

Psalms 42-44 - John Karmelich

1. Have you ever felt like God has gone silent? It is a feeling that God is not responding to our cries for help and is somehow testing our faith. This is the issue I want to bring up, as it is a central theme that ties these three psalms together. That single word "testing" is my title for this lesson.
 - a) Most veteran Christians will tell you that God regularly puts believers through periods of time where it feels like we can't sense His presence despite whatever problems we are dealing with. It can feel like when we cry out to God for help or relief, we don't sense Him comforting us through our bad situations. OK, so why does God go silent at times?
 - i) The answer is, that God wants to see if we still trust Him. God goes silent at times to see if we will trust in Him watching over us and watching after us even when we have no idea how to get out of the "mess" we are currently in.
 - ii) My goal for this lesson is not to solve all of our individual problems. What I do hope to accomplish to give all of us some perspective about why we go through such times and what God wants us to learn about going through testing periods.
 - b) With that not to happy introduction stated, ☺ I will discuss this issue throughout the lesson, and explain why God can and does go "silent" at times in our lives.
2. Before I get started on this lesson, let me share with you something I have been debating with myself for the past few weeks. This psalm (#42) begins the start of "Book Two" of the book of Psalms. This collection of psalms is divided into five "books" as most of your bibles will indicate.
 - a) I have been debating whether or not to go through all 150 psalms as one set, or to take a break in the middle and then come back and finish the rest. God reminded me of something: There are 150 psalms for a reason. If I (God) called you (that's me) to write on all (note the "all") the psalms, I will give you the ability to do so. So stop worrying, keep writing, and I (God) will guide you through these lessons.
 - b) The end of the second book of the psalms is roughly the halfway point. I will probably (not definitely, but probably) stop at the end of the second book of the psalms, take on a New Testament study and then I will come back and finish this study of the psalms.
 - c) I also admit there is a positive feeling that goes with all of this. If God has called on me to write on all the psalms, that means He plans on keeping me around until it is done. That also makes me hesitate to write on the final psalm, but I'll worry about that later. ☺
3. OK, with that speech out of my system, let me turn my focus to the three psalms of this lesson. As I read through them a few times, something caught my attention:
 - a) First, there are many of the same patterns in these psalms that are common among most of the psalms we have studied so far. What I mean by that is that there are references to dealing with one's own sins and the need to pour out our issues to God and trust in Him.
 - b) Still the focus of these three psalms is on the issue of suffering. All three ask the question in effect, "Why does God allow good people to go through suffering?" That is the main issue as we will see in this lesson. With that scary thought stated, let's start.
4. Psalm 42 Introduction - For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.
 - a) Here we have the first psalm that is not directly attributed to David or to an unknown author. It is written by the Sons of Korah. OK, who are the Sons of Korah, and why should I care?
 - i) You can find brief references to this group in 1st and 2nd Chronicles. What one gets from studying those references is that they are Levites (priests). The only biblical direct reference to a "Korah" is a man who led a rebellion against Moses, roughly 500 years prior to when the "Sons of Korah" are referenced. This group of "sons" existed around the time of King David. The point is simply that the only biblical reference to the "Sons of Korah" is brief mentions in Chronicles as well as the title of this psalm as well as some other psalms coming up later in the book.

- b) The psalm title also has an untranslated term "maskil". That refers to a reflective song. In other words, whoever wrote this psalm wants us to think about it and reflect upon it.
- c) The final term of the introductory notes is a term by now we are familiar with. It is the term translated, "for the director of music".
 - i) It is as if this title is saying, "We who are of the family (or descendants) of Korah wrote this psalm, and now we would like the person in charge of music at our worship services to play this psalm. The actual music is long gone.
- d) OK John, what does all of this stuff in the title have to do with this psalm? The theme of this psalm is about desiring God but at the moment, not feeling close to Him.
 - i) Whatever the "Korah's" are going through (or went through), it caused them to not feel close to God. They (the writers) want us to think about what to do when we don't feel like God is helping us and wrote this psalm on that issue.
- e) Remember this is the first psalm of the second book of the psalms. If the second book of the psalms does tie to "Exodus" as some Jewish bible scholar's claim, then the second book of the Psalms must be about redemption as Exodus is all about redemption.
 - i) The key point of the entire book of Exodus is about the Israelites being "redeemed by God" (i.e., set apart for His use). The book of Exodus is God saying in effect, "I have purchased you people and therefore, here is what I expect of you." If (a big "if" here) this second book of the psalms does tie to being redeemed it should start with the idea of those who are God's people desiring to be close to Him.
 - ii) So what does "rejection" (the theme of Exodus) have to do with "testing", which is the title of this lesson? The short answer that I find that God tests those who are His. To put it another way, if we go through a period of time where we don't sense God responding to our prayer requests, take it as a sign that God is testing those who are His (you and I as Christians) and we are still one of the "redeemed".
- f) That point about not feeling close to God, ties to Verse 1 of this psalm. Speaking of which:

5. Psalm 42, Verse 1: As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

 - a) To truly appreciate this verse, one has to visualize a hot day and being very thirsty. With that in mind, visualize a deer very much desiring a drink of water. Why a deer?
 - i) Deers are nervous creatures and constantly watch for enemies. When they are really thirsty, they "pant" (deeply desire) for water. The point is the same way someone desires a drink when one is very thirsty, so is the writer's desire for God.
 - b) For some unknown reason, the writer did not feel close to God at this moment. The point is the writer of this psalm was crying out to God and at the moment, the writer was not getting a "response". Think of the times in our lives when life is falling apart and we don't sense His comfort. That is the flavor of this verse.
- 6. Verse 2: My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?
 - a) I'm sure that whoever wrote this psalm understood that God is everywhere. Yet, that same person is crying out about where could he go to meet God.
 - i) Think of it this way: When things are going wrong and we are desperate for God's help, we start pondering about where we can go or what we can do in order to get some answer from God as to whatever we are facing at the moment.
 - ii) To put this thought another way, sometimes it is not God's answers that cause us pain, but God's silence on whatever we are dealing with.
 - b) It occurred to me as I wrote that last sentence that a nonbeliever would have no idea what I meant by God communicating with us. To those of us who have committed their lives to serving God the Father and are trusting in Jesus as payment for their sins, God does communicate to us in that we understand that coincidences are God working in our lives and it is a matter of recognizing that fact. The believer looks to the bible to understand God's desires for our lives. When we struggle for answers, it feels as if God is silent. The idea is that Christians live to please God by following biblical principals for our lives.

7. Verse 3: My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
- a) Imagine crying out in pain due to some bad circumstance. Others around us know we are in pain. Nonbelievers may even question our faith and say, "Where is your God"?
 - i) Sometimes I have found that God goes "silent" so that we can learn to trust Him when those "silent moments" come. We are showing the nonbelievers around us that we are trusting in Him when we don't have solutions to our problems.
 - ii) The point here is we do show our faith by trusting that God will come through even if (and especially if) He does not come through on our timing.
 - b) I want to come to back to an issue from my introduction: "Why is this psalm the first one of the second book of psalms?" If this second book of the psalms does tie to the second book of the bible (Exodus), then this second book of the psalms must also be about redemption, because the main theme of Exodus: being redeemed by God. Again, it is about the idea of being redeemed means to be separated in order to serve God with one's life. It is like God saying, "these people are mine and I'm "cashing in" what is mine".
 - i) Remember that redemption is not just about being saved. The idea also includes the idea of trusting that God will help us through whatever situation we are in, because we are "His".
 - ii) To put it another way, if we are trusting that we are one of "His", then we show that trust by waiting on His timing to deal with our problems.
 - a) That does not mean we sit still and do nothing. It means we keep moving and trust that God is working in our lives and helping us as we work our way through our problems and our lives.
 - b) This surprisingly, does lead me to Verse 4.
8. Verse 4: These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.
- a) Remember that the "Sons of Korah" wrote this psalm. The writer(s) are going through some sort of painful moment in their life, and now he (or they) are recalling how they used to go into the house of God leading the procession. The Sons of Korah were Levites, which is one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The Levites were in charge of worshipping God and helping other Israelites to worship God.
 - b) The point here is not about how Jewish people of that time had "worship service". The point is that this "son of Korah" (I'll assume the writer was "singular" for the moment) was in pain and God was not helping him at this moment in time. To help him deal with his pain, he remembers a previous time where he was leading a procession into the House of God and leading a large throng of people.
 - c) OK, the writer felt better because he recalled a past positive time where he felt close to God. How does that help me? As I have stated in past lessons, a person who is dedicated to praising God will never run out of reasons to praise Him. Thinking about times when we had joy in our past helps us to have joy (an inner sense of peace) in our tough times.
 - i) By the way, this does not mean we have to be artificially happy when life is falling apart. The point is not to mask our suffering. The point is we can have joy in God even when everything is falling apart. We are trusting in His redemption.
9. Verse 5: Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and ⁶ my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon--from Mount Mizar.
- a) Speaking of emotionally struggling between dealing with emotional pain and the desire to be praising God, I present to you Verses 5 and 6. The writer of this psalm (again, assuming just one writer) is talking to himself and saying in effect, "Why am I so down right now? I will overcome how down I feel by praising You just where I am."

- b) We need to have a quick geography lesson at this point. Verse 6 refers to the heights of Hermon and Mount Mizar. Essentially, this is in the northern part of Israel not far from the Sea of Galilee. I believe the point here is the center of worship for a Jewish person is Jerusalem, as that is where God's "presence" was located, in a worship tent that stood in David's time and later a temple structure that was built by David's son Solomon.
 - i) The point of all of this is that the Sons of Korah were not home in Jerusalem, but for some unnamed reason were currently in the Galilee area (near Sea of Galilee).
 - ii) The writer is saying in effect, "I am not going to worry about my geographical location. I am just going to praise God from where I am and praise Him despite of what I am going through right now." The point is despite whatever we are dealing with at this time, we can praise God because we trust that He will be there to help us through our present situations.
10. Verse 7: Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.
- a) The visual painting here is that of waves crashing over us. One can feel overwhelmed by pain. Such pain can feel like a powerful force like a wave crashing over us.
 - b) It would help here to remember that whatever the writer of the psalm is dealing with at this moment (it is not stated), it is something so bad that he feels overwhelmed.
 - i) I have been with people who have just discovered they have cancer. The news can be so painful that it does feel like a wave is crashing over you at that moment.
 - ii) My point is that most of us go through periods of our lives where it does feel like life is too much for us to handle and waves of emotion are affecting us.
 - iii) During such tough moments is when we wonder why God is not working on our timing to deal with the crisis at hand? (Let's read on for an answer.)
11. Verse 8: By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life.
- a) If you haven't noticed by now, this psalm spends a lot of time going back and forth between dealing with one's emotional pain and wondering where is God at this time. When such times occur, we need to remind ourselves that God is there and He is directing His love to us even though we may not feel His love at that particular moment in time.
 - b) The psalm writer is trying to get his mind off of his pain and remember that God still loves him, cares about him and is working in his (and our) lives even though God is not responding to his cries for help, at least not in ways he can recognize at the moment.
12. Verse 9: I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" ¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
- a) The psalm writer (again, assuming the writer is singular) refers to God as his rock in Verse 9. This is not a small rock in one's hand. The idea refers to a giant, unmovable boulder that one could stand on. The idea is God is "unmovable" from where He is.
 - b) With that said, the psalm writer is suffering because he is being taunted by those who do not believe in God. At the same time, this psalm writer does not feel God's presence and is wondering, where is God through all of this?
 - c) Now picture yourself in some predicament and cannot sense God's presence to comfort you through that time of trial. What do you do for mental relief when we don't feel God helping us through such a time?
 - i) For starters, we remind ourselves that God is still an immovable "rock" and is still there, even when we don't feel His comfort. We remind ourselves that God will see us through our predicament whether we "feel Him" or not.
 - ii) That in effect is what the psalm writer does, beginning at the next verse.

13. Verse 11: Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
- a) The psalm ends on the reminder that God will rescue all that trust in Him out of every single predicament that we find ourselves in. For some, that rescue comes through our death. Often God likes to work in a way that is unexpected to us so that we should give Him (and Him alone) the glory for getting us through that situation.
 - b) With that said, the psalm writer is reminding himself that he (or they) will praise God again when he (or they) gets rescued out of their predicament. Does that mean they can't praise God now? Of course they can, but that is not the point. The point is we trust in God to get us through whatever we are dealing with. When we do feel relief, we will pause to praise God for helping us through that situation.
 - c) The psalm ends on that happy note. The last line is the reminder to trust God through one's crisis and the fact that we can't sense God helping us at that moment in time.
 - i) We will move on to the next psalm and see how ties to this same lesson theme.
14. Psalm 43: No title.
- a) That is not the title for Psalm 43, the point is, there is no title. Some scholars speculate that this psalm is an epilogue of Psalm 42 and they attribute it to the same author as Psalm 42. I just wanted to point out that there is a reason this short five-line psalm follows after Psalm 42 and I believe they are meant to be tied together.
15. Verse 1: Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.
- a) In Psalm 42, the psalm writer (again, assuming it was one writer) was physically away from his spiritual home in Jerusalem and was dealing with taunts from nonbelievers. Here in Psalm 43, the writer is still dealing with taunts, but now instead of one person picking on this believer in God, we have an "ungodly nation" picking on him or them.
 - i) Like the last psalm, we have an unnamed psalm writer who feels like he is distant from God and wants His help in the midst of deceitful and wicked men.
 - b) OK John, and what does this have to do with us? Suppose we are away from where we consider home. At the same time we are amongst people who are putting us down for our lifestyle based on our trust in God. The point here is there can be a time or place where we look for God's comfort and we can't feel His presence.
 - i) Forget the issue for the moment of whether or not we should be in a place with ungodly people or how we got there. The issue is we feel like where we are (it can be a physical place or a spiritual state of mind) where we feel surrounded by unbelievers and we can't sense God comforting us.
 - ii) I believe the point is in such a situation, we asking God to comfort us when we feel surrounded by nonbelievers. The method of how we speak to God on this issue is not as important as just the fact we are turning our attention to God for relief through whatever we are facing at the present moment. It is about reminding ourselves that God is still there and He is still watching out for us even when we are surrounded by "foe's".
16. Verse 2: You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?
- a) Translation: Dear God, I hate this feeling of not sensing your presence. Why are You (God) allowing me to be oppressed by my enemy? Why is it I don't feel Your comfort through this whole situation? I can sense enemies of You taunting me, but I can't sense any sort of relief from what I am going through at this moment.
 - b) OK and now for the tough question: Why does God allow moments like that in life?
 - i) One of my favorite bible teachers (Chuck Missler) likes to say, "I am convinced that God stays up late at night thinking of new ways to test me (Chuck) and ask me in effect, "Do you (Chuck) really trust Me (God)?"

- ii) The point of that quote by Chuck Missler is that God likes to test us. He likes to see if we are still going to trust Him when we are going through a rough stretch of time. Why is that? Why doesn't He just comfort us when we ask Him to? Why does He allow us to go through periods of testing like this? (That is the key question of this lesson and why my lesson title is about God's silence at times.)
 - iii) The short answer is God wants us to grow as believers. For us to grow in our faith and trust in Him, there needs to come times where God can see if we will trust Him in "this or that" situation. I find that at times God "goes quiet" to see if we will still trust Him despite what we are dealing with at that moment.
 - iv) One of the best pieces of advice I ever heard during moments when everything is really falling part is to focus on (read about, think about and be grateful for) is the "goodness" of God. In other words, spend time thinking about how good God is and how merciful He is toward us. Think about how He has forgiven us of all of our sins. Not only does that issue tie to this psalm but it also strengthens us during the rough moments of life.
17. Verse 3: Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.
- a) OK, first question: What does it mean to "send forth God's light and truth"? Should we as Christians be praying that specific line when we are in trouble? What does it mean?
 - i) The idea is to make God's word and His presence part of our life. The idea is to once again sense the presence of God, which is what the writer lacked at this time.
 - b) Looking at the whole sentence, the writer of this psalm wanted God to "guide him" and bring him (mentally) to the place where God dwells.
 - i) Let me state here that this verse is not about suicide. It is not saying "Dear God let me take my life now so I can be with You in heaven." The verse is about asking for God's guidance so our life on earth can continue to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) Also know that this verse is not about asking God to literally guide the psalm writer back to Jerusalem where God's temple was at that time. Assuming the writer was a competent Israelite, he would know the literal way to get there.
 - iii) It is possible that the writer of this psalm is in some sort of predicament where he literally could not get back to Jerusalem, but I don't think that's the point here.
 - iv) The point of this verse as it applies to us is that we have mentally gone to a place where we are away from the presence of God or again, the writer doesn't feel God's presence in his life at this moment.
 - c) Let me try to pray a good paraphrase of this verse: "Dear God, I don't know how to get out of the mess that I am in right now. Further, I don't feel like You are guiding me at this moment in time. Therefore, I appeal to Your goodness and Your mercy and I ask that You lead me into a close relationship with You again. Bring me (mentally, physically and or emotionally) back to where I feel close to You again."
 - i) Personally, I don't believe God can turn down a prayer request like that. Asking to be drawn closer to Him is in effect, about giving up control of the situation and asking Him to take over. I can't promise one will immediately know what to do next, but I can promise such a prayer will remind us that God is guiding us even if we don't feel His presence at that moment in time.
18. Verse 4: Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.
- a) At first, this verse reads like the writer of this psalm is trying to bribe God by saying in effect, if You (God) will rescue me, then I will go to Your temple and praise You.
 - b) While drawing close to God is always a good idea, praying a prayer like this does not mean God is now obligated to tell us what to do. God has His reasons for going "silent" and we have to trust that He is there when such times occur.

- c) What we are to get out of this verse, is that God appreciates gratitude. It is not that God has an emotional need for us to be grateful. God just knows that when we show gratitude for what He has done in our lives, it draws us closer to Him (as we are sharing His love back with Him) and at the same time it may even make us a better witness for Him.
 - i) Such gratitude if done in a "church setting" is contagious.
 - d) This verse also mentions praising God with a harp. This does not mean all of us have to take harp lessons and learn to praise God through that particular musical instrument.
 - i) I believe it is simply that the writer of this psalm is in the "band" at the Jewish worship service and that was his way of praising God. If one has a musical talent for praising God and one can use that in one's church setting do that. At the same time, just singing out praise to God from the audience can be just as effective.
19. Verse 5: Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
- a) This is the last line of this short psalm, and in effect, a summary of the whole thing. The whole psalm is about putting one's trust in God when one does not sense His presence.
 - b) This last line has the writer of the psalm thinking, "Why am I so mentally down right now? I trust that God will get me through this situation. Further, I will praise God when He does get me through this rough stretch of time."
 - i) That type of prayer should be present in all believers. We should try to mentally catch ourselves when we are feeling down and think to ourselves, why are we worrying? Don't we know God is in charge of our lives and is watching over us?
 - ii) Just as I believe God constantly thinks of new ways to ask us, "Do we trust Him?" He also takes delight when we do trust Him through our difficult moments and enjoys when we praise Him when things get better.
 - c) So is this psalm just saying, "Don't worry be happy?" Not exactly. It is saying that there is a God who made the universe and also cares about the lives of individuals. Trusting in Him should be our remedy for worry and that, should make us happy.
20. Psalm 44: For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*.
- a) The title here is almost identical to the title of Psalm 42. As I said earlier in this lesson, a *maskil* simply means this is a reflective psalm. It is about examining our own lives in relation to what God desires for our lives.
 - b) I find it interesting how the writer(s) of this psalm wish to remain nameless by simply calling themselves the "Sons of Korah". That name Korah could refer to their actual father, but more likely it is their ancestor. It is saying in effect, "We Korah's have been called to be priests and we want to show our love to God by writing about His attributes."
 - c) OK John, given all of that, what is this psalm about? Like the last two psalms, this one is also about trusting God when one is "down". Psalm 44 goes one step further and suggests a time when all of Israel was really depressed and possibly under attack or siege.
 - i) The point is there can come times when not only are we suffering, but everyone around us is suffering. It is our whole group crying out to God for help and wondering why He is not doing more at the present moment?
 - ii) With that depressing introduction completed, ☺ let us start Verse 1 of this psalm.
21. Verse 1: We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. ² With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish.
- a) In these opening verses, the writer(s) to this psalm are recounting ancient stories of how God has rescued past generations of Israelites out of trouble and made it possible for them to live in the land in Israel.
 - b) It doesn't mean we never suffer from hardship, but it means that just as the ancient Israelites trusted in God to be rescued, so should we trust in that same God to rescue us.

- c) These lines are saying that victory comes to those who trust in God. It happened in the lives of the generation of Israelites that first conquered the land and ultimate victory can and does happen to those of us today who trust in Him.
 - i) Suppose we have lost our home or our job. Suppose our whole community is suffering due to a recession or a depression. Suppose someone I love is really sick. How does these verses help me? The point is there is no problem big enough or small enough that God is not willing to be involved with. God may not rescue us the way we expect, but if we rely on Him and trust Him through our situation, He promises to see us through it and lead us down the path He desires for our lives.
22. Verse 3: It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.
- a) Verse 3 is the reminder that the Israelites who first settled in the land of Israel did not conquer the land because they were stronger than their enemies. They won those battles simply because they trusted in God and relied upon Him for victory.
 - b) OK John, tell me again how this ancient story helps me? The point is just as other people trusted in God, so we have the privilege of doing the same thing. We can't earn that trust by being a good person, but simply trusting that God sees us as perfectly forgiven people because we are trusting in Jesus' sin payment for all of our sins, past present and future.
 - i) That still means we should desire to live a life pleasing to God. At the same time, knowing we are forgiven, and that privilege of forgiveness also means that we can trust that God is watching over every aspect of our lives and wants to see us through whatever we are dealing with at the present moment.
 - ii) I have no idea how God will see you or me through whatever we are dealing with or whatever our society is dealing with. I just know that our trust is in Him, and He never lets down those who put their trust in Him.
23. Verse 4: You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. ⁵ Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. ⁶ I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; ⁷ but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame.
- a) Verse 4 says that God decrees victories for Jacob. What does that mean? Know that the word Jacob as used here is a synonym for the nation of Israel. So why doesn't the psalm writer say "Israel", since that is the name God used to rename Jacob back in Genesis?
 - i) By using "Jacob", that is a reminder that God knows that we are imperfect people, who are trusting in Him despite our struggles. Jacob, in the book of Genesis was a person who regularly got in trouble, yet God rescues him time and time again, not because Jacob was anything special, but just because it was part of God's plan to see Jacob through all of his troubles.
 - ii) OK John, what does that mean? It means that God sees us with all of our faults, and still desires to help us despite of those faults. It amazes me that people refuse to put their trust in the God of the Bible despite promises like this that He will (not may but "will") see us through all the problems of our lives.
 - b) With that thought out of my system, I can now concentrate on the text of Verses 4-6:
 - i) The essential point of these verses is that God gives us victory not because we are good people or better people than our enemies, but just because He wants to show His love to those of us willing to trust in Him.
 - ii) The verses say in effect that they (the Israelites) do not trust in their weapons in order to win battles. Notice that does not mean they threw down their weapons when facing an enemy. It does mean that they rely on God for victory.

- c) So if the Israelites are still using their weapons what does it mean practically? It means the leaders of the army are to seek God in prayer before strategizing how to engage the enemy. It means in effect when we have to battle what we face in life, we pray about it and trust that God is guiding the decisions we make in life.
- i) If that is true, why do we still lose some battles? The short answer is that God may be teaching us something through our losses or He has some bigger plan that involves our suffering in the short term. Remember that we are still far better off by relying upon Him than trying to do things based on our strength.
- ii) On a more positive note, the last part of these verses remind us that through God, we eventually will have victory over whatever forces we face.
24. Verse 8: In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. *Selah*
- a) So what does it mean to boast in God all day long? Do I have to shout out God's name as I go about my daily routine? Well, not exactly. The point is God is to become a central part of our lives. We care about pleasing Him in all that we do. We trust that God is guiding our lives. We should be known among our neighbors as one who is committed to following God with our lives. Those are practical ways we boast in God all day long.
- i) Obviously, making time in our day for prayer and study is a part of that equation, but I wanted to describe this concept on a practical level, which is the last point.
- b) This verse ends with the word "Selah". As I've stated in past lessons, it is an untranslated word, which essentially means to stop and think about what was just said.
- i) With that "Selah" in mind, pause for a second, and contemplate whether or not God is part of our lives all day long. Again, it is not about trying to think of God every moment of the day. It is about making time in our day for Him (through prayer and His word) and having the goal of living a life that is pleasing to Him.
25. Verse 9: But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. ¹⁰You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. ¹¹You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. ¹²You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale.
- a) From an upbeat message in the previous set of verses, the psalm now goes very negative and says in effect "God has rejected us" and here is the evidence of that rejection by God. The evidence is, "We have lost our battles. We have retreated from our enemies who have plundered (taken our goods)." It goes downhill from there. ☹
- b) Let's put these verses in perspective of the psalm so far:
- i) The psalm opened in effect by reminding us that God has helped the ancestors of the Israelites. It is that reminder that God worked in human history in the past.
- ii) The next set of verses stated in effect that it is a known fact that the writer(s) of the psalm (and hopefully us too) trust in God and desire to please Him.
- c) That leads to these verses, where it says in effect, we have lost the war "big time".
- i) Anybody who has been a Christian a good while, knows the feeling of trying to please God but can't understand why we are going through so much pain and loss at the present time. With that said, what does one do when one is in so much pain, one can barely go on?
- ii) For starters, one has to remember that God has not abandoned us. Never misread God's testing as being abandoned. Next, focus on His love. Find one's favorite scriptures that focus on how much God loves us. If one needs an example, try Jeremiah 33:11b. It reads, "'Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever.'" (NIV). Other translations say His mercy endures forever, but the point is about God's love is the same.
- iii) When we are suffering, I would cry out to Him with our problems. Remember that God loves us too much to leave us alone. You can always do what I do, which is to write out one's frustration on the computer screen.

- d) I have yet to know of one person that God has used in a mighty way, in which that same person has not had to suffer in order to be used greatly by Him. When one is really hurting, simply remember that God does have a purpose for us going through such pain.
 - e) Finally, remember that one is never alone. Have others pray with you or for you. It has never ceased to amaze me what a difference that has made in my life. Sometimes it is even easier to share one's burden with one who you don't know well as to get a fresh perspective on the situation. OK, enough moping. ☺ Let's get back to the Israelites.
26. Verse 13: You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. ¹⁴ You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us.
- a) There are bible scholars who theorize that whenever this psalm was written, it was during one of the periods of time where the Nation of Israel suffered from tremendous defeat or was scattered due to the attack of some enemy. There are even some scholars who take this psalm a step further and say it is predictive of when the nation of Israel will suffer greatly in the future during what the Christians call the "Great Tribulation".
 - i) I don't think the "when" issue is nearly as important as the "how to deal with it" question. Maybe one or more of those theories are true. Maybe this was written at some point where the nation of Israel was (or will be) so defeated that they are the scourge (nonbelievers look down at them) of neighbors and other nations.
 - b) Since the "why" question is never answered as to why the Israelites are suffering, the real question is what do we do about it? What do we do when we as a group are suffering that much? This leads back to the points I made in the previous verse. It is a matter of seeking God both as individuals and as a group for guidance.
 - c) One of the reasons psalms like this are here in the bible is because there are times in our lives where we are so low and we don't know what to do. All we can do is keep moving forward and trusting that God has a plan for our lives for His glory. God either rescues us from such periods or in some cases, relieves us by the end of our lives. Remember that eternity in heaven is much longer in length than everything we can suffer in this lifetime.
 - d) By "coincidence" I ate lunch recently next to a person who is in the funeral business. I asked him to verify for me (he did) that if a person dies with a smile on their face, morticians cannot remove that smile from a dead body. Further, a mortician cannot force a smile on a dead body. That is why the early Christian church started the tradition of open casket funerals to show others how happy Christians are at their death.
 - i) I am in no way encouraging our death. My simple point is that God is quite aware of all we go through and one way or another is watching out for our lives and wants us to have joy making a difference for Him in our lives.
27. Verse 15: My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame ¹⁶ at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.
- a) Notice that things are not getting any better in this psalm. I have seen cases where suffering has gone on for a very long time and it seems like there is no end. Here, the disgrace of whatever the Israelites have gone through causes the writer to state how he covers his face with shame. At the same time, those who are suffering in this psalm are still aware of their enemies being "bent on revenge" on those of us who trust in God.
 - i) If we are complaining about how bad our lives are, what kind of a witness for God are we at that moment? We don't have to be artificially happy, but one has to trust that God will rescue us through such times and reminding ourselves of that fact helps us through those times.
 - b) Sometimes the best witness we can be for God is when we are in pain and we can state or show others how much we still trust in God. It may be "today" when we are hurting, but "tomorrow" is when others are hurting and they will turn to us to ask in effect, "Tell me again how did you get through that time"? That is when being a good witness for Jesus can truly make a difference in the lives of others.

28. Verse 17: All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. ¹⁸ Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. ¹⁹ But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness. ²⁰ If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, ²¹ would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? ²² Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
- a) I can summarize these six verses in one thought: "I can't think of anything I (or we) have done wrong to deserve this wrath." When we are suffering, our first thought can be, "I must have done something to offend God for Him to allow me to get in this mess".
 - i) Such self-reflection is important and if there is some unconfessed sin, it would help our relationship with God, but that is a separate issue.
 - ii) In effect, this is the problem that Job suffered through. When Job was suffering, his friends said to him in effect, "Why don't you (Job) just confess what you did wrong, and bring this suffering to an end?" (See Job 34:32 or 36:23 as examples of his friends asking that type of question.)
 - iii) Like Job' suffering in the bible, the writer of this psalm was not suffering due to sin, although that question is often asked when someone is really down. Like Job and like here in this psalm, God at times allows believers to go through painful times, and it has nothing to do with the sins we have committed in our lives.
 - b) A point of these verses is that God can bring us "low" due to our sins, and often He will do that in order for us to become aware of our sins and deal with them. At the same time, there comes times where we can suffer and it has nothing to do with our sins. That is the issue here in this psalm. One should do an inventory of one's life during low times to see if there is something God wants to teach us.
 - i) No one is perfect and we all have issues to work on. Still, I find that when God wants me to be aware of some specific sin, He makes it obvious. One gets the impression that although the Israelites were not perfect people, the reason for the suffering has nothing to do with some specific sin.
 - ii) If one gets the idea that one can suffer even when one has done nothing wrong, one has made great advances in their trust in God through good and bad times. Yes one should do an internal inventory, but one must also accept the idea that God can allow us to go through suffering even if there is no particular sin issue involved.
 - c) OK, enough suffering for those verses, ☺ let us go to the last four verses of this lesson.
29. Verse 23: Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. ²⁴ Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? ²⁵ We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground.
- a) If I have learned one thing about suffering and God's love for us, it is that we have to appeal to God not based on our "goodness", but solely based on His love for us.
 - i) We should not cry out to God, "Rescue me because I am your servant and I deserve to be treated better than this." Instead we should be crying out to God to help us only because He loves us and it is His desire to show His love to us.
 - b) In these verses, the writer is asking God to "wake out of his sleep". No the writer of the psalm does not think that God sleeps. The writer of this psalm is asking in effect, "God, where are you during this rough time? It feels like You are asleep because whatever that pain is, it is going "on and on" and it feels like You are not doing anything to help."

30. Verse 26: Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.
- a) This last verse is a good ending to this psalm about long-term suffering. The point again is to appeal to God solely based on His love for us. We should cry out to God to help us because He loves us and not because we deserve His help.
 - b) So will God automatically rescue us if we let go of worrying about ourselves and pray for His love to take over? I can't guarantee that, but I admit I have watched situations become a lot more tolerable, when we put the problems in "His hands".
31. I opened this lesson by asking in effect, why does God allow us to go through periods of testing? The answer is God can put us through such periods to see if we trust in Him and not our strength or our resources to get us through such periods. Those testing periods are not only for us to ask the question, "Do we trust God?" It is also for us to ask the question, "Are we trusting in God and nothing else?" Usually when we get to that point when it is God and nothing else, I find that He does rescue us on His timing.
- a) In the meantime, we can face going through such times knowing that God is there and knowing that God has some purpose for us going through such painful times.
 - b) I am reminded of something taught by Chuck Swindoll. (A great bible teacher if you've never read any of his work.) He said that when we get to heaven, the only word we can get out of mouth in the presence of God is "oh". It would be like us asking, "Why did You (God) allow this to happen? Once we learn the answer, all we can say is "Oh, that is why you allowed that to happen". We will verbally, never get past the "oh" with God.
 - c) God has His reasons to allow us to go through such times. He may make us aware of those reasons in our lifetime or we may have to wait until we get to heaven before we can say "Oh, that is why you allowed me to go through that".
 - i) In the meantime, God promises to see us through those times and if you think about it, we really have no choice but to trust in Him, which is often the reason why God allows us to go through such times in the first place.
32. OK, I admit this is a tough lesson. I promise the next one gets better and is a much more positive and upbeat message. (I've read ahead ☺). In the meantime, trust that God is aware of whatever we are dealing with and God wants us to see us through such times. Further, the most important thing we can do during rough times is trust in Him alone (that means keep moving forward and trust that He is working) to get us through those times. Let me try ending this in prayer, which usually helps.
33. Father, there comes times in our lives where we are going through tremendous pain and it seems like it is not due to anything we have done wrong. First of all, help us to do an internal inventory and bring to the surface any sinful issues you want us to be aware of. Next, help us to remember that You are with us through such times and You are seeing us through such times. Help us to trust in You, in the sense that we know that You love us and You do have a plan for our lives. Help us to keep moving forward and trust that You are guiding us as we live to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.