 - i) David is realizing that his life is brief and in some way his sin has offended God. I believe David wants his relationship restored in the sense that the guilt over whatever he has done be taken away.
 - ii) Maybe David just wants assurance that he is forgiven. Whatever the "mess" is, he is crying out to God for help and that is always the secret when we are feeling overwhelmed by whatever is our problem of the moment.
 - b) In the final part of this verse David says he dwells with God "as an alien or stranger". OK, what does that mean, and make it brief as we are running long? ☺
 - i) Whatever David did wrong (sin wise), it made him feel like a "stranger" to God. That is what sin does, it separates us from Him. Don't get me wrong. We are still saved and I'm sure David believed he would spend eternity with God. So if David believed he is saved, how is he like a stranger to God here? He understood that some sin he has committed has for the moment put "distance" between himself and God and the pain caused by that sin is what David wanted taken away.
28. Verse 13: Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more.
- a) When David says, "look away from me" to God, he did not mean he wanted God to ignore him. It means that David wanted God to turn away from the sin he has committed.
 - b) Let me personalize this: There are times all of us mess up and we feel alienated from God because we can't forgive ourselves for what we did.
 - i) How do we end such a situation? For starters, we turn the whole situation over to God and say in effect, "I can't handle this, help me". It is to admit it is better to let God discipline us than to let people around us suffer for our sins. That was David's point when I quoted 2nd Samuel Chapter 24 a little while ago.
 - ii) The point for us is that to believe the Gospel message (that we are forgiven of all of our sins) also means that we trust in God for the rest of our lives. That means we share our joy with Him and we turn to Him when we displease Him.
 - c) I can't summarize the lesson any better than that, so I'll go to prayer:
29. Father, help us to remember how short our lives are. Show us the ways that are displeasing to You not to make us feel guilty, but so that we can have the type of close and personal relationship that You desire of us with You. Help us to see nonbelievers not as people doing wrong, but as people who need You in their lives. May we draw upon Your love so we can be a good witness to both the believers and nonbelievers that are around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.