

1. My title is based on two questions: "Why do we worship God and how He responds to that worship"? The idea is about understanding how God intervenes in response to our worship.
  - a) I believe God is perfect. If He is perfect, He does not need any benefit or thrill out of us worshipping Him. We worship God for our benefit. This lesson focuses on why we worship God and what benefit do we receive as believers from that worship of Him.
  - b) This leads to the three psalms in this lesson. The common theme is simply about the fact that God does intervene in the lives of believers. The issue is why does He do that, when does He do that and what do we have to do to invoke His interference in our lives?
  - c) OK why should I focus on that concept? The problem is that we have short memories. We get so busy focusing on our lives we forget that God is there to guide us through whatever we are dealing with at the moment.
2. To explain this better, as I like to do, let me summarize the main points of these three psalms:
  - a) Psalm 84 is a reminder to gather together as believers in order to seek Him. The mistake we make as Christians is that we get so busy "serving Him" that we forget to take the time to just worship Him as God. The related point is that we need to draw upon His strength in order to make the difference in the world that He wants us to make.
  - b) Psalm 85 is describing a point in time for the psalmist where things are going horribly wrong in His world. I think the reason this psalm is here is that if we are trusting that God is going to guide our lives, we need to do "just that": Trust Him.
    - i) The issue here is about how to have faith through such a rough time.
  - c) Psalm 86 describes a point in the life of King David, where things in his life are going badly. He understood that in order to get through life, he couldn't do it without God's help. David praises God in this psalm because he understood how dependant he was for God in his life. This psalm is about showing gratitude to God for the fact that He does lead us down the path He desires for our lives.
  - d) To put this whole lesson another way:
    - i) Psalm 84 reminds us to seek God just to worship Him as God. It is through worshipping Him we get the strength and ability to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) Psalm 85 then says in effect, "OK God now that I am living for You and at the moment I am dealing with problems, I need You to see me through this time."
    - iii) Psalm 86 is then about us giving God gratitude as He guides us through our lives.
3. OK John, I know that God is guiding me and leading me. Why study these psalms?
  - a) A point is to remind ourselves that God is guiding us in order for us to make a difference for Him. The mistake we make is we easily get our focus back on our own problems and we forget that God desires to guide our lives the way He wants.
  - b) The other point is we need to worship Him to draw on His strength to make a difference in this world. We are dependant upon Him and in order to live full of joy. So what is that joy? It is the greatest purpose one can have in life: To live to make a difference for God.
    - i) Think about what matters at the end of our lives: It is whatever we have done to make a difference for God. Yes that includes being of service to others.
    - ii) My point is true joy is learning to live on God's love in order to experience that joy.
    - iii) This leads us back to these psalms. We should pray psalms like this because our memories are short. We tend to wander away from what God desires for our lives as we get too busy focusing on our own lives and problems and we forget that He does desire to intervene in our lives for His glory. Praise to Him gives us the strength and ability to do His will and receive that joy in our lives.
  - c) With that happy thought stated, I believe I can actually start Psalm 84 at this point.

4. Psalm 84, title: For the director of music. According to *gittith*. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.
  - a) OK, we have a new author for the first time after about a dozen psalms. Note that we had read psalms by this author many psalms ago. A quick history lesson is good here:
    - i) Way back when the Israelites were wandering through the desert, there was a rebellion by some Israelites who wanted to go back to Egypt. A leader of that rebellion was a man named Korah. Yes, he died at the rebellion.
    - ii) Korah was among the group of Levites that was to be in charge of taking care of the tabernacle. Despite Korah's sins and rebellion, his descendants still did their job of taking care of the temple and apparently some of them even wrote psalms.
    - iii) God previously announced that Korah's family was in charge of some aspect of the tabernacle in "Exodus". A point is that God can't go back on His word despite that rebellion that took place at a later date in the Book of Numbers.
  - b) OK John, that is neat. Why should I care, other than the fact God keeps His word?
    - i) Let's say we are the descendants of someone who was not "God fearing". It is not necessarily our destiny to have the same problems as our ancestors if (big if) we are willing to trust in God. That is what we can learn here.
  - c) The rest of the title mentions that it is a psalm, which simply means the words should be contemplated. It was written for the director of music whoever that was. That simply means the psalm writer(s) intended this psalm to be sung.
  - d) Finally the title mentions "According to *gittith*". That is some sort of musical term and it may refer to a musical instrument or a person from somewhere called Gittih.
    - i) I suspect that since the writers worked the tabernacle, it was something they were familiar with as an instrument that could be used to praise God. I'll leave it at that.
5. Verse 1: How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! <sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
  - a) This psalm is about the importance of actually seeking God and the joy of doing so. I think the reason the psalm writer brings this up here, is that we can be so concerned with dealing with our own issues, we can forget the simple pleasure of just seeking God both individually and as a community.
    - i) Let's say we go to church almost every Sunday. Let's also say we do something over and above that, be it a weekly bible study or some sort of commitment to our church group. If we're doing that, what should I learn from this psalm? I think the point for the veteran Christian is that we can be so busy in service to God, we can forget the simple joy of just worshipping Him as God.
  - b) The psalmist appears to be crying out for God. The idea is remembering how much the psalmist wants to worship Him. The writer is stating what a wonderful place it is to be, which is God's temple. Remember that the writer of this psalm was in charge of taking care of this temple, so in effect he is describing the joy of being at work. ☺
    - i) OK John, so the writer of this psalm loves his job and loves to be where his job is located. What is that mean for you and me? The idea is not about to love what we do. The idea is that we should have a heart to just worship God at times.
    - ii) At the moment, I'm being reminded of one of the most convicting verses in the New Testament. It is, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first." (Revelation 2:4, NIV). The point of that verse is that Jesus criticizes a specific Christian church because they were so busy being of service to God, they had forgotten the important concept of just "worshipping Him".
      - a) We as Christians can get so busy being of service to God that we can forget the simple joy of just worshipping God for who He is. That is the main point of this psalm and the main point of Revelation 2:4.
  - c) Meanwhile, we still have ten more verses in this psalm and there is more than the writer wants us to learn from this psalm.

6. Verse 3: Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young-- a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.
  - a) When one works at the same place day in and day out, one notices the details around the place where one works. The writer here notices that some sparrows have made a home somewhere under the shade of the temple structure itself. Instead of getting a "broom handle" and chasing the birds away, the psalmist simply takes notes of what these birds have done and compares them to the people coming to seek God.
  - b) To put this verse another way, "birds have made an effort to seek the God of the bible as a place of rest, and yet the people I (God) have called to worship Me have not made as much of an effort as these birds have to seek me."
    - i) Yes Jesus once commented that when a bird dies, God is aware of it. (See Luke 12:6). The point is God is aware of the birds that exist near His temple and at the same time He is well aware of when you and I make the effort to seek Him not just out of service or obligation, but just because we want to.
    - ii) That is why this psalm is in the middle of this book. It is to remind us, as we are busy living for God to sometimes just seek Him for who He is, and nothing else.
7. Verse 4: Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. *Selah*
  - a) Let's start by remembering again that the psalmist in effect "dwelt here". The psalmist was part of those in charge of maintaining this place of worship. On one level the writer is describing his extended family who get the pleasure of praising God because they get to "hang out" there, for the lack of a better descriptive term.
  - b) OK John, good for them. I don't live at a Jewish temple or at my church for that matter. The point is not about being at church full time. The idea is about the desire to worship God on a regular basis. I believe that when we get to heaven, we are going to spend a lot of time praising God. If we don't enjoy that now, how will we enjoy that for eternity? I am convinced some people are going to appreciate heaven more than others only because they enjoy praising God now for who He is.
    - i) Does that mean I need to spend more time singing praise songs and hymns? It means we need to have a heart for praising God. It means taking time to either sing or pray out to Him for who He is. It means that if we care about God, then we should have a heart to want to praise Him on a regular basis.
8. Verse 5: Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
  - a) OK John, I get the idea you want me to go to church just to praise Him for who He is. I sing my parts in church. Why do you want me to praise Him so much?
    - i) First of all, it is not for God's benefit. God does not get a thrill because we are putting our hearts into it while we are praising Him. The point is when we "mean it" when we praise God, it is beneficial to our lives.
    - ii) The secret to living the Christian life is to draw upon His strength to live our lives. It never ceases to amaze me how when we trust in God, He gives us the strength to accomplish things when we may feel too tired or unable to do a particular task.
  - b) When you study the Gospels, you may notice that Jesus was tired a lot, because there was constant demand on Him to "do this or that healing". Yes there were times where Jesus encouraged the disciples to come rest with Him. More importantly, Jesus regularly sought the Father for the strength to accomplish what God the Father wanted Him to do.
    - i) But John, I have seen people do some amazing things without seeking Him. Yes, we can do some things based on our own strength and ability. However, to really make a difference for God, we need to draw upon His strength to do His will.
  - c) The purpose of praying to God is that act of pure worship is the power source behind living the Christian life. That is why Jesus criticized one group of Christian believers in Revelation 2:4. That is what the psalmist is warning us about here in this verse.

9. Verse 6: As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. <sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.
- a) OK, what is the "Valley of Baca" and why should I care? The location is debated among scholars. This valley is described as a hot dry, desert climate. When rain comes, it makes water pools there. Those water pools bring a needed humidity to a very dry location.
    - i) The reference is not to know something about Israel's geography. The point is as we seek God, He can refresh us in a place that is not a good climate (place to be).
    - ii) Think of it this way: Let's say we are doing works for God without spending time drawing upon His strength. We may feel exhausted because we are not drawing upon His strength in order to accomplish what He wants of us at that moment.
    - iii) To go back to one of my favorite illustrations, we are not using the "car engine" that God has given us and we are just trying to push that car up a hill. The reason this verse describes a dry desert is because we as believers make the mistake of trying to do good works in life without drawing upon His strength. That is what these verses are warning us about.
  - b) The point of this verse is knowing that God can bring us strength when we travel through such "dry" places. Even the act of going to seek God to worship Him gives us the strength to go forward. That is why these verses are describing the "autumn rain" making water pools. The idea is not about physical thirst. The idea is that God wants us to seek Him so bad, He provides comfort for us as we make the effort to seek Him.
10. Verse 8: Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. *Selah*
- a) Verse 8 is saying in effect, "OK God you got me to pray, now I need You (God) to listen to me and my prayer. The specifics of the prayer are coming up in the next few verses.
  - b) The purpose of this verse is to remind ourselves that the God we worship (or the God of Jacob, effectively the same thing), the one that believers trust in, is also the God of the whole world. It is more than the fact that God is the creator, it is the concept that well, "God is God" and He is to be respected as such.
    - i) One of the tough balancing acts for all Christians is that God wants us to treat Him like a loving father who cares about our lives, but at the same time respect Him as God. The idea of respect is more than obedience, it is about caring about what He cares about and avoiding the sins that God does not want us to commit.
11. Verse 9: Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.
- a) When the text says "shield", it is referring to the king of Israel. The idea is the Israelites looked to its king as their protector. Yes, it can refer to the king or any sort of leader who is over us. The idea is to think of our leaders as our protectors from physical harm.
    - i) Asking God to "look with favor on your anointed one" does not mean that God has to show special love to the king or the Promised Messiah. The point is we want protection for our lives and we look to God for that protection.
12. Verse 10: Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
- a) Remember that whoever wrote this psalm, spent most of their lives at God's house. This psalm writer would rather spend one day at "God's house" than 1,000 days elsewhere.
  - b) OK John, so the psalm writer loves his job. What's the point? Remember that this psalm is about the desire to be close to God. It is about having the desire to seek God just for the sake of worshipping Him as God. Given that, it should be our desire to want to be with Him then have to spend a good portion of our life without Him elsewhere.
  - c) I once read about a seminary professor who said that every few years he spends some time away from his job just to remind himself how bad life is out there without God.
    - i) The point is it should be our desire to be close to God and close to others who also care about Him more than spending time away from His presence in this world.

13. Verse 11: For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. <sup>12</sup> O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.
  - a) This psalm ends with promises that God protects those who trust in Him. The idea of God being a "sun" means that His light shines on us. A "shield" means God protects us.
  - b) In short, these last two verses promise blessing to those who trust in Him. These verses are not saying that no bad thing will ever happen to believers. It is saying that God will bless those who seek Him. In short, it is worth the trouble to seek Him regularly and there are blessings and joy in life when we make that effort to seek Him.
14. Psalm 85: For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.
  - a) The lesson theme of understanding the benefits of seeking God continues in Psalm 85.
  - b) Like the last psalm, this one has the same author. It is also a psalm, meaning that the writer wants us to contemplate its meaning and it is written to be sung. As I stated way too often in these lessons, the original music to the psalms are long gone and I do believe God encourages us to make our own music to go with these psalms.
  - c) OK John, if this psalm continues the same theme of praising God as the last psalm, why doesn't the last psalm just continue with more verses? Why is this a separate psalm?
    - i) Good question. The point of the last psalm was simply to teach us about the benefit of seeking Him and the desire on God's part that we do make the effort to worship Him as God. Here in Psalm 85, the intent is still the same (the desire of God for us to seek Him as God) but the timing is different.
    - ii) In Psalm 84 the timing was Israel gathering as a group to seek Him.
    - iii) In Psalm 85, the timing is seeking God when things are going wrong.
  - d) Let me ask a different question about Psalm 85: Why does the bible spend so much time focusing on prayer when things are going wrong? (If you have been with me in these studies of the psalms for a while, you must have noticed that pattern by now. ☺)
    - i) We tend to seek God the hardest when things are going wrong. It is the idea of "Dear God, I need help and I need it now, so I am turning to You". Because that desire for help in bad times causes us to focus on God, He is well aware of that fact and many psalms like this one teach us how to properly pray in difficult times.
15. Verse 1: You showed favor to your land, O LORD; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. <sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. *Selah*
  - a) As I read these opening two verses, I noticed they are "past tense". The psalmist is stating that God has helped out His people in the past, simply based on the fact the psalmist believes the bible stories written to that date are true and correct. Therefore, the psalmist is asking God to work again to help out His people.
  - b) OK John, this ancient history helps me how? The point is if we are trusting in the God of the bible, He loves us as much as He loves any and all believers from any point in history. Because we have full forgiveness of our sins, we can come to God as perfectly forgiven and seek His help with guiding us through whatever we are dealing with.
16. Verse 3: You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger. <sup>4</sup> Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. <sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations?
  - a) In these three verses, it speaks of God's wrath. It does not mean that God hates us when we sin. However, it does mean that "God hates sin" and cannot tolerate it.
  - b) If God knows we are imperfect people and we make mistakes, why does He still in effect, get angry at sin? I am saying that God Himself cannot "look upon sin". (See Habakkuk 1:3). A perfect God cannot stand any sin whatsoever.
  - c) The point is God wants the best for our lives. He realizes that sin causes us pain. If God does care for us, then He must care how we live our lives. When we turn from what He desires for us, it appears to us as if God is getting angry.

- d) Personally, I don't picture a perfect God actually getting angry at anything. A better concept is that God allows bad things to happen in our lives in order to show us the consequences of our sins. The way I view it, is that God is not afraid to go to extreme measures in order to prove that He loves and cares for us.
    - i) At some point that can even mean to allow suffering and death as such actions can cause others to turn to Him with their lives. While that may seem cruel, it is actually merciful when one thinks about it. Remember that the goal is to keep all people from going to hell and sometimes simply to get believers to live a life that is pleasing to Him. By God going to such extreme examples to get our attention, we then have a stronger desire to turn to Him for help in our lives.
  - e) This surprisingly, does lead me back to these verses. The point is the psalm writer is expressing the frustration at how bad things have been going for God's people. Life is going so badly at that moment that it appears as if God is angry at His people. Again, I don't see God having emotions as much as I see Him going to extreme measures in order to get our attention and get our focus back on Him.
  - f) Verse 3 is the psalm writer asking, "Will this go on forever?" Obviously, the answer is no, but when one is in a lot of pain, it does feel like that pain does go on forever.
17. Verse 6: Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
- a) Remember that the desire of the psalmist is for the Nation of Israel to rejoice in God.
    - i) Yes the psalm writer works at the Temple. He is not writing this psalm in order to increase His business. The psalm writer truly wants people to have the type of joy that God desires for all believers. It is difficult to experience God's joy if we are suffering for some unnamed reason as implied here in this psalm.
  - b) OK, John, why is the psalmist asking God to revive His people and how does that work?
    - i) First of all there are times in life when disasters come where we do ask God to bless our land and help through whatever is that crisis is. I don't want to discount that possibility, as that may be what is being described.
    - ii) In the history of the United States, there have been a handful of times where the nation as a whole has made a major effort to seek God as a country. I also believe it is happening in China today and many other times and places in world history.
      - a) The idea is the people of a land (or of a church or of a community) realize that somehow they have sinned and need to collectively turn to God.
    - iii) I have heard of great revivals happening in places simply because one person or a group of people have committed themselves to long-term prayer for that revival.
      - a) So if God wants people to seek Him, why have people pray for a long term for such a desire? If such a revival does happen, it then becomes a major time commitment for believers to teach others about God. If we are going to make such a major commitment, He wants to see if as believers are serious about that commitment, which is why such a commitment often requires a lot of prayer before it becomes a reality.
18. Verse 7: Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.
- a) The prayer for revival is continuing in this verse. I don't believe there is a specific set of words one can say in order to bring revival. It is about commitment on our part in order for such an action to happen. If that is true, why is the psalmist praying for God's love to happen and His salvation? In other words, doesn't God want all people to be saved?
    - i) If it is our desire that others understand God's love, then in effect it is up to us to be willing to make that commitment for such a revival to happen.
  - b) If we do believe in God's love for people, He does not want us to keep that knowledge to ourselves. God calls on all of us to spread the word of Him and His love to others.
    - i) That in effect is what "revival" is, in our land. To have such a revival, begins with prayer that is what is being offered here in Verse 7.

19. Verse 8: I will listen to what God the LORD will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints--but let them not return to folly.
- a) The idea of folly here is about those who believe in God not wasting their time on sinful practices. I'm not saying we can't relax or have hobbies. I am saying that each of us have an unknown limited time on earth, and the greatest purpose one can live for, is to make a difference for God in our lives. That is the joy that I explained in the lesson introduction.
  - b) Verse 8 says that God promises peace to His people. In many ways, this verse is similar to Jesus' statement that He promises us peace if we trust in Him. (See John 14:27).
    - i) So what does God's peace mean? It means we don't have to worry about the results of our lives. No matter what happens in our lives, we are forgiven of our sins and our lives are in His hands. The idea of God's peace is that no matter how bad of a mess we are in, we can trust in God to guide us through that mess and lead us down the path that He desires for our lives.
    - ii) God's peace is knowing that if we turn the results of our lives over to Him, we in effect don't have to worry about anything, with a big emphasis on anything.
    - iii) Yes we still have to make the best decisions possible given the information at hand, but we can have peace knowing the results are in God's hands.
  - c) With all that said, notice the first part of the verse says, "I will listen to what God has to say". In order to have that peace of God, one must take the step of actually trusting in Him and learning what it is He wants and expects of our lives. While that may sound obvious, the point is God demands obedience in order to experience His peace.
    - i) We then study God's word as our guide to how we are to be obedient to Him.
    - ii) Are we saved by faith alone? Of course. If we have such faith, then we should prove it by living to make a difference for Him with our lives.
20. Verse 9: Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.
- a) I was thinking about this verse and this thought popped in my head: How do I know I or anyone else for that matter is saved? How can I be sure of that concept of my salvation?
    - i) This verse gives us the answer. The answer has to do with a fear of the wrath of God. Let me explain: The book of Proverbs (1:7 and other places) teaches us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The idea is if we believe in a perfect God and we believe that He will judge us based on how we live, in a technical sense, that it what it takes to achieve salvation.
    - ii) Yes of course I believe in Jesus as the perfect payment of my sins. With that said, even as a forgiven Christian one should fear God in that we should fear being displeasing to Him. We should care about avoiding sin in our lives.
    - iii) My point here is an indication that we are saved is that we do fear God's wrath for disobedience. If I have learned one thing in my life as a Christian, it is that God intervenes in people's lives. Sometimes He does that in order to drive us back or simply closer to Him. That fear of God interacting in our life in a negative way should keep us close to Him and is a sign of our salvation.
  - b) OK John, and the second part of this verse says so that "his glory may dwell in the land".
    - i) The point is if His people do have a healthy fear of Him, it keeps us close to Him if for no other reason than to avoid His wrath. His "glory dwells" simply because believers are making the effort to seek Him to trust Him with their lives.
21. Verse 10: Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.
- a) The idea of "love and faithfulness meeting together" is that God will always be there for us is also an indication of His love for us. Remember that this psalm deals with the concept of God guiding us, even when things are going wrong in our lives.
    - i) I believe the point here is that if we do trust in God, He promises to be faithful to us even if we are not faithful to Him. God is more than willing to show His love to those who are trusting in Him through their own situations in life.

- b) OK John, I am still confused. What does this mean? It means that when things are going wrong, we can (big "can" here) trust that God will somehow see us through our problems and our situations and lead us to His peace. That in effect is what the second part of this verse is about. God is interested in us doing what is right in life. That means living by biblical principals and trying from this moment forward to do the right thing no matter how much we have messed up in the past.
  - i) The way I look at it is I can't change my past. I have made some horrible mistakes in my past and I can't change my history. All I can do is let God work through me to make my life better today and tomorrow. My job as a believer is in effect to make a difference for Him given the remaining time (whatever that is) on earth.
  - ii) The whole idea of this verse is simply that if we are willing to seek God, He will guide us down the path that He desires for our lives. God never promises that our lives will be easy, but He does promise us peace no matter what we are dealing with simply because we are trusting Him and not ourselves with the results.
  - iii) Which surprisingly, does lead me to the next verse.
- 22. Verse 11: Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.
  - a) The point of this verse is that those who are faithful to God will experience Him getting involved in our lives. God does meet us in the sense that He does intervene in our lives to make a difference for Him if we are willing to trust Him to make that difference.
    - i) This verse is simply a promise that if we do seek Him, He promises to guide us.
  - b) Think of this verse as another promise that God will not only intervene in our lives (there's that word "intervene" again), but He will do so in order to give us peace, to draw us closer to Him and yes, to live our lives to make a difference for Him as He desires.
- 23. Verse 12: The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.
 

<sup>13</sup>Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

  - a) The final two verses is another reminder to see life from God's perspective. These verses remind us that God will provide for those who seek Him.
  - b) When Verse 12 says our land will yield its harvest, I think it is far more than saying that the farmland will have a good crop this year. I'm sure there are many devout Christian farmers who still have to suffer through years of bad crops.
  - c) My point is when we as a collective body of believers are seeking Him it does benefit our lives. Think of it this way: If Christians are working to make a difference in each other's lives and the lives of the world around us, it will cause a harvest of new believers and even cause some existing believers to draw closer to Him.
    - i) Jesus said the way people would know we are Christians is by our love for one another. (John 13:34). When we are making an effort to see other believers grow in their faith and make a difference in the world, our land (be it a church, a city or a country) will yield a harvest of new believers and existing believers that grow in their trust in Him. That is how the harvest grows.
  - d) The final verse ties to this concept. The point is that it is not up to us alone to live the way God wants us to live. It is by God's power that we have (big "have") the ability to live to make a difference in the lives of others.
    - i) What if I have no idea where to start? It always starts with prayer. Ask God how it is that you can make a difference for Him today. I can promise you that if you are willing to make that sort of commitment to get beyond oneself and make a difference for God in this world, then He will lead us to make that difference.
  - e) With that said, that is a wrap up for this psalm. Think of this psalm as one big request on our part for God to intervene in the lives of believers. A big part of praying to God is so that He can work in our lives. Yes it starts with God's desire to want to work in our lives, but in order for God to work, He needs our cooperation. Therefore, in order for God to intervene for His glory, He desires that we live to make a difference for Him in this world.



24. OK one more psalm before I wrap up this lesson. Psalm 86: A prayer of David.
- a) We haven't had a psalm by David for a good while now and there won't be another one by David until Psalm 101. So why is there a psalm by David here?
    - i) The short answer is that David himself understood about his own dependence upon God to intervene in his life in order to make a difference for David's life.
  - b) The only thing this title says is that this psalm is a prayer of David. I believe that simply means that David used this psalm to ask God to intervene in his life for God's glory.
25. Verse 1: Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
- a) The point is David understood that the secret to living life is full dependence upon God in order to live one's life. To say we are "poor and needy" is not a comment on one's financial status, but on one's need of God in order to guide our life.
  - b) It is very similar to when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor" in Matthew 5:3. Jesus point had nothing to do with financial status. His point is that we are blessed when we realize we should be fully dependant upon God to guide every aspect of our lives.
26. Verse 2: Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you. <sup>3</sup> Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long.
- a) David is not saying, "Lord I am dependant upon You, so let me live a long and peaceful life." David is saying that since I am devoted to You, guide me as You want me to live and You want me to make a difference for You in this world.
    - i) When I hear of people going through horrible situations (as I have just done as I was interrupted from this study), all I can say is in effect, there is a God who wants to guide us through whatever we are dealing with at the present moment.
  - b) In Verse 3 David asks for God's mercy. Did David believe God forgave him of all of his sins? Of course. Still, David understood that he more than capable of sinning at any time.
    - i) Asking for God's mercy is the reminder that He should in all fairness wipe us out for disobedience. Asking for mercy is the reminder to us that God is forgiving of all of our sins and that we too should forgive when others hurt us.
27. Verse 4: Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. <sup>5</sup> You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. <sup>6</sup> Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy.
- a) In these three verses, David expands on his prayer for God's mercy. David understood that God brings joy to our soul when we praise and trust in Him.
  - b) Let me ask a question here: If we believe that God forgives our sins and has mercy on us because we are imperfect people, why not just pray this prayer once? Why remind God of these facts and pray for His mercy here?
    - i) It may help to start with the reminder that God knows all things. We don't pray to inform God of new things. We pray to remind ourselves what we are like. We pray to discern what is God's will for our lives for the moment.
    - ii) By reminding ourselves that we need God's mercy, it is a reminder to us that He has forgiven our sins, that He still forgives what we do wrong and it remind us that He is more than willing to guide us in what He desires for our lives.
28. Verse 7: In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.
- a) For some people, every day is a day of trouble. For most of us, we have good days and bad days. So does that mean we should only call upon God when trouble comes?
    - i) We as believers may say, "I give this situation completely over God. I have tried all of my ideas and nothing is working. I give up and it is now God' problem."
      - a) I am convinced that God loves prayers like that. He does His best work when we totally give up and trust in Him for our solutions.
  - b) I think the problem with us is that we forget easily how dependant we are upon Him. We don't realize how much trouble life is without His help. Asking God to help us regularly is in effect a prayer request for Him to guide us through our troubles.

29. Verse 8: Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.
- a) Is David saying that more than one god exists? He is saying in effect that the other deities called gods are not really gods at all, although David acknowledge they exist.
  - b) So what happens when people do pray to deities other than the true and living God?
    - i) Sometimes God allows prayers to false gods to be answered just to test people to see if they continue to worship that false deity. Such false deities never pan out in the long run, but sometimes they do have short-term success if for no other reason than to show that God does give them some power, in order to test our hearts.
  - c) Getting back to David, the point is that others do pray to different gods, but David knew that praying to any other deity is a waste in time in comparison to praying to God.
  - d) As some one who grew up Roman Catholic, it amazes me watch some of my relatives pray to Mary or other saints as if God Himself is above being prayed to directly.
    - i) I bring that up, as I believe if that is what it takes in order for God to have a relationship with us He tolerates it. God tolerates such prayer to Him through others in order to draw people closer to Him, although I never see it as necessary.
30. Verse 9: All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. <sup>10</sup> For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.
- a) Speaking of people worshiping the true God, I present Verses 9 and 10. David is stating that there is coming a day when all the nations of the world will worship God.
  - b) OK, lets assume we all believe that the Messiah (Jesus) will literally rule over all people one day from earth. Or we can argue that this verse is discussing a day of judgment when all people will worship Him before being judged.
    - i) So is David asking that all people of the world seek our God? For starters, it should be the desire that all people do come to the true God in order for Him to guide our lives. Yes, there is coming a day when God will require everyone to worship Him. (See Romans 14:11 on that point.)
    - ii) More importantly, it is a reminder that despite all the evil that exists, a judgment day is coming for all people and hopefully that fact gets some people to repent.
    - iii) Notice the last phrase in Verse 10, "You alone are God". When people choose to rebel against God, they may have to learn the hard way that there is only one God that does rule over the world and one day everyone will acknowledge Him.
31. Verse 11: Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.
- a) When David is praying for God to "teach Him his way", is he denying that God exists? Of course not. The point is that David understands that we believers easily turn away from Him and constantly want to do our will over His will.
  - b) The question really becomes, how do we discern what God wants for our lives? It starts with asking Him for His will, which is what David is doing in this verse. It involves living by biblical principals and trusting that whatever happens in our live is His will if we trust that He is guiding us and we are doing what He desires for our lives. That in effect is what an undivided heart means for you and me.
32. Verse 12: I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.
- a) Is David saying he spend all day long walking around singing praise hymns? No.
    - i) If you recall from the last lesson, I said what made David special is that he liked to "get his hands dirty" for God. That means that he liked to live to make a difference for God and at the same time liked to praise Him.
    - ii) That is what God desires of all us in living for Him: To spend our lives making a difference for Him and praising Him for the victories He has given us.
  - b) OK John, back to the issue of "why do we praise Him?" It is to remind ourselves that God exists, He rules and we do trust in Him. Also to praise Him teaches us gratitude and it makes us a better witness to those around us when we praise Him for our victories.

33. Verse 13: For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.
- When David says that God has "delivered him from the depths of the grave", yes it is referring to salvation and protection from hell. It also refers to the fact that we can be protected from those who want to harm us simply by trusting Him to guide us through our difficult moments in life.
  - The point here is about showing gratitude to God for our protection. If we realize it was God that gets us through our life, it makes us better people if we show gratitude to Him for how He has delivered us. Gratitude to God is not for His sake, but for ours. It is about making us more joyful and a better witness to others around us.
34. Verse 14: The arrogant are attacking me, O God; a band of ruthless men seeks my life-- men without regard for you. <sup>15</sup> But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.
- It is best to see these two verses as contrasts to each other:
    - Verse 14 describes people who don't believe in the God who sought David's life.
    - Verse 15 describes God being faithful despite all of our faults and sins.
    - OK John, explain what is the contrast. It is a reminder that if we put our trust in people, they will eventually let us down. If we put our trust in God, He promises to be faithful despite all of our faults.
  - The related point here is that if we trust in God, enemies come with that trust. They may be people who actually want to hurt us or it may be those who are just opposed to us having success for God. We pray psalm lines like this to remind ourselves of what is real and the danger that exists around us when we trust in God.
  - Remember that this psalm is about focusing our trust in God and being grateful for good He has done in our lives, whether we are aware of it or not. Part of appreciating the good that God has done for us comes from taking the time to praise Him with our lives. That is what David is doing here and that is what God desires of us, gratitude, not so He could hear it, but so that we can lead the type of life that He desires for us.
35. Verse 16: Turn to me and have mercy on me; grant your strength to your servant and save the son of your maidservant.
- Notice David doesn't think highly of himself here. It is not a matter of thinking lowly of ourselves as much as it is the realization of our dependence upon Him to accomplish what it is He wants us to accomplish in life.
  - David realized that in order to accomplish anything for God requires His strength. He also realizes that in order to do His will in our life requires God to work through us and give us the strength to accomplish His will. That is David's prayer here.
  - I believe the reason a psalm of David is included here at this point in the psalms is that David understood that God was his power source in order to accomplish any good thing.
36. Verse 17: Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.
- Remember that this whole psalm and in effect this whole lesson is all about asking God to intervene in our lives for His glory. Here in this final verse David is asking God for a sign of His goodness. So is David asking for a miracle here?
    - Yes there are times where we can visibly see God work in our lives and David is asking for one of those moments as he deals with his enemies.
    - The whole point here is that we trust and believe that God does intervene in the life of people and it is ok to ask for a visible sign of Him during tough times.
  - The related point is that God works "His way and on His timing". Just because we ask God for a miracle does not mean He is obligated to give us one there on the spot.
    - The important thing is we learn to trust that God is guiding our lives and yes He is intervening in our lives whether we notice it or not. That in turn should give us all the more reason to praise Him for what He does in our lives.

37. Let me sum up this lesson with the key point for us to remember: It is that God does desire us to worship Him. That simply means to seek Him and honor Him as God as well as bring our prayer requests to Him for His sake but ours. By honoring God as our God, we are inviting Him to take over our lives and let Him guide us the way He wants to guide us for His glory.
- a) That simple concept of worshipping God as God is the key point of this lesson, and hopefully is the desire of all of us reading this lesson
38. On that happy note, I'll close in prayer. Father we don't know how You will get us through this day or through the rest of our lives. I just know that You are in charge of us and it is Your desire to lead us down a specific "path" that is Your goal for our lives. Help us to do discern Your will and actually do what it is You desire of our lives. Help us to use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus' name Amen