

1. Let me start by giving my title: "Why is it we as believers struggle with God at times?" I bet you didn't even know you were struggling with God right now. ☺ I'm talking about those times when things go wrong and in effect we have two choices in our relationship with God: We can either be angry at God or we can give our anger to Him for what is happening at the moment.
 - a) We can blame Him because life is not turning out the way we thought it should, or more importantly we can trust in Him to guide us through our situations and lead us toward the way He wants us to go. That in effect, is how we struggle with God.
2. Lately, I have been thinking about the fact my life is not coming out the way I thought it would come out, say ten or twenty years ago. I have made the mistake of focusing on others who have become more successful than me at a younger age. It has made me wonder if I have done something wrong or if God has somehow "let me down".
 - a) The point of course, is that we can blame God for things go wrong, or we can let Him guide us through our lives. Obviously, some things are beyond our control. As a Christian, the challenge is to figure out how God wants to lead us.
 - b) I have been learning over and over again that every time I try to jump ahead of what God wants me to do, I fail. But, whenever I just let Him lead me where I believe He wants me to go, I have had far more success than when I try to do things without His help.
 - i) This writing ministry is the perfect example. Every time I try to advertise it somewhere or every time I make an effort to make it grow, it fails miserably.
 - ii) At the same time, when I get out of the way in that I let God lead the effort to make it grow, it does amazing things both in terms of how each lesson comes out on paper and how the ministry itself grows the way He wants it to grow.
 - iii) What I keep learning is the secret to living the Christian life to let God lead me in what becomes obvious over time. That should never be an excuse to be lazy or not try new things. It just means as we go forward in life, we learn to trust God and be aware of how He is working out our life for His glory.
3. OK John, what does all of this have to do with the psalms in this lesson? Good question.
 - a) In both psalms, we have the issue of things going horribly wrong. The psalm writer wonders why would God allow such bad things to happen to His people if (a big emphasis on "if" here) He truly loves His followers like the bible says He does.
 - b) In other words, "Hey God, why are You allowing me to go through all of this?"
 - i) It may help to know that the word "Israel" literally means to struggle with God.
 - ii) The word "Israel" does refer to the common ancestor of all people of Jewish decent. In a spiritual sense the word Israel also refers to all of us who struggle with our relationship with God in trying to understand what it is we are supposed to do in our relationship with Him. I struggle in understanding just what it is God wants me to do in my life and where He wants me to go from where I am at in life.
 - a) Know that the Israelites struggle with similar questions of wondering what is God's purpose for allowing specific bad events to occur in their lives.
 - c) If you recall from a few lessons back, I stated that this third book of the psalms focuses on the issue of worship. I believe this third book of the psalm in a lot of ways parallels the book of Leviticus in that the focus is on how God is to be worshipped. Part of the issue of how God is to be worshipped involves our struggle with Him in terms of understanding just what it is He wants of our life and what He expects us to do in certain situations.
 - i) That includes the idea of learning to trust Him through difficult situations and letting Him lead us down the path He desires for our lives.
 - ii) There, now that we are all confused as to what to do next, ☺ time for Psalm 79.

4. Psalm 79, title: A psalm of Asaph.
- a) All we have in this title is the author's name and the fact it is a psalm.
 - b) To rehash a point I have been making over the last few lessons, there is debate among bible scholars as to who is this Asaph. 1st Chronicles mentions a man named Asaph who was in charge of worshipping God at the time of King David.
 - i) Yet, this psalm and a few others we have studied over the past few lessons appear to have occurred much later in the history of Israel than when King David lived.
 - ii) Some have argued that there is a family of Asaph's that have been the writers of psalms and they all use the single name "Asaph" as part of their title.
 - c) In effect all we need to know is that there is debate amongst experts as to who is this Asaph. With that said, we can leave that argument alone and focus on the psalm itself.
 - d) The word "psalm" itself simply means that the writer wants us to contemplate the words to this psalm and consider how they apply to our lives. Since I'm obsessed with that topic in these studies, I won't expand upon that thought any further.
5. Psalm 79, Verse 1: O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
- a) Given Verse 1, most bible commentators speculate that this verse appears to be written about the time that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. That would be the only time in the history of Israel that would fit this verse. Historians do know that all of the psalms were compiled as a group many centuries before the Greeks and Romans took over Israel.
 - b) It may help at this point to understand why God allowed the Babylonians to destroy God's temple at that time. That particular temple existed for many centuries from the time of David's son King Solomon all the way until the kingdom of Judah was conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians hundreds of years later.
 - c) The key point is that as a group, the Israelites had turned from worshipping God to worshipping idols. One gets the idea that many Israelites still went through the motions of worshipping God but their hearts were not in it. God allowed that destruction of that nation as the Israelites did things that God forbid them to do.
 - i) Over those centuries the Israelites' sins grew to a point where God said in effect, "I won't put up with your disobedience as you Israelites are acting no better than the nations your ancestors conquered to be there in the first place."
 - ii) Obviously the Israelites did not believe that the God they trusted in would ever go a point of actually kicking them out of the land because the Israelites understood that they were still "God's chosen people" even though they knew they sinned.
 - d) Gee John, that is interesting ancient history. What does it have to do with my life today?
 - i) The point is if we too, are trusting in God for our lives. Know that God is willing to go to desperate measures to get our attention in order for us to commit every aspect of our lives on Him. To put it another way, God wants to lead our lives down the path He desires for us. That battle for control of our lives (between us and God) can and will cause Him to go to extreme measures in order for us to be obedient to Him in the first place.
 - ii) Therefore, as we read this psalm and the next one in this lesson about the struggles the Israelites had at these moments in history, the point is not to think, "Oh poor them". The point is to realize that God is more than willing to go to the same extreme measures with us in order to teach us obedience in our lives.
 - iii) So would God kick us out of our land for disobedience? I wouldn't want to get to a point where I have to put that issue past Him. Since Christians are scattered all over the world, there are probably other punishments we should fear more.
 - e) Which surprisingly leads me back to my introduction. It is about trusting God through good and bad times as opposed to blaming God for the way our lives have turned out. In effect, this lesson continues last week's theme of God won't leave us "half-baked".

- f) OK, I have now written almost a whole a page on Verse 1, and I have yet to talk about the specifics of that verse. Whatever is happening, a foreign army has attacked Israel. This army has reduced the city of Jerusalem to rubble. Further, these invaders have entered God's holy temple and destroyed that temple.
 - i) OK John, and how does this affect me? There are going to be times where it seems like everything in our lives that we love or respect has falling apart. We then in effect, have two choices: We can blame God for how our lives have turned out or we can turn to Him to guide us through those situations. That is how we as well as the ancient Israelites "struggled with God". That is why I picked that expression as the title of this lesson and we can see how it fits well with this lesson.
- 6. Verse 2: They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. ³They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead.
 - a) I read these verses and thought, "Boy and I thought I had problems". ☺ Here is a tragedy so bad that multitudes of people are lying dead in the street with no one to bury them.
 - b) The question of course is, "If God is so good and He loves us so much, why would He allow something like this to happen to His people?" A related question is "What did we or they do that would cause the (fill in the blank) tragedy to happen?
 - i) I gave up a long time ago trying to explain all of the bad things that happen to good people that do trust in God.
 - ii) All I do know is that the alternative of giving up on God is far worse than whatever pain comes from the tragedies we deal with in our lives.
 - iii) Yes we should examine our lives regularly for sin, but there are times when disaster can strike and in effect there is nothing we can do about it.
 - iv) In effect, our choices is to complain about how bad it is or to simply work our way through the disaster and rely on God's strength to get us through it.
 - c) I have to admit, in all of my good and bad times, I've never experienced anything so bad as watching my world get conquered where there are multitudes of dead all around me.
 - i) In that literal sense I do have a tough time relating to this psalm. However, most of us who have lived life a little do understand that tough times do come.
 - ii) We trust that God is well aware of whatever we are going through right now.
 - iii) I had a friend at a men's bible study explain it real well last night: We may not understand everything we are going through, but from God's perspective, He sees our entire life as a "planned out race course" where He knows what is going to happen to us at any moment and He knows what will happen next.
 - a) That may not comfort us through our tough times, but knowing that God knows all things reminds us to trust in Him through both the good and bad times in our lives.
 - d) Let me try this from another angle: We may not be the person lying dead in the streets as this psalm is describing, but we may wonder, "What about them? If God is so good, why did He allow those people to die or suffer like He did?
 - i) In the literal aspect of this psalm, this is a point in time where God had "had it" with disobedience and He allowed the nation of Israel to be conquered for that reason. My point is God allows bad things at times, to teach us to trust Him. Yes that may even includes the death of loved ones all around us.
 - ii) As I like to say, if this lifetime is "all there is", life would be very unfair. But if we understand that we are going to live forever, then using what time we do have in this world to make a difference for God is the best use of the time we are given.
 - iii) Are you saying all disasters are God ordained? No I am saying God is aware of all disasters and wants us to trust Him through such times in our lives.
 - e) Meanwhile, those Israelites are still hurting and it's time to get back to the psalms.

7. Verse 4: We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us.
 - a) In Verse 4, the psalmist changes the perspective from "what about our tragedy" to what will others think about this?
 - b) Let's face it: Other nations around Israel knew that they trusted in God. Other nations knew that if Israel were conquered, then those nations would argue that the God of the bible is a waste of time as He allowed such a tragedy to occur to His people.
 - i) To put it in our vocabulary, if something really bad happens to those who trust in God, how will that affect how others see Him? Won't a horrible tragedy to "God's chosen people, cause others to doubt the benefit of following Him?
 - ii) In other words, we may think, "God can't kill us believers, because if He did who will be a witness for Him?" What I have learned is that God does not need us to be His witnesses in the sense that if we fail to do what God calls us to do, He will find someone else to get done what He wants to get done in this world.
 - iii) My point is God will move on with us or without us. If we fail to do what God desires of us, He may take us "out of the ball game", but His will, will be done.
 - c) The argument in Verse 4 is in effect, "What will our neighbor's think by our tragedy?" Such tragedies may be a problem in terms of our witness to God, but it is not an issue of God's work getting done as He will find someone else to get His will done.
8. Verse 5: How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
 - a) Give the psalm writer a little credit. He understood that the reason God allowed that particular tragedy to happen was because He was angry at His people.
 - i) The point for you and me is that there is a price to be paid for disobedience. Just like God could take certain Israelites "out of the ball game" for disobedience, so God can take you or me home to heaven if we fail to do what He calls us to do.
 - ii) OK John, you are now scaring me. What is it I'm supposed to do, so my life does not end up dead like the people in this psalm? The issue still us trusting God. The question is are we living the life that God desires us to live? Are we avoiding things that cause us to sin in the first place? Are we trusting in Him daily not only for our survival, but to succeed in what God desires us to do?
 - a) This is why I call this lesson "struggling with God". If we are trying to please God, all of us will struggle between the desire to do our will versus doing His will at any moment in our lives.
 - b) At the moments where we try to jump ahead of what God desires for us, or we turn away from what we sense is God's desire for our lives, the ultimate price for that decision can be death as the Israelites experienced in the opening verses of this psalm.
 - i) Remember here that the Israelites did not die from some sort of disaster like an earthquake or a tornado. They were literally conquered by an enemy.
 - ii) So who is the enemy that we need to fear? The reason God allows Satan and his demonic forces to exist is as a motivational tool to keep us close to Him. The only reason Satan does win battles at times is because we turn from God's help and try to fight our battles without His help. In such cases, we like the Israelites will suffer defeats when we try to do things based on our own strength.
 - c) John, are you saying we will never lose a battle in life if we trust in God? Hardly. Sometimes God allows defeats in order to teach us specific lessons. That may or may not be the case for the Israelites here in this verse. We don't always understand the reason why God allows defeat and yes tragedies to occur in our lives. All we do know is that we are fully dependant upon Him in order to be able to get through whatever we are facing with at the present moment. The point here in these verses is that when everything is going wrong, the solution does start with acknowledging God is in charge of our lives. We look to Him to lead us through whatever we are dealing with at that moment.

9. Verse 6: Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name;⁷ for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his homeland.
- a) Meanwhile the psalmist is angry at the nations that fight against Israel. It is a natural tendency in bad times to want to look for someone to blame. Instead of saying, "It was our fault for turning against God, what about those other people over there who don't trust in You in the first place? What about them?"
 - i) I always find it interesting that we want God's mercy and His forgiveness on our lives, yet we want God's anger and wrath on the lives of others who hurt us.
 - ii) Yes of course, there is a coming a judgment day for believers and unbelievers as well. Yes those who will never turn to God be judged in that day. What the psalmist is asking here is for God to "work now" on those who avoid Him.
 - b) It may help to study these verses another way: If God does love us, wouldn't He then want to harm those who harm us? Wouldn't that be God showing love to us? Again, there is coming a judgment day and God will show His wrath on that day to those who refuse to trust in Him. The question really becomes, "Hey God, why aren't You working now on my timing to harm my enemies? Why are You so much harder on those of us who trust in You than You are on those who don't believe in You in the first place?"
 - i) So why is God so much harder on His people than He is on those who don't trust in Him in the first place? For starters, God holds His people to a higher standard because we know of His existence and trust in Him to guide us.
 - ii) I believe the answer gets back to the idea that God is patiently waiting for as many people as possible to repent before allowing judgment to happen. (See 2nd Peter 3:9 on this topic.) It appears as if God does focus His wrath at times on believers more than unbelievers. That is because God is interesting in seeing us grow as believers. If that means to allow disasters in our lives, God will do whatever it takes in order to get our attention and get us to turn back to Him in our lives.
10. Verse 8: Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need.
- a) In the last two verses, I was comparing the disasters of believers to the "look what those unbelievers are getting away with it". That was the concern of the psalm writer.
 - i) His next thought here in Verse 8 is in effect, "Yes Lord, we are being hurt by our enemies and our only hope is in You, so please Help us. Yes we know we have sinned or else You God, would not have allowed this to happen in the first place."
 - b) The point is the psalm writer realizes the desperate need that God's people have for Him to guide and protect them (and us) from real and spiritual enemies. The psalmist is crying out not only for revenge but for help in dealing with a tragic situation.
 - i) OK you may ask, where is God in my tragic situation? I may not have dead bodies all around me, but I have problems too, and I don't sense God working.
 - ii) The point is not to hope for "biblical size" miracles to occur. The point is for us to trust that God can and will work through our lives through whatever situation we are facing at the present moment. I have no idea how God will get you or me through whatever we are facing at the moment. I just know that without God's help getting through my problems will become far harder than if I simply depend upon Him to lead me through what I am dealing with at the moment.
 - c) This psalm is reminding us that God never promises us a pain free life. Disasters are going to come to all of us at times. Sometimes these rough moments are due to our own sins and sometimes due to things others have done to us. We are not always privileged to know why disasters come at time, we just know that they are there and we have to deal with the situation at hand. All we do know is that the best solution is to cry out for God to guide us through such times, and that is what the psalmist is teaching us here in these verses. Meanwhile the psalmist is still pleading to God in the next verse. ☺

11. Verse 9: Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.
 - a) If there is one key principal to get out of Verse 9 it is that we don't ask for God's help because we deserve it. We ask for His help for "His name's sake". Let me explain:
 - i) We as people (saved or not) are all born with "sin disease" meaning we are prone to sin without God's guidance and help.
 - ii) My point is we don't plead for God to help us because we are good people. What we deserve is to be condemned because our "sin nature" is beyond help. We are only saved because we trust in the goodness of God's sin payment for our sins.
 - iii) This surprisingly leads me back to this verse. We ask for God's help, not because we are good people or because we are "His people". We ask for God's help for the sake of "His name".
 - iv) We know that God is perfect by definition. We trust in a God that is perfect and cannot sin. Therefore, if we want to glorify His name and be a good witness for Him in our lives, we do it not because we are good people but because we represent Him. In other words, if we are defending "His honor", then we ask that God work through us, "for His name sake, and not for our goodness."
 - b) This may seem like an obvious principal, but in effect it is the center of how we should pray. It is a matter of God helping us not because we deserve it, but because if we choose to represent Him, then He cares about His name being glorified and not ours.
 - i) To make it simpler, we should ask God for blessings on our lives not because we deserve it, but because we want His name to be glorified through us.
 - ii) Remember that God wants to bless us, simply because He loves us and wants us to live a life that glorifies Him. He blesses us as He wants us to trust in Him. The secret of prayer is to ask for what He desires so that His name is blessed.
 - iii) Believe it or not, that is the principal of this verse. Therefore, we can move on. ☺
12. Verse 10: Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.
 - a) The psalmist is pleading to God to work in the lives of believers "then and there" so that the enemies of God may know that He and He alone is the one who rules in the world.
 - b) It is again, a prayer to ask God to work, not for our sakes, but for His sake. Even with a prayer to ask God to defend "His name", we still must remember that God only works on His timing. We can ask God all we want to bless His name, "here and now" but it is up to God to respond. Even with that said, I find that God is far more likely to respond to our prayer requests when we pray for "His name sake" as opposed to asking Him to help us because we need His help.
 - c) Getting back to the verse, remember this was written at a time when Israel experienced a great defeat at the hands of their enemies. There were lots of dead Israelites with no one to bury them. For a lot of nonbelievers then and now, they look at such a situation as a great victory. For those of us who trust in God, we see the defeat of those trusting in Him as a reason to cry out to God to help, which is what the psalmist is doing in this psalm.
 - d) So why doesn't God work when we ask Him? Even if we ask Him to work "For the sake of His name", He doesn't always respond on our timing. If God truly loves us, why isn't He responding to our cries for help?
 - i) The answer is of course, that God is always responding to our prayer requests. We just don't always understand how it is He is working. In the meantime, we have to keep moving forward in life and trust that He is working through our present situation His way and on His timing.
 - ii) So if God is going to work, "His way", why pray in the first place? For starters, God likes to get us involved in His plans for our world. Second our prayers to Him remind us of our dependency upon Him for our lives.

13. Verse 11: May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die.
- a) The psalmist is asking God in effect to hear the cries of those who trust in Him. If God is aware of all things, why would we need to pray for God to hear the prayers of the suffering? In other words, why bother to pray Verse 11 here?
 - i) Of course God is aware of all things. This is another request for God to work now so that those who have harmed God's people can make the connection between the harm they have done and the fact that He works in the lives of believers.
 - b) So why doesn't God work now when we pray this type of prayer?
 - i) The answer is sometimes He does. I find that God often works best when we get our focus right. That includes the concept of asking God to work for "His name sake" and not our goodness. It is a matter of asking God to work so that others can see that the God of the Israelites is also the God of the whole world.
 - ii) I don't know historically how well this prayer worked. I do know that God judges all people and in that sense, the prayer was successful. However, that prayer may or may not have helped the specific tragedy of what the Israelites faced at that moment in time. This type of prayer is not a guarantee that God will help us through our particular tough situations in our lives. The point is God's response to prayer is still up to Him to work His way and on His timing.
 - c) The point is we don't know what will get God to react until we try. A reason this psalm is here is to give us the proper perspective of how to pray when such tragedies do occur.
 - i) Whether or not God reacts our way or on our timing is in effect His business. All we can do is cry out to Him because no matter what, we are His people and we are dependant upon Him for our lives. No matter what happens, judgment day is still coming and that alone should motivate us to stick close to Him through all of "this", whatever "this" may be.
14. Verse 12: Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O Lord.
- a) In the bible, the term "seven times" means completeness. It gets back to the principal that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. Therefore when there is a prayer request like here in Verse 12 for God to pay back "seven times" the damage. It is a request for God to work completely in doing what we ask Him to do.
 - i) In this specific case, the psalmist is asking that God harm those who harm His people seven times worse then the original harm done.
 - ii) The verse is not saying, "If they stabbed us one time, may God stab them seven times". The verse is saying may God be complete in what He does to His enemies.
 - b) But John, earlier in this lesson you talked about the danger of wanting God to forgive us of our sins and punish those who have hurt us. What about God's forgiveness? That concept of forgiveness is always there for the asking. This is about those who refuse to ever (big emphasis on ever) turn to the God of the bible for forgiveness. There is coming a day of judgment for everyone who turns down God's free gift of forgiveness.
 - c) So is this verse asking that God not forgive those who harm His people? It is asking for God's justice on those who refuse to take that free gift of forgiveness.
 - i) Remember that justice is "God's problem". Our job as Christians is to show love to others and we pray for and watch God take care of judgment of nonbelievers.
 - ii) Also remember that to love God means to love what He loves and hate what He hates. If we are to love God, then we must also learn to hate sin as much as God does. That is the principal being taught here in these verses.
 - d) Getting back to the verse, notice that the "neighbors" have hurled insults at God. I suspect the literalness was taunting of the God of the bible as those enemies defeated Israelites. For us, the point is about God avenging those who refuse in a lifetime to turn to Him.

15. Verse 13: Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.
 - a) Well, this psalm does have a happy ending. The point is there is coming a day either when we get to heaven (and often here on earth) where do see God work and we do see Him take revenge on those who refuse to turn to Him.
 - b) The final point of this psalm is simply that God will win. No matter what happens in this lifetime, we can trust in the fact that we are on the winning side. The simple fact that we are still alive to praise Him at this moment in time can be proof of that fact. How God will get us through our own tragedies, are in effect His business and not ours.
16. OK, time for Psalm 80, which is in effect a prayer to God for help in situations like Psalm 79. Let us see what we can learn from this psalm:
17. Psalm 80, title: For the director of music. To the tune of "The Lilies of the Covenant." Of Asaph. A psalm.
 - a) Ok, this title has a handful of things for us to cover. It was written to be sung. The name of the tune is given, called "The Lilies of the Covenant". As I have stated a number of times in the past few lessons, the actual music for this is long gone. We do know that Asaph (whoever that was) wrote it. We also know it was intended as a psalm, which means that it is the author's hope that we contemplate what this psalm is saying.
 - b) Ok, if the music to "The Lilies of the Covenant" is long gone, why should I care about this title? Great question. Time for one of my theories since I don't have an answer. ☺
 - i) The word "lilies" are a type of flower. I suspect it refers to people, and in particular people called by God to be believers. The idea is that this tune is written for believers. God in effect calls us as believers "beautiful flowers" as we read what He has planned for believers through this psalm.
 - ii) If I'm totally wrong, the good news is I didn't spend much time on that theory.
18. Verse 1: Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth ² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.
 - a) This psalm is addressed to God, who is called the "Shepherd of Israel".
 - i) The idea is that if we trust in God, He is the one who leads and guides our lives.
 - b) The title says that God leads us "like a flock". Ok what does that mean?
 - i) It probably refers to sheep. It is not a compliment as sheep are not smart animals. The point is that we as people need to be guided because without God we tend to wander away from what He desires of us.
 - ii) OK, I don't feel led by God. How does this apply to me? Think of it this way: If we ignored God for awhile, be it a lack of prayer time, or a lack of time without other Christians or a lack of time in God's word, would we naturally wander away from Him? I would say yes. God gives us this wonderful balance of free-will and at the same time desires to guide our lives. The point is God will only lead us if we desire to be led by Him. That in effect is the point of this reference.
 - c) The rest of Verse 1 implies the idea that well, "God is God". When the text says that God "sits enthroned between the cherubim", it is a colorful way of saying that the God of Israel is also the God of the whole world. For an Israelite, the temple, and in particular the box-structure called the "ark of the covenant" represents the presence of God. The idea of that "ark" is that it represents God in His perfect (or "holy") state of being.
 - d) OK John, I am still confused by this. What does this mean and why should I care?
 - i) The idea is simply to remind ourselves that the God who is "everywhere" and is perfect by definition, is also the God who cares about our lives and wants to interact in our lives. Therefore, His presence can be found and His desire for our lives can be found by seeking the "God of the Israelites" who is also the God of the entire world. That is the idea behind all of this.

- e) This leads us to Verse 2. Three specific tribes (of the 12 tribes of Israel) are listed in this verse. So why these three tribes? (Time for another one of my theories here. ☺)
 - i) When the Israelites were wandering around in the desert camping out around the "presence of God", they would camp based on their tribal ancestry. The three tribes that would go first in a process to move out were the three tribes listed in Verse 2. They were the tribes that would most closely follow the "Ark of the Covenant" as it moved from one point to another
 - ii) OK John and how does that bit of historical biblical trivia affect me? I suspect it means that God desires we draw close to Him. Just as these three tribes were the closest in a processional march of the 12 tribes, this verse is saying in a poetic way that God desires that we be close to Him as we go through our lives.
 - f) This leads to the final part of Verse 2. The verse then is a cry out to God in effect to "do something and save us".
 - i) Like the last psalm, somehow the Israelites are in trouble at this moment in time. The specifics of how the Israelites are in trouble are not stated yet in the psalm.
 - ii) Think of it this way: When do we make our strongest effort to seek God as a group? It is usually when we are in big trouble. It is as if God is looking down at us thinking, "Well, it took a lot to finally get your attention, but now that I (God) went to such desperate measures to get you all to pray to me, what do you want?"
 - a) This gets back to the classic issue of why does God allow bad things to happen to the lives of believers? Sometimes the answer is in effect for us to collectively get our focus on Him. In other words if we don't seek God "voluntarily", He will go to more extreme measures to get our attention.
 - iii) Does that mean that every bad thing that happens is in effect God trying to get our attention to seek Him? The true answer is we have no idea the cause and effect of behind every bad thing that happens. The only reality we do know from history is that disasters do cause people as a group to truly seek God as in effect that is our only help to get us through whatever is the problem of the moment.
19. Verse 3: Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.
- a) Meanwhile, this psalm is a cry out for help in a bad situation. Again, notice the "plural" of Verse 3 in the words "us" and "we". This group is asking God to look upon how they are suffering at the moment. This group wants to be rescued from whatever it is (specifics are not given) that they are suffering from at this moment.
20. Verse 4: O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. ⁶ You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us.
- a) Have you ever wondered why God allows bad things to happen to good people? If you recall my lesson title, it was about the question of "why do we struggle with God?" Here in these verses, we get one of those struggles.
 - b) In these verses, the psalm writer is asking why his prayers have been ignored and why those Israelites have been brought so low that they have become a source of contention to those that live around them?
 - i) Yes, part of the answer is that God often wants us to seek Him collectively, and often He allows tough things to happen in order for us to do that.
 - ii) Part of the answer is that we live in a world that is cursed by sin. The bible never guarantees us we will all live a long and wonderful life before we die. If anything, the bible teaches that all people are under sin's curse and feel the effect of it.
 - c) OK John, I know this. Still, why does God allow us as believers to suffer? Sometimes it is to teach us things and sometimes it is just a matter of having us collectively trust Him.
 - i) In effect, what choice do we have? Would we rather go through our tough times trying to solve problems ourselves or be dependant upon Him in such times?

21. Verse 7: Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.
- a) I believe the psalm writer came to the same conclusion that I just stated, that the reason we seek God when we struggle is in effect, "what other choice do we have?" Yes we belong to God and that doesn't change. Yes we can be going through a tough time at the moment, and He does promise to see us through such tough times.
 - b) Let me try this from another angle: If the Bible promises believers that God loves us and will see us through tough times, why specifically pray for that help? Why not just trust that God will see us through such times? Why do we collectively have to pray here?
 - i) Part of the answer is simply to keep our focus on Him. Part of the answer is to remind ourselves that God is there and wants to work in our lives. Part of the answer is to remember that God does His best work when we as a group (that group could be a church, a community or our prayer group) seek Him collectively.
 - ii) In summary, it literally helps a situation when we are collectively focused on seeking Him through difficult times.
22. Verse 8: You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.
- a) Sometimes when things are going wrong, it helps to remember how God has helped out in the past in order to get through the present. That is what is happening here.
 - i) It may help for this verse and the next few verses to know that a nickname for Israel is a "vine". If you have ever seen a grapes grow, they grow on a bunch of vines hanging everywhere. The point is in order for that vine to flourish it needs to be planted in good soil. That is the picture here.
 - b) OK John, how does this affect me? The point is God has called you and me into His plan of salvation. If we believe that, then we must also believe that God has separated us from nonbelievers and cares about how we live our lives.
 - i) Just as God literally and spiritually separated the Israelites from the Egyptians, so God in effect has separated you and me from nonbelievers in order to serve Him. That concept is true whether or not we as believers wish to accept it.
23. Verse 9: You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.
- a) Historically speaking, the idea is that the Israelites successfully conquered the land only because God lead them to that victory. Further, God made it so the Israelites grew in population so that the land of Israel was filled with His people.
 - b) More importantly, the point is when we got saved God didn't stop there in our lives. Stop and consider how much our lives have changed since we first learned to trust God with our lives. This is another one of those reminders, that God won't leave us "half done" as I stated in a previous lesson. In tough times, we have to remember that a God that has gotten us this far, will not let us down the next time things get tough again.
24. Verse 10: The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches.
- a) Remember that these verses are describing grape vineyards. The literal point is that such vines can grow and spread over a large area and even cover big rocks. For those of us who live in urban and suburban areas, visualize plants that grow well on walls. The point is that such vines appear to grow and spread all by themselves.
 - b) OK John, good for grape vines. ☺ What about us? Again the point is to consider how much God has helped us grow and change as believers. If we are new to Christianity, consider how God has called us into salvation. If we have been saved a while, stop and think how much He as gotten through life "so far". The point here is when life gets difficult it usually helps the situation to remember how God has worked in the past.
25. Verse 11: It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River.
- a) The point here is that Israel as a nation spread from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Again, the point for us is to consider how much we as Christians have spread around the world to make a difference for Him. That's all that needs to be said here.

26. Verse 12: Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes?
- a) OK, its time to end all of this happy talk about how God has worked in our past to remind us of the reality of how bad things are for the moment for the psalmist and Israel.
 - b) Remember my lesson theme is about struggling with God. Here the psalm writer is wondering why God allows the "walls" of Israel to be broken down. What I believe the writer is referring to is the idea of the enemies of Israel being allowed to win battles.
 - i) OK John, and what does this ancient history have to do with my life? The point is we can wonder at times, "If God loves me so much, why is He allowing these bad things to occur in my life? Have I done something wrong, or is God just ignoring me at this point in time?" That too, is a way we struggle with God.
 - ii) I'm not saying I have all of the answers to the problems of life, but I am saying that when things are going wrong we do collectively need to look to God for help.
27. Verse 13: Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it.
- a) This verse is giving a visual picture of walls of protection falling apart so that animals are coming over the walls to feed off what we have grown to eat. The point is the bible likes to work in word pictures that we can fairly easily understand and picture.
 - i) Again the idea is that things are somehow going wrong to the point where we are now vulnerable to being attacked by enemies.
 - b) OK John, suppose my life is going ok right now. Why should I pray this way? I am not saying every psalm is applicable at every moment. However, there are times in all of our lives when it seems like everything is falling apart and that is when we do struggle with God in terms of wondering why He isn't doing more to help our situation at that moment.
 - i) The point is about getting our focus on Him when we as a group desire His help with a specific problem in our lives.
 - c) Meanwhile, the psalmist is still describing all of Israel as a big, spreading vine:
28. Verse 14: Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine,
¹⁵ the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. ¹⁶ Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. ¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.
- a) In Verse 15 notice the word son. In Verse 17, also notice the phrase "son of man". Jesus used that latter term to describe Himself. However, reading both "son" and "son of man" in context here, both terms are describing the nation of Israel itself. The point here is that God has planted a group of people in the land of Israel with the intention that they are "His people" and at that moment they are suffering.
 - i) OK John, and this affects me how? If we are called to be God's people, then in that picture, we too are sons (and daughters) that God cares about. The main point of this psalm is that somehow and someday a group of believers are suffering at the main moment and are looking to God for help. The next time we too are going through a tough time collectively, we too need to come to God as a group.
 - b) OK John, let's say my by life gets hit by some big disaster. Shouldn't I go pray quietly by myself somewhere? Why do I need to find others to pray with?
 - i) This gets to the point that God does not want billions of individuals working for Him, but for us to work collectively as Christians. That doesn't mean that all Christians have to quit our individual churches and go sing together. It means to remember that we are already connected as believers and at times, God wants us all to collectively focus on Him.
 - c) Does this also mean that God will only help us if we pray as a group? The point is that God does encourage group interaction and that includes prayer as a group. It never ceases to amaze me how God works answers to prayer when we pray collectively. That could mean with one's family or with a group at one's church or even with a good friend. The point is God does encourage group interaction to help us through situations.

- d) OK John, suppose I am going through a tough time, and it has nothing to do with anyone "cutting me down" at the moment. The point is we still need to seek God for His help through our struggles in life.
 - i) This gets me back to my theme of struggling with God. The underlying point of this whole lesson is in effect, "When things are bad, and we don't understand why God is not doing more about this problem now. If God really does care about me and my life, why isn't He helping me "here and now" to deal with my issues?"
 - ii) Part of the answer is that God desires we seek Him as a group in order for God to make a difference. Why is that? Part of the answer is so that God can show "the whole group" that He is in charge, He does interfere in the affairs of people and He is more than willing to work when we seek Him as a group.
 - iii) Part of the answer is God allows bad stuff to happen to believers simply to get our focus on Him. This is why God encourages us to pray collectively. (1 Corinthians 7:5 comes to mind as a good cross-reference here.)
 - iv) Part of the answer is that group prayer will encourage us as a group to continue to seek Him in the future. Let's face it, if God does respond to such prayer, that would encourage us to keep on seeking Him in the future. Which, by coincidence is the point of the next verse.
 - e) Before I go there, one more point: What if we have been praying about a problem and it won't go away? I usually find that in such cases, God still has things He wants us to learn from those situations and we have to trust that He has a purpose for allowing us to go through such difficult times. Again, it is a matter of trust through such struggles.
 - i) Meanwhile, we only have two more verses to go.
29. Verse 18: Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.
¹⁹Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.
- a) The final point here is simply about trusting God through our struggles. Yes we as believers do struggle with God in the sense we often do not understand why He is not working the way we want Him to work through a situation.
 - b) Verse 18 makes an interesting request. It is a prayer for God to "revive us" and then the psalmist claims, "We will call on your name". So what does that mean?
 - i) It means we can ask God to help during our times of doubts. If we are struggling to trust God at a moment because of some bad thing we are dealing with, it is not a sin to ask Him to help us with our doubts. I find that He is more than willing to help us in such times.
 - ii) Such help may simply come from studying our bible and reminding ourselves of the reality of His existence. Sometimes God will give us some sort of reminder that He is there and Yes, He is willing to guide us through whatever we are dealing with at that moment. The point is I do believe God answers the prayer request made in these last two verses of this psalm.
30. This leads me well back to my opening question: Why do we struggle with God? The answer is that bad things happen and we don't understand why God isn't doing more to fix those things on our timing. We struggle in our faith because it is easy to get our focus on what we see rather than trusting in a God we cannot see. The solution is to remember that God is still there, He is still working out things on His timing, and Yes, He is still there guiding us through our lives. That in effect is the point of these last two psalms and the main point of this lesson.
31. Dear God, we thank You that You are guiding our lives. Help us in our times of doubts to remember that You are working on Your timing. You are guiding us through whatever we are dealing with and we put the results of our situations into Your hands. Help us to live to make a difference for You in all that we do. Help us to live a life that glorifies You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.