

Selected Psalms

From Psalms 1 through 51

By David Webb

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Introduction

In the Scriptures, a unique section of the inspired message is comprised of what we commonly call “poetic literature.” These inspired writings include the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastics, and the Song of Solomon, and when combined, answer every basic need of man. For example, Job offers comfort and guidance during times of intense suffering brought on by loss. Proverbs provides practical wisdom for everyday living. Ecclesiastes offers guidelines for godly living in a crooked and perverse world. Song of Solomon gives direction when facing the challenges of courtship and marriage. And the Psalms expresses the deepest spiritual and emotional needs of man, and reveals the deepest feelings of the human heart.

John Calvin said, “This book I am wont to style an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for no one will discover in himself a single feeling whereof the image is not reflected in this mirror. Nay, all griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, anxieties -- in short, all those tumultuous agitations wherewith the minds of men are wont to be tossed -- the Holy Ghost hath here represented to the life. The rest of Scripture contains the commands which God gave to His servants to be delivered to us; but here the prophets themselves, holding converse with God, inasmuch as they lay bare all their inmost feelings, invite or impel every one of us to self-examination, that of all the infirmities to which we are liable, and all the sins of which we are so full, none may be hidden.”

Albert Barnes states, *“The Book of Psalms is a record of deep religious experience. It is this which, in the estimation of religious persons in general, gives it its chief value. It is the guide of young believers; and it becomes more and more the companion, the comforter, and the counselor, as the believer moves along through the varied scenes of life, and as gray hairs come upon him, and as the infirmities, which pre-intimate the approaching close of all things, press him down. A religious man is rarely, if ever, placed in circumstances where he will not find something in the Psalms appropriate to his circumstances; where he will not find that the Hebrew sacred bard has not gone before him in the depths of religious experience. Hence, in sickness, in bereavement, in persecution, in old age, on the bed of death, the Book of Psalms becomes so invariable and so valuable a companion.”*

Psalms provide excellent insights as to how we should express the deepest needs of our hearts in a godly manner. Regardless of the emotion, and despite whatever circumstance we may find ourselves in, Psalms teaches us how to properly express whatever may be most needful in our lives.

Jesus placed the Psalms as one of three major divisions in the Hebrew Bible, and verified their inspiration as a prayer and praise book for the nation of Israel. (See Luke 24:44)

Authors of the Psalms

David: David is the principle writer of the Psalms, with 73 credited to him in their titles. Samuel referred to David as “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1).

Sons of Korah: The Sons of Korah are credited for writing 11 or 12 psalms. The Sons of Korah were Levites who held positions of prominence during the reign of David (1 Chronicles 9:19; 12:6), and continued to hold a place of honor as temple servants to the time of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 20:19).

Asaph: Asaph was one of the heads of David's choir in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 6:39; 15:17-19; 16:5), and is responsible for authoring 11 psalms.

Solomon: David's successor and son, Solomon, is credited for writing 2 psalms (Psalms 72 and 127).

Heman: Heman, the first of three Levites appointed by David to lead in the musical services (1 Chronicles 2:6; 6:33; 25:5), is credited for writing 1 psalm (Psalm 88)

Ethan: Ethan, a friend of Solomon and renowned for his wisdom (1 Kings 4:31; 1 Chronicles 2:6, 8; 6:39-44; 15:17, 19), wrote 1 psalm (Psalm 89).

Moses: Moses the Lawgiver is also credited for having written 1 psalm (Psalm 90)

Various Anonymous Writers: Nearly one-third of the psalms, 49 in all, were written by various anonymous writers.

Categories of the Psalms

Alphabetic or Acrostic: Psalms in which one or more sets of letters from the Hebrew alphabet are used in order to begin verses or sentences within

the psalm. Some psalms (Psalms 9, 25, 34 and 37) are incomplete alphabet psalms. Others (Psalms 111, 112 and 119) are complete acrostic psalms. (Psalm 119 is perhaps the most well-known alphabet psalm, with each eight verse segments beginning with a new letter from the Hebrew alphabet, and including all 22 letters.)

Imprecatory: Psalms in which the writer prays for vengeance, and for God to bring his righteous judgment upon the enemies of Jehovah. (Psalms such as 35 and 69)

Messianic: Psalms that in some way prophesy or pertain to the coming of the Messiah, either in part or in whole. (Including, among others, Psalms 2, 16, 22, 110, 118, etc.)

Penitential: Psalms that express deep remorse or repentance. (Some are Psalms 6, 32, 38, and 51)

Ethical: Psalms that teach certain moral or ethical principles. (Psalm 1 and 15)

Hallelujah: Psalms that either begin or end, or that begin *and* end, with “*praise Jehovah*” or “*Hallelujah.*” “*Jah*” is a shortened form of “*Jehovah.*” (Psalm 106)

Prayer and Petition: Psalms that express needs and desires of the writer, or of the people of Israel. (Psalm 3)

Songs of Ascents or Degrees: Fifteen psalms that were probably sung by bands of pilgrims as they ascended to the yearly feasts in Jerusalem. (Psalms 120-134)

Other General Categories of Psalms:

- **Historical:** Psalms that teach a lesson from reviewing the history of the people of God or of some other period of time, such as creation.
- **Suffering:** Psalms in which the writer expresses his feelings during times of severe trial.
- **Thanksgiving:** Psalms that express praise and thanksgiving to God for His greatness, or for things that He has done for His people or His creation.
- **Didactic:** Psalms of teaching, or of an instructional nature.

Psalm 1

Background:

Although the writer of Psalm 1 does not identify himself, it is believed by most commentators to have been composed by David. It deals with a very simple theme, namely that God rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness. This particular psalm divides itself into two equal parts. Part one is composed of verses 1 through 3, and describes the character and blessings of the godly. Part two comprises verses 4 through 6, and details the character and ultimate destruction of the ungodly.

Outline:

I. The Godly Life (vs. 1-3)

Key Words:

Blessed, walks, counsel of the ungodly, stands, path of sinners, sits, seat of the scornful, delight, law of the Lord, meditates, tree planted, rivers of water, bring forth its fruit, shall not wither, shall prosper.

Observation:

The psalmist speaks of two classes of people -- those who are ungodly, sinners and scornful, and those who are not. The psalmist also describes a progression toward sin -- first walking, then standing, and finally sitting. Real happiness comes from a man who is not ungodly, a sinner or scornful, but rather from one who delights in the

law of the Lord and meditates on the law day and night. The psalmist describes this kind of person as being fruitful, not withering when difficulties arise, and prospering.

II. The Ungodly Life (vs. 4-6)

Key Words:

Ungodly, chaff, shall not stand, sinners, congregation of the righteous, the way of the righteous, the way of the ungodly, perish.

Observation:

The psalmist contrasts in verses 4-6 the character of the ungodly with that of the righteous in verses 1-3. The ungodly “*are not so*” -- not fruitful, will wither when difficulties arise, will not prosper. They are worthless, life chaff, and shall not stand in the judgment, nor have any part with the righteous. The psalmist says the Lord “*knows the way*” - - the future of both the righteous and the ungodly. The ungodly will perish. It is therefore implied that the righteous will not perish.

The Exposition:

I. The Godly Life (vs. 1-3)

1. What does the word “blessed” mean? (v. 1)

The word “*blessed*” comes from the Hebrew word “*esher*” (pronounced “*EH-sheer*”) and conveys a much deeper meaning than it does in English. In Hebrew, the word “*blessed*” carries with it the idea of “*happiness, many times over*” It is an abundance of happiness. But in what does this “*abundance of happiness*” consist? It comes by one who is maintaining an uncompromising

level of purity in their life, and who are maintaining a righteous walk with God. We see this by looking at the three categories of the remaining terms in verse 1.

Walk	Counsel	Ungodly
Stand	Path	Sinners
Sit	Seat	Scornful

2. Explain the following terms as they are used in verse 1:

a. “Walk”

The Hebrew word “walk” is “*halak*” (pronounced “*haw-LAK*”) and is a term that means “*to go about or to go along.*” It suggests a casual movement along the way -- moving in the direction of some destination, or to go forward. Within this verse, the word means one who does not even begin a casual movement toward wickedness.

b. “Stand”

The Hebrew word for “stand” is “*amad*” (pronounced “*aw-MAD*”) and carries the idea of “*stopping to abide or dwell, to be in place, to tarry.*” In the text, the psalmist says that the godly does not stop to abide, dwell, or tarry among sinners. He does not remain or choose to be with those who live their lives contrary to God’s Word.

c. “Sit”

The Hebrew word for “sit” is “*yashab*” (pronounced “*yaw-SHAB*”) and means “*to sit down, to settle down and remain, to make a habitation, to find comfort and ease.*” In the context of

Psalm 1:1, the psalmist says the godly certainly will never sit down, or settle down and remain in the seat of the scornful. He will never find comfort and ease with those who mock and scorn the commandments of the Lord.

3. Explain the following terms as they are used in verse 1:

a. “Counsel”

The Hebrew word for “*counsel*” is “*etsah*” (pronounced “ay-TSAW”) and conveys the idea of “*seeking advice; believing that advice to be prudent and wise*”. The godly would never seek advice from, or move toward (walk in the direction of) the counsel or advice of the ungodly.

b. “Path”

The Hebrew word for “*path*” (“*way*” KJV) is “*derek*” (pronounced “DEH-rek”) and conveys the idea of “*a course of life or mode of action,*” or “*a precise way of life -- a well marked-out path, or a customary way of living.*” In this verse, the psalmist says the godly would never follow the way of life, the customary way of living of sinners -- those who rebel against God’s authority.

c. “Seat”

“*Seat*” in the Hebrew come from “*mowshab*” (pronounced “mo-SHAWB”) and means “*to dwell in, or to find a dwelling place, to inhabit a certain place permanently.*” It also suggests “*to take one’s rest and ease.*” The psalmist in Psalm 1:1 says the godly would never dwell in, or find a permanent place of rest in the lifestyle of those who scoff at God.

4. Explain the following terms as they are used in verse 1:
 - a. “Ungodly”

The “*ungodly*,” according to the Hebrew word “*rasha*” (pronounced “*raw-SHAW*”) are “*those who are morally wrong - - one who is condemned and held to be guilty because of wrong he has done.*” The ungodly is such because his morals are wrong. Those wrong morals then led him to do wrong, thus becoming guilty of wrongdoing.
 - b. “Sinners”

The Hebrew word “*sinner*” comes from “*chatta*” (pronounced “*khat-TAW*”) and means “*a criminal, or one accounted guilty:-- offender, sinful, sinner, one who misses the mark.*” The sinners are those who have progressed to a lifestyle characterized by missing the mark -- continually given to sin.
 - c. “Scornful”

The “*scornful*,” according to the Hebrew word “*luwts*” (pronounced “*loots*”) literally means “*one who mouths at*” (we would say one who “*mouths off*” at someone). It pertains to those who “*speak in derision, or who mock.*” The scoffer or scornful are those who have finally reached the point in their life when they no longer have any respect for the things of God. They “*mouth at*” God and His commandments, and against anyone who would keep them.
5. Explain the progression illustrated in verse 1 by the words “the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.”

The progression is seen very vividly in this passage. The psalmist says the godly is **NOT** a person who makes a casual movement toward or moves in the direction of the advice or counsel of the ungodly, or those who are morally wrong. Nor would the godly progress from there to stand, abide or dwell in the path, the mode or action or customary way of living of the sinner, whose life is characterized by a lifestyle of missing the mark. Nor would the godly progress from there to sit, to settle down and remain, to find comfort and ease in the seat, the place of permanent dwelling of those who scoff at God, who mouth off at all that is righteous and holy, or against those who are seeking to be righteous and holy.

6. Lot provides a good example of one who followed the same progression into sin as outlined in Psalm 1:1. Look up the following passages and explain the progression of Lot toward sin in light of the progression outlined in Psalm 1:1.

a. Genesis 13:11

Genesis 13:10-11 *“And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and **Lot journeyed east**. And they separated from each other.”* When Abraham and Lot’s herdsmen could not raise their flocks together, Abraham gave his nephew first choice of the place where he wanted to move. Lot saw the fertile land to the east -- disregarding the moral corruption in the cities of the plain

(including Sodom and Gomorrah). So, Lot “*journeyed east*” -- he moved in the direction of the counsel of the ungodly.

b. Genesis 13:12-13

*“Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and **pitched his tent even as far as Sodom**. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.”* Next we see that Lot “*pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.*” He takes another bold step closer to wickedness. Lot stands, abides or dwells in the path, the mode or action or customary way of living of the sinner, those in Sodom and Gomorrah whose life is characterized by a lifestyle of missing the mark.

c. Genesis 19:1

Genesis 19:1-3: *“Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was **sitting in the gate of Sodom**. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, ‘Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.’ And they said, ‘No, but we will spend the night in the open square.’ But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.”* Finally, we see Lot sitting in the gate of Sodom -- this is the place where the influential leaders of the city met to discuss business. From this we may assume that Lot may have actually become a

leading citizen of Sodom -- even though God “*delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)*” (2 Peter 2:7-8). Lot had finally settled down and remained, and found comfort and ease in the seat, the place of permanent dwelling of those who scoff at God, who mouth off at all that is righteous and holy, or against those who are seeking to be righteous and holy.

7. Read Genesis 39:1-12 and explain how Joseph responded to sin.
- Genesis 39:7-12: “*And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master's wife, ‘Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. **How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?**’ So it was, as **she spoke to Joseph day by day**, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.” Joseph’s reaction to the allurements of sin was to “**flee!**” It’s interesting to notice how the Scriptures tell us we should treat sexual sins: “*Flee sexual immorality.*” (1 Corinthians 6:18). This is exactly what Joseph did.*

8. Psalm 1:1 gives a promise of happiness, but verse 2 explains how we can acquire genuine happiness. Explain how real happiness is attained. (v. 2)

Genuine happiness comes from living an unblemished and morally pure life, and from delighting in the Law of the Lord -- meditating on it day and night. It's interesting to notice that verse 2 begins with the word "*but*" -- a word that suggests a contrast. The godly person does not do the things mentioned in verse 1, but he does those that are mentioned in verse 2. While the first verse is negative, the second verse is very positive. In contrast with compromise and the erosion of the ungodly, sinner and scoffer, the godly believer occupies himself with God's Word.

9. Why does David mention the Law here? What is so important about Law? (v. 2)

David mentions the "*Law*" here because to change our path of living we need an absolute standard, a clear direction. Absolute truths of what is right and wrong. The Word of God gives us that. In Psalms 119:9, 11, the psalmist asks the question, "*How can a young man cleanse his way?*" Then he answers his own question by saying, "*By taking heed according to Your word.*" (verse 9). In verse 11, the psalmist goes on to describe how he avoids sin in his life. He says, "*Your word I have hidden [treasured] in my heart, that I might not sin against You!*" He hides the Word deep within his heart as one would hide a valuable treasure that he wants to protect and keep safe.

10. Why does the godly person “delight” in the Law of the Lord? (v. 2)

The Hebrew word “*delight*” is “*chephets*” (pronounced “*KHAY-fets*”), and conveys the idea of “*pleasure in a valuable thing.*” The psalmist says he “*delights*” in the Word of God, meaning he doesn’t look at studying and meditating on the Word as some burden, or as some interruption during the day. He finds joy in spending time immersed in God’s Word -- it brings peace of mind, and comfort. That’s why he “*delights*” in the time he can spend meditating on these things.

11. Why is it so important that the godly “meditates day and night” on the Law? (v. 2) Compare this verse with Psalm 119:97.

We should remember that David was a king. And as a king over God’s kingdom, Israel, he had to attend to all the matters of state that every other king was required to handle. He had a full-time job -- much more than any of us have. But in the rush of the day, David deliberately made time to “*meditate day and night*” on the Law. The word “*meditate*” comes from the Hebrew word “*hagah*” (pronounced “*haw-GAW*”) and means “*to ponder and imagine, to study.*” The word *meditate* means that David placed his mind on the Word of God, he pondered these things, and thought about them deeply -- not simply read the Word of God, but meditated on it. The reason David meditated on the Law was because he realized it provided him with wise counsel. “*Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.*” (Psalms 119:23-24). We see a similar thought expressed by the psalmist David in Psalms 119:97: “*Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*”

12. Explain how the godly person in verse 3 is like a tree:

a. "That is planted by the rivers of water"

Verse 1 of this Psalm gives us a promise of happiness, while verse 2 tells us how we can achieve that happiness. But when we come to verse 3, we are told the results of living a godly, uncompromising life. There are four tree-like qualities or characteristics of living a godly life that are mentioned in this verse. The word "*planted*" comes from the Hebrew "*shathal*" (pronounced "*shaw-THAL*") and suggests the idea of "*fortified, stable, rooted, solid, and strong.*" Living a godly life gives us stability and solid strength, much like a "*tree that is planted by the rivers of water.*" There is a source of constant life-giving nourishment from living a godly life that spends time meditating on the Word of God day and night.

b. "That brings forth its fruit"

A tree "*that brings forth its fruit*" conveys the idea of fruitful -- the product that naturally follows being planted where we can grow. Every child of God is expected to be fruitful. Jesus said something about this to His disciples in John 15:1-6: "*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in*

Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."

Living a godly life in which we spend time meditating on God's Word will make us productive in His service.

c. "Whose leaf shall not wither"

The phrase "*whose leaf shall not wither,*" conveys the idea of enduring, even during days of difficulty -- persevering under difficult circumstances, trials and tribulations. The Hebrew word for "*wither*" is "*nabel*" (pronounced "*naw-BALE*"), and literally means "*to wilt.*" However the word is used figuratively to speak of those *who "fall away, fail, faint; or who fall down, or come to nought."* In the parable of the sower, Jesus talked about those who wither away. Matthew 13:5-6: "*Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away..*" In Matthew 13:20-21, Jesus explained: "*But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.*" The person who tries to the best of their ability to live a godly and uncompromising life, and who spends time meditating on God's Word will not only be stable and strong, as well as productive, but they will also be "*unwithered*" -- evergreen -- because they are planted by rivers of water.

d. "Shall prosper in whatever he does"

The final tree-like characteristic mentioned here is "*prosperity*" -- fulfilling the purpose for which God intended. The godly person does not measure the level of his prosperity in material things, but in the spiritual qualities and characteristics he has attained by being in close fellowship with God, and by meditating on God's Holy and Divine Word.

13. Compare Psalm 1:1-3 with Jeremiah 17:5-8. What similarities do you notice?:

Jeremiah 17:5-8: *"Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.'"* There are only two places where we can put our trust -- either in flesh (man), or in the Lord. Those who put their trust in man will be like a shrub in the desert (compared to a tree planted by the waters), he shall not see when good comes (compared to the tree which will not fear when heat comes), he shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited (compared to the tree that spreads out its roots by the river).

II. The Ungodly Life (vs. 4-6)

1. Psalm 1:4 marks a dramatic contrast with the preceding verses. In what ways are the ungodly “not so”?

The phrase “*not so*” makes a very dramatic contrast between the lifestyle of the godly and the blessings that accompany him, versus the lifestyle of the ungodly, sinner and scoffer, and the calamities that accompany them. What was said of the godly is “*not so*” with the ungodly. The ungodly, sinner and scoffer are not happy many times over. They are not those who delight in the Law of the Lord nor do they meditate on it day and night. And they are not like a tree planted by the rivers of water -- there is no stability or strength in their lives, they are not fruitful in spiritual things, they are not able to stand when trials, tribulations and calamities strike, nor are they able to be prosperous by doing those things for which God made them.

2. What is “chaff” and how is the ungodly like chaff? (v. 4)

The psalmist portrays the life of the ungodly as “*chaff*.” Chaff is the outer part of the grain seeds which separates at the time of threshing -- the husks and grasses which fall and blow around during harvest time. Chaff is completely worthless. It is the refuse blown away by the winnowing process. Chaff stands in contrast with the tree mentioned in verse 3. And to make this even more descriptive, the psalmist says the ungodly are “*like the chaff which the wind drives away*.” The Hebrew terms “*drives away*” is from “*nadaph*” (pronounced “*naw-DAF*”) and means “*to shove asunder, to disperse, to drive away, to thrust down, to be shaken, tossed to and fro*.” The word suggests “*to drive asunder, disseminate, diffuse, strike or beat*.” It’s a harsh, buffeting picture. John warned

the Pharisees and the Sadducees that the Messiah was coming to separate the wheat from the chaff among those of the nation of Israel. In Luke 3:16-17, John said, *“John answered, saying to all, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.’”*

3. The Hebrew word “stand” in verse 5 is not the same as in verse 1. This word means “to stand erect, to arise.” Explain what the psalmist means with the use of this particular word in the context of verse 5.

The word *“therefore”* in verse 5 connects the thought of this verse with the one preceding it (verse 4). *“Therefore (on account of their inner worthlessness and instability)... the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment...”* The Hebrew verb *“stand”* is **not** the same as the word *“stand”* in verse 1. This particular Hebrew term is the word *“quwm”* (pronounced *“koom”*) and means *“to stand up, to stand erect, to arise.”* The idea in the mind of the psalmist is an inability to stand erect before God’s judgment. The parallel statement is *“nor sinners in the congregation (assembly) of the righteous.”* The one who has never come by faith to the Lord and trusted in Him alone for eternal life, will not be able to stand erect on the day of judgment along with the assembled righteous.

4. Verse 6 explains why the ungodly and sinner will not be able to stand in judgment nor among the assembly of the righteous. Explain in your own words.

Here is a striking contrast. In our eternal destiny, there is a vast difference between the godly and the ungodly. The godly will stand, but the ungodly will not stand. But so many unbelievers live healthy, moral lives, even sacrificial and dedicated lives. How can anyone say they won't be among the eternal assembly of the righteous? Verse 6 answers that question. *"For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."* (Psalm 1:6). Notice, it is the LORD who does the judging. Him, and Him alone! Man is incapable of judging because we do not know the thoughts and the intents of the heart. But God knows. He knows *"the way of the righteous."* The fact that the Lord knows *"the way of the righteous"* suggests He also knows *"the way of the unrighteous."* He knows one is desiring to serve Him according to the best of their ability, while the other is not. He knows that one is trusting in Him for all things, while the other puts his trust in the flesh (man). Since God knows the way of the ungodly, He assures us that *"the way of the ungodly shall perish."* Another vivid contrast. Instead of prospering, the ungodly will ultimately perish because their *"way"* -- manner of life -- is filled with compromise with that which is sinful. With no solid foundation, the way of the ungodly will collapse.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 5

Background:

This psalm is believed to have been written by David, although it is difficult to ascribe it to a particular period in his life with any degree of certainty. However, many believe it may have been written a short time before the revolt of his son Absalom, when David became aware of the conspiracy against him (2 Samuel 13-18). The psalm is dedicated to the Chief Musician, and is to be sung to the accompaniment of the “nahiloth,” an ancient woodwind instrument similar to a flute or oboe. The parts of this psalm fall into three main divisions. Part one is comprised of verses 1 through 3, and is a plea in the form of a prayer. Part two provides four descriptions: (1) how the psalmist describes the Lord in verses 4-6, (2) how the psalmist describes himself in verses 7 and 8, (3) how the psalmist describes his enemies in verses 9 and 10, and finally (4) how the psalmist describes the righteous in verse 11. Part three of the psalm ends with a promise to the righteous in verse 12.

Outline:

I. A Plea (vs. 1-3)

Key Words:

Give ear, my words, consider my meditation, my cry, King, morning,
direct

Observation:

Increased pleading: (1) give ear to my words, (2) consider my meditation (groaning), (3) heed the voice of my cry!

II. Four Descriptions (vs. 4-11)

Key Words:

Wickedness, boastful, iniquity, falsehood, bloodthirsty, deceitful, righteousness, enemies, no faithfulness, inward part, throat, flattery, tongue, guilty, counsels, transgressions, rebelled, rejoice, trust, joy, defend, love Your name, joyful

Observation:

Seven qualities of God. Four characteristics of David's enemies.
Description of righteous.

III. A Promise (v. 12)

Key Words:

bless, righteous, favor, shield

Observation:

Result of David putting matters in God's hands.

The Exposition:

I. A Plea (vs. 1-3)

1. Why does David seem to be repetitive, making the same request in verses 1 and 2 but with different words? Why is the writer employing "*synonymous parallelism*" here?



Textual Note: A common literary technique found in Hebrew poetry is known as “*synonymous parallelism*.” Similar, or “*synonymous*,” thoughts are recorded in sequential lines for the purpose of either completing the thought of previous lines, or of creating the feeling of increased intensity.

“*Give ear,*” “*consider,*” “*heed*” -- increased intensity. Feelings of burden. A sense of growing discouragement. There are three things David asked God to do here. First, “*give ear to my words,*” which is a request for God to be attentive or regard (give special attention to) his words. Second, “*consider my meditation,*” which is asking God to understand, perceive, his “*meditation*” (some translations put “*groaning*”). The root word in the Hebrew means “*to set on fire, kindle,*” and is used here to mean “*heat,*” or “*fervor of the mind.*” These are desires of the soul that are too deep to put into words (Romans 8:26-27). Third, “*give heed to the voice of my cry,*” which is asking God to render assistance at a time of immense trial and trouble. The words “*my King and my God,*” show that even though David was a king, he showed subjection to his Supreme Ruler, and looked to Him to protect him from danger and to restore his rights. David also calls Jehovah “*God,*” the One to whom David felt he could come during times of trouble, and whose blessings he was permitted to evoke.

2. What is significant about this prayer being in the “morning?” (v. 3) Compare Psalms 55:17; 59:16; 88:13; 119:147.

The peaceful mornings are frequently mentioned in the Scriptures as an especially meaningful time to a person’s spiritual life. Jesus also used this time (Mark 1:35). David was surrounded by his

enemies that he could not afford to be without God's protection for even one day. Therefore, at the beginning of each day, David brought forth his petition to Almighty Jehovah. He needed to approach the throne of God first thing in the morning to get help from all the temptations and dangers that he would face during the course of the day. By use of the second occurrence of the phrase "*in the morning,*" the psalmist was literally saying, "*regularly, each morning I will direct my voice to You.*"

3. What two statements in verse 3 indicate David anticipated God's intervention?

First, the word "*direct*" means "*to place in a row, to put in order, to arrange.*" By this, David meant he would regularly arrange his time in the mornings as a special and significant time of worship to God. It would be a time of prayer that came out of a deep sense of worship to the God of heaven, and not something done merely haphazardly. Second, the phrase, "*I will look up,*" literally means "*to look about, to view as from a distance.*" This means David will look up in anticipation of receiving an answer from God. David took his requests to the Lord each morning in a special time of private worship, then waited for the Lord to answer his requests for Divine help and assistance.

II. Four Descriptions (vs. 4-11)

1. The first description is of God. (vs. 4-6) In these verses, David identifies seven things about Jehovah.
 - a. List the seven attributes of God mentioned by the psalmist:
 - (1). *Takes no pleasure in wickedness.* Since God is holy and Divine, He cannot have any pleasure in furthering the

designs of wicked men. David was well aware that his own intentions were right and holy, and that those of his enemies were wicked. Therefore, David assures himself that God cannot in any way assist or bless the efforts of wicked men.

(2). *No evil will dwell with Him* (literally). If God could not favor wicked men, neither will He allow those who practice evil to have any intimate fellowship with Him at all. This was also assuring to David, since he knew his enemies were working without God's blessings or favor.

(3). *Arrogant boasters shall not stand before Him*. Some translations put "*foolish,*" meaning those who proud and insolent. These shall not stand in God's presence. David again understood that the proud and arrogant boasters shall not have favor with God, nor shall they be permitted to stand in fellowship with Him.

(4). *He hates all workers of iniquity*. Workers of iniquity are all those who do wrong. Since God hates all forms of iniquity (lawlessness and sin), He will not tolerate fellowship with those who persist in it.

(5). *He destroys those who speak falsehoods* (lies). The allusion here is to David's enemies who were false and treacherous. This was certainly true of Absalom.

(6). *He abhors murderers* (bloodthirsty). The word "*abhors,*" means to hate and hold in abomination, or to show abhorrence

toward. In this case, it is to show abhorrence toward murderers or bloodthirsty men. David was certainly confronted by this kind of enemy, especially in his own son Absalom, who sought to take David's life and throne.

(7). *He abhors deceivers.* "Deceivers" are those who deal in treachery and fraud, who speak lies and traffic in deception. God likewise abhors those who resort to lies and fraud to sway the minds of the gullible.

- b. In your opinion, why did David meditate on these seven attributes of God?

It was therapeutic to review the magnificent attributes of God. Many of the pent-up angry feelings and frustrations are dispelled when we review God's attributes. It dispels discouragement. And we are reminded that God's enemies are really our enemies, as well. Again, David is confident that his cause is right and holy, and armed with that confidence, he reflects on the qualities and characteristics of God's holy and righteous nature and attributes from whom David could call upon for help. God has no attributes that can have fellowship with sinners, or on which the sinner can rely. Therefore, David relies upon God's righteous and holy attributes to help him in his cause. This brings David confidence and hope.

- 2. The second description is how the writer describes himself. (vs. 7-8)
 - a. In what way does David say he is permitted to come into the house of God? (v. 7)

While the wicked have no desire to serve God, and while their characteristics are such that they can have no hope of access to God, and no reason that God will hear their cry, David says he is different. David enters the house of God (holy Temple) by God's mercy, and by a reverential fear and respect for God. The term "*holy temple*" is a poetic reference to intimate fellowship with God. However, some commentators believe that David is specifically referring to the tabernacle and to the holy city of Jerusalem from which David had to flee for his own safety. His enemies have entered the house of God by their own treachery and murder, showing no reverential fear and respect for God. David plans on entering the house of God once again as a result of God's mercy in giving David the victory over his enemies. Worshippers were not permitted to enter the tabernacle, but to worship "*toward*" it -- looking toward it, and prostrating themselves in the direction of the tabernacle. Orthodox Jews still do this today -- praying toward Jerusalem and the place where the Temple once stood. (In Jerusalem, they pray facing the temple wall.)

- b. What was the substance of David's plea (prayer)? (v. 8)

Verse 8 is the major theme of this psalm. Everything before this verse could be considered preliminary. David didn't want to resort to the tactics of his enemies, so he prayed that the Lord would lead him in His (God's) way throughout the conflict. He wanted God's righteous way first and foremost. David is asking God for guidance in showing him the right and proper way to handle himself in the situation at hand -- doing what God wants, not what David thinks may be right. Isaiah, not too

many years later, wrote similar words (Isaiah 55:8-9). David is praying this prayer “*because of my enemies,*” meaning that he is afraid unless God gives him guidance and direction his enemies will triumph over him. David wanted to be vindicated and delivered from them. Therefore, he asks God to “*make Your way straight before my face*” -- that is, mark out or make a plain path for me to follow, a path of righteousness that will deliver him. In times of trouble, especially when threatened by an enemy that may seem to great for us to handle, we need to do what David did -- pray that the Lord will lead us to respond in righteousness, and that He will vindicate and deliver us.

3. The third description is of David’s enemies. (vs. 9-10)
 - a. Just as the psalmist earlier listed the seven attributes of God, here he lists four attributes of the wicked. What are they?
 - (1). *There is no faithfulness in their mouth.* There is nothing in them which can be confided in; nothing in their promises. They are false and treacherous.
 - (2). *Their inward part is destruction.* Not only their external conduct, but even their hearts (their principles and motives) are destructive. They are completely depraved and have no sense of what is right, holy and good.
 - (3). *Their throat is an open tomb.* Their speech is contemptible and filled with all kinds of corruption. Some commentators say, “just as the grave is open to receive its victims, so is their throat open to devour or swallow up the peace and happiness of others.” The apostle Paul uses this

passage to show the depravity of all mankind -- both Jew and Gentile (Romans 3:13).

(4). *They flatter with their tongue.* Earlier, the psalmist referred to their “*inward part*” (the heart), and to their “*throat*” as being depraved and evil. He now refers to another member of the body that is equally depraved -- the “*tongue.*” Instead of speaking truth and revealing their true intentions, the enemies of David resorted to deceitful flattery in trying to turn people against David and to support his arch-enemy, Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1-6). James also says quite a lot about the tongue and how destructive it can be (James 3:1-12).

- b. How does David deal with his enemies? (v. 10) Compare this with Paul’s remarks in Romans 12:17-19.

David realizes that he needs to turn his enemies over to God who is capable of handling them with no problem whatsoever. The first thing David asks God to do is to “*pronounce them guilty.*” The KJV uses the words “*destroy them.*” But the Hebrew literally means to “*condemn them or make them guilty.*” David is not saying he wishes God to “*make them guilty*” of something they are not already guilty of, but that God will see their guilt and pronounce them guilty of the crimes they are committing against God’s anointed king. The apostle Paul suggests a similar tactic when we are dealing with people who are posing a threat to our own peace and security -- “*Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge*

yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:17-19). Also consider the last two verses of Romans 12, *"Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* (Romans 12:20-21). It's important that we realize that these kinds of people are not just fighting against us, they are also fighting against God -- therefore, He can be relied on for our defense. David knew he could overcome the discouragement he faced by letting God do his fighting for him.

- c. What is significant about the words "let them fall by their own counsels?" (v. 10)

The next thing David asks God to do is to *"let them fall by their own counsels,"* which means to let their own plans backfire on them and bring them down. David is asking God to let them perish by their own wicked schemes and treachery. David also asks God to *"cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions,"* which means David is asking God to cast these transgressors away because their transgressions are numerous. They aren't people who are generally righteous and faithful but slipped into momentary sin, they are known for the *"multitude of transgressions"* -- a lifestyle that is constantly characterized by lawlessness and rebellion against God.

4. The fourth description is of the righteous. (v. 11)
- a. What kind of attitude does the psalmist say the righteous should display when God deals with our enemies? (v. 11)

The key to this verse should be obvious -- it is joy. David realized he could be joyful during this terribly discouraging and threatening situation because he put his trust and confidence in the Lord. He knew he could rely on the Lord for protection and deliverance. The wicked have everything to dread -- they will eventually be cut off and face the consequences of their own rebellion. But the righteous have every reason to be happy and joyful -- because they are living their lives in such a way as to win the favor and blessings of God. "*Let them shout for joy*" -- which is a natural outward expression of an inward happiness. More than likely, this "*shouting for joy*" was to be done in song as well as praise and prayer. As we said earlier, the reason for this joy is clearly expressed here -- it is "*because You defend them.*" Therefore, the psalmist concludes "*let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.*" There can be no real peace and joy -- no genuine happiness unless we are "**IN**" the Lord.

III. A Promise (v. 12)

1. What is the significance of being *surrounded* with a shield? (v. 12)
David says there are two things the Lord will do for the righteous. First, He will "*bless the righteous*" -- literally, He will "*show favor to the righteous.*" Second, "*with favor You [God] will surround him [the righteous] with a shield.*" The "*shield*" mentioned in this verse was the large warrior shield that covered the entire body. This shield was always carried into battle to protect the warrior against the enemy. Shields were used to protect the soldier against the swords, spears and arrows of the enemy, and were generally made

in David's day of thick hides fastened to a rim and attached to the left arm so that they could be swung in front of the body to ward off attacks. God will surround the righteous with a shield of "*favor*" -- meaning God will give special attention to and protection for the righteous. God will grant them "*favor*" that He will not give to those who are unrighteous. There are other references to our "*shield*" in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:10-17). Our "*shield*" is a shield of faith.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 8

Background:

This psalm is also credited to David, and there is nothing in the psalm that would indicate otherwise. This psalm is addressed “To the Chief Musician upon Gittith.” Although the etymology of this Hebrew word is in doubt, most believe it is derived from the word “Gath”, the ancient city of the Philistines. The word occurs two other places where it is also used in the titles of psalms (Psalm 81:1 and Psalm 84:1). Since we know David spent time in Gath while fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 21:10-11; 2 Samuel 15:18), the word “Gittith” is believed by many to have been a musical instrument common to the people of Gath, and one which was intended to be used as accompaniment to this psalm. Quotes from this psalm appear in the letter of Hebrews (Hebrews 2:5-9), where the writer applies part of it to man (vs. 5-8), and part of it to Jesus Christ (v. 9). This psalm falls into three main divisions. Part one is comprised of verses 1, and is an introduction of praise to God, and an explanation of the cause for such praise. Part two includes verses 3 through 8 in which the writer admires God for what He has done for mankind. This section is further divided into two sub-sections: (1) the Creator’s notice of mankind among His creation (vs. 3-4), and (2) the honor conferred on mankind (vs. 5-8). Section three is composed of verse 9 where the psalmist concludes with a repetition of the first verse -- reflecting on the greatness of the Divine name, and His majesty.

Outline:

I. Praise (vs. 1-2)

Key Words:

LORD (Jehovah), Lord (Adonai), excellent, Your name, earth, Your glory, babes and infants, enemy and avenger.

Observation:

This section opens the psalm with praise and adoration for Jehovah, and for the fact that He has “*ordained*” (established) His strength because there are always those who will stand in opposition to Him and His will. God’s power in creation should silence “*the enemy and the avenger.*”

II. Admiration (vs. 3-8)

Key Words:

Work of Your finger, man, son of man, visit, angels, crowned him, glory and honor, dominion, works of Your hands, all things under his feet, paths of the sea.

Observation:

The psalmist is so overwhelmed when he considered all God’s creation, and compared that to small, frail, insignificant man. He simply cannot understand why man is so important to God, nor can he understand why God has gone to such an extreme to provide for man’s benefit and enjoyment. And yet, the psalmist recognizes that man has been created “*a little lower than the angels*” -- actually, a little lower than God Himself -- and has been “*crowned*” with “*glory and honor*” by being given dominion over all God’s creation.

III. Conclusion (v. 9)

Key Words:

LORD, Lord, excellent, Your name, earth.

Observation:

The psalmist ends with the same words as he began. At the beginning of the psalm the writer made an assertion which he proceeded to prove in the verses that followed. Now, at the conclusion of the psalm, the writer offers all that he has said as proof of the fact that Jehovah's name is "*excellent (or to be held as high, great and noble)... in all the earth.*"

The Exposition:

I. Praise (vs. 1-2)

1. The psalm begins with the words, "O LORD, our Lord," or more literally, "O Jehovah, our Adonai (master, lord, ruler and owner)." What significance do you see in the usage of the words "LORD" (Jehovah) and "Lord" (Adonai)? (v. 1)

The term "*Jehovah*" is a term used exclusively in referring to God. The term "*Adonai*" is a term that is given to an owner of land or of slaves, to kings, or to rulers, and is also applied to God as being the ruler or governor of the universe. The psalmist uses both terms here to suggest that Jehovah is our rightful King and Ruler, and that He is the owner of all things. David begins by establishing in his own mind the absolute Sovereignty of God.

2. How is the Lord's name exalted "in all the earth?"

The psalmist proceeds to establish the fact that Jehovah's name is

to be held as exalted above all others -- *“How excellent is Your name in all the earth!”* The psalmist is praising God’s majestic character and attributes. Jehovah’s name is exalted in all parts of the world -- not just to one country, but should be exalted among all peoples throughout the whole world. In every place, the true character and attributes of Jehovah are seen in His works. In every land, there are evidences of His wisdom, His greatness, and His goodness.

3. The word “set” in verse 1 means to “display.” How has God displayed His glory above the heavens? (Compare: Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20)

The psalmist says let God’s glory not only be recognized on the earth, but even exalted to the highest degree imaginable -- even above the heavens on which the psalmist was obviously gazing at the moment. Let the heavens themselves *“display”* the glory of God. How? Psalm 19:1-3: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard.”* Romans 1:20-21: *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”* The universe, with its awesome splendor, speaks loudly of God’s majesty and greatness, and speaks of His wisdom, and His goodness. It has all been created for us to enjoy and benefit from

4. How is it that God has established strength and silenced His enemies “out of the mouth of babes and infants?” (v. 2) (Compare this Messianic prophecy about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem to Matthew 21:12-16)

This passage is quoted by Jesus as He is entering the city of Jerusalem on the Sunday before His crucifixion in an attempt to silence the criticism of the chief priests and the scribes. The chief priests and scribes were shocked that Jesus would allow the people to praise Him with shouts of “*Hosanna to the Son of David.*” The word “*Hosanna*” is a Hebrew or Aramaic word that is best translated as a prayer: “*Save now,*” or “*Save, we beseech Thee.*” The term “*Son of David*” was another way of describing the Messiah who would be a descendent of King David. The people on that occasion were clearly calling Jesus the Messiah. As Jesus used this quote from Psalm 8, He meant to tell His critics that men and women who were calling Him the Messiah could see in Jesus something that the Chief Priests and scribes couldn’t see. Jesus was also describing these men and women as being so humble and weak that by comparison to the powerful Chief Priests and scribes, these men and women were like babes and infants. But they wouldn’t remain that way. Ultimately, it would be these spiritual babes and infants that would rise up to overthrow the enemies of Christ by courageously proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to the world even though it might mean their own deaths. What was true in the days of Jesus would also be true of the faithful in any age -- even in Old Testament times. The most courageous are often those who start out as spiritual babes and infants. However, in time, the Lord strengthens them and gives them courage to go

forward to stand up against the Lord's enemies, and act as His avenger.

II. Admiration (vs. 3-8)

1. Based on the words of verse 3, it is safe to assume David was writing this psalm one night while contemplating the vastness of the universe. When David viewed the heavens, what thought rushed to his mind? (v. 4)

When David considered the heavens and the work of God's fingers -- the moon and the stars which He had ordained -- the question that immediately came to the mind of the psalmist was "*what is man?*" The Hebrew word for man used by David on this occasion is a rather uncommon term -- it is the word "*enosh*" from the Hebrew verb which means "*to be weak, sick and frail.*" In other words, David is saying "*what claim does weak, sick, frail and insignificant man have that entitles him to even be noticed among God's vast and immense creation?*" Why has man been given such special honors? Why has he been given dominion and authority over God's creation itself? Why has God given man so much comfort? Why has Jehovah done so much to save him? Why is God "*mindful*" of man -- meaning, why does God remember man, think about man, attend to man?

2. The term "son of man" is used two ways in Scripture: (1) a Messianic title (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 1:13); and (2) a term signifying mankind, or that which belongs to humanity (Ezekiel is called "son of man" 40 times). How is the term being used here? (v. 4)

The term “*son of man*” as used in this passage is speaking of that which belongs to humanity -- any descendent of man, or anyone who is of the human race. The psalmist is asking “*what is the son of man -- what is humanity -- that You would visit him?*” The word “*visit*” is from the Hebrew “*pakad*,” which means the giving of special attention for purpose of taking care of a specific need.

3. What is the significance of mankind’s rank in Creation, and how are we crowned with “glory and honor?” (v. 5)

Mankind’s rank in the creation is that he has been made “*a little lower than the angels.*” In other words, man was originally designed to be given charge over all of God’s creation -- even though by size to God’s creation, man is insignificant -- he nevertheless is given a rank in God’s order of things just a little lower than the angels of heaven. It’s interesting to note that the word “*angels*” in Psalm 8:5 is “*Elohim*” which is translated as “*God.*” However, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament done before the days of Jesus), the Syriac translation and the wording of this same text as quoted by the author of the Hebrew epistle (Hebrews 2:7) suggest the meaning should be “*angels.*” However, if it weren’t for these translations, the original thought would suggest that God created man almost equal to God Himself -- or a little lower than God. Regardless of how we interpret this passage, the fact remains that man hold a very high regard in God’s eyes for reasons which the psalmist cannot completely understand. Furthermore, God has “*crowned him (man) with glory and honor.*” Man has been given a position of exalted glory and majesty among all God’s creation because he has been given dominion over all creation. The Hebrew writer not only uses

this expression when speaking of mankind, but also quotes from this Psalm when speaking of the humanity of Jesus (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus also took upon Himself the form of a man so that He *“might taste death for everyone.”* The use of this Psalm in making reference to the humanity of Jesus doesn’t make this Psalm completely Messianic in nature. It simply shows that God the Son was willing to humble Himself in taking on the form of a servant in coming in the likeness of man -- weak, frail and insignificant man, when compared to the vastness of God’s creation.

4. Why would the psalmist be amazed at the fact that Jehovah has given mankind dominion over all the works of His hand? What conclusions can be drawn from this fact? (vs. 6-8)

The expressions *“You have made him (man) to have dominion over the works of Your hands’ You have put all things under his feet”* (verse 6), conveys the idea of subjection -- of all creation being made for man’s purpose and for his benefit. The expression *“put all things under his feet”* (verse 6), is used elsewhere to convey the idea of treading down enemies in battle, and of putting the feet on the necks of their captives. This does not mean that man is to mistreat or abuse that which has been put under his dominion, but rather that all creation has been subjected to man for his own use - - *“all sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the sea”* (verses 7-8). Everything God created has been given to man to subdue and domesticate for his own benefit, and for his own enjoyment. The idea is that man has universal dominion -- one which is so wide and all-encompassing that man cannot help but be amazed and filled with wonder and gratitude that this has all

been given (entrusted) to one so feeble, weak and insignificant. Man has been entrusted with the proper care and protection of God's creation, and is not supposed to abuse and mistreat it. Unfortunately, the history of modern man has all too often shown a complete disregard for the proper care and protection of God's creation. Man has been prompted more by greed and the desire for financial gain than he has in properly caring for and maintaining God's creation for the benefit of all.

III. Conclusion (v. 9)

1. Why would the psalmist feel compelled to repeat the thought of verse 1?

Repeating the words of verse 1 here in verse 9 at the conclusion of the psalm, simply confirms the assertions made in verse 1. The psalmist opened this Psalm by making an assertion which he proceeded to prove. He concludes this Psalm with the same words as a means of showing the truthfulness and beauty of what he said at the beginning.

2. The word "excellent" in verses 1 and 9 means "high, great and noble." In what way was Jehovah's name high, great and noble?

"How excellent is Your name in all the earth!" As we said at the beginning, the psalmist is praising God's majestic character and attributes. Jehovah's name is exalted because in all He has created, we can see His wisdom, His greatness, and His goodness toward us. This speaks of God's grace -- sheer, undeserved, unmerited and unearned favor. In the vastness of God's creation, He never loses sight of His most important creation -- man, for

whom He would send His Son to the earth to die so that through Jesus, we could also become Sons of God by spiritual inheritance.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 15

Background:

This psalm of David addresses a very simple but direct question, namely, “who may abide in Your tabernacle,” or to put it another way, “who may dwell in Your holy hill?” The question deals with who will be able to enjoy a close, intimate relationship with the Lord now, and ultimately go to heaven? There is no other Old Testament passage that deals with this question in such a detailed and concise manner as Psalm 15. The psalm is naturally divided into three parts. Part one is verse 1, which contains the question. Part two is found in verses 2 through the first part of verse 5, where the answer is given to the question. And part three, which is found in the conclusion of verse 5, gives a promise to those whose lives are characterized by the content of the preceding verses.

Outline:

I. The Question (v. 1)

Key Words:

Abide, Tabernacle, Dwell, Holy Hill

Observation:

David opens the psalm with two questions that ask basically the same thing. Both are Hebrew idioms referring to a place of God’s

presence -- a place of spiritual intimacy (Psalm 91 begins in similar fashion). When the Jews wandered in the wilderness, they worshipped God with the Tabernacle -- a tent-like structure which was only temporary in nature. However, after the Jews settled in the promise land, the Tabernacle was eventually replaced with the permanent structure of the Temple of Solomon, which was built on Mount Zion, the *“holy hill”* of Jerusalem. What kind of person dwells in God’s holy presence? Who can maintain intimate fellowship with the Lord? What are the characteristic marks of a godly person?

II. The Answer (vs. 2-5a)

Key Words:

Walks uprightly, works righteousness, speaks truth, heart, backbite, evil, neighbor, reproach, friend, vile person, despised, honors, fear, swears, usury, bribe, innocent.

Observation:

David paints a portrait of the person who is able to have intimate fellowship with God by mentioning eleven specific character traits

III. The Promise (v. 5b)

Key Words:

Never be moved.

Observation:

The psalm of David closes with a promise that those who practice these traits will *“never be moved”* -- never be shaken. This speaks of stability and strength -- much like that of a tree planted by the rivers

of water (Psalm 1). Our roots sink deep into the soil of the Lord's love, and we have the strength and stability to withstand whatever storms may come our way in life.

The Exposition:

I. The Question (v. 1)

1. What did the "tabernacle" and the "holy hill" of Zion symbolize to the Jew? (v. 1) (Compare: Exodus 28:43; 29:43; 40:34; and Psalm 2:6) Exodus 28:43 reads, "*They (the special clothing designed specifically for the High Priest) shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.*" Exodus 29:43 reads, "*And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory.*" In Exodus 40:34, it reads, "*Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*" The Tabernacle, and the Temple which followed years later, were a place of meeting to the Jews. It was a place where the presence of Jehovah dwelled -- more specifically, in the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle or Temple. When the Tabernacle was finally brought to Jerusalem, it was placed on Mount Zion, one of the hills on which the city of Jerusalem was built, and the Mount on which the Temple of Solomon was eventually erected. But Mount Zion also had another, deeper, meaning. It was symbolic of heaven itself. In Psalms 2:6 we have a prophetic revelation which speaks of Christ's resurrection in

these words of Jehovah: *“Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.”* Following His resurrection from the dead, and the 40 days He spent proving Himself to be alive to His disciples, Jesus ascended back to heaven to sit on the right hand of God, *“on My holy hill of Zion.”* But to the Jews reading Psalm 15, the terms *“tabernacle”* and *“holy hill”* meant the same thing -- a place where one comes into the presence of Jehovah, or a place of intimate fellowship with God. The question being posed by the psalmist is simply: What kind of person dwells in God’s holy presence, or who can maintain intimate fellowship with the Lord?

2. By use of the words “abide (sojourn) in Your tabernacle” and “dwell in Your holy hill,” the psalmist seems to be contrasting something temporary with something permanent. What would the writer be alluding to that is only temporary versus what is permanent?

The Hebrew word *“abide”* (sojourn) means to abide in a place as a sojourner or a stranger, not permanently, but only for a while. The idea in this place is taken from the word *“tabernacle”* or *“tent”* which is naturally associated with someone who is on the move, and not a permanent resident. The writer of the Book of Hebrews speaks of Abraham in this same way: *“By faith he (Abraham) dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:9). Speaking of these same Patriarchs, the Hebrew writer continues by saying, *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare*

plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:13-16). Metaphorically speaking, we are all strangers and pilgrims while on this earth, but we are likewise looking for a *"city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* -- a city prepared for us in heaven. In this same way, we are much like the Jews who wandered in the wilderness worshipping God in a temporary setting, but longing for the time when we enter the promised land and come to the holy city, New Jerusalem and to Mount Zion where Jesus reigns, to dwell with and worship God there forever. The question posed by the psalmist in Psalm 15 is simple but direct. Who has the right to come before God's presence now, and who will have the right to enter into heaven and dwell with God forever? The answer to David's question comes in the verses that follow, where he outlines the character we should all strive to achieve.

II. The Answer (vs. 2-5a)

1. What is meant by the following phrases in verse 2?

a. "He who walks upright"

This statement has to do with who we are. The one who *"walks upright,"* is one who walks with integrity. The word *"walks"* is often used in the Scriptures to speak of a manner of life, speaking of life as a journey through which we walk and describing the character of the man or woman who is making this journey. The word *"upright"* means *"innocent, morally whole"* and speaks of one whose life is *"complete"* -- complete

in the sense that there is nothing lacking or wanting in moral or ethical character. This does not mean one who is completely free from sin, but whose life over all is characterized by a walk in harmony with God's standards of righteousness. Those who enjoy an intimate fellowship with God are those who have no hidden areas of shame in their lives. He refuses to live a lie, and he is careful to maintain fellowship with God in all areas of his life because he walks in the realm of truth.

b. "Works righteousness"

This statement has to do with what we do. Righteousness is defined as that which denotes not so much the abstract idea of justice or virtue, as much as it denotes right standing and right behavior. In other words, those who dwell in the Lord's presence make a habit of being ethical, honest and straightforward in their daily conduct. Righteousness is a habit of our conscious life. Our dealings with others are to be honest, and our daily activities must be free of compromise. This principle is taught throughout the Old Testament. For example, in Micah 6:6-8 it reads, *"With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"* The New Testament is filled with similar teaching. For example, 1 John 3:6-10 reads, *"Whoever*

abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” John is not speaking of our attaining a level of spiritual maturity where we no longer sin -- that would contradict what he already taught in 1 John 1:8-10. Rather he is speaking of one whose life is not characterized as a life given to sin, or of one who sins habitually.

c. “Speaks truth in his heart”

This has to do with how we think. Nowhere else in the Scriptures does this phrase “*speaks the truth in his heart*” appear. Normally, we think of speaking the truth as something we do with our mouth or tongue, rather than with our hearts. But in reality, it is the heart, not the mouth, that dictates what we say. In Mark 7:21-23, Jesus said, “*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.*” Solomon also spoke of this unique relationship between the

heart and our outward speech and conduct: *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...”* (Proverbs 23:7). Our attitudes, our actions, our motives are what the psalmist has in mind in Psalm 15 when he says we speak the truth in our hearts. The heart is the source of all we say and do, and the one who would enjoy close fellowship with God is one whose has no credibility gap what they profess with their tongue and what they live out in their lives.

2. Explain the character described in verse 3 by the use of these phrases:

- a. “He who does not backbite with his tongue”

This has to do with what we say. The Hebrew word for *“backbite”* (slander) literally means *“to go about, to foot it”* -- we might say *“to hoof it.”* It carries the idea of walking into a situation, looking it over, backing out carefully, then hoofing it - - going around from place to place revealing secrets that are really no one else’s business. It speaks of one who goes about, or who walks from here to there, spreading malicious slander, pouring out verbal venom and poisoning others behind their backs. It describes a gossip, as well as one who enjoys hearing a juicy tale about another. This is one of the seven things God hates most: *“These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.”* (Proverbs 6:16-19). Slander is not simply telling a lie, it is grossly distorting the truth about someone.

Before passing along information or comments about someone else, here are some things we should stop and ask ourselves. First, is it confidential? If so, then never mention it. Second, is it true? This may take some investigating. But even if it is true, third, is it necessary? Is there some real and pressing need for passing on this information on about someone else? And finally, is it kind? Does passing on this information serve some wholesome purpose? If we have to answer “no” to any of these, then we need to **keep quiet!** Another good piece of advice: if you have to say, “I really shouldn’t say this...” then **DON’T!** Those who enjoy a close fellowship with God don’t pass on detrimental information about others -- they aren’t interested in hearing or telling others about some juicy bit of information someone else wishes to pass their way.

b. “Nor does evil to his neighbor”

This also has to do with what we say and do. The word “*does*” literally means “*to endure*.” In other words, the righteous man will not “*endure*” evil to his neighbor. He will not allow harm of any kind, verbal or otherwise, to come to his neighbor. The word “*neighbor*” usually refers to someone who lives near us. But in this context, it refers to anyone who is near to us in the sense of closeness of fellowship or friendship, or in a broader sense, anyone with whom we have anything to do. The one who enjoys close fellowship with God is consistent, dependable, and steadfast toward his neighbor -- not fickle or

erratic, or one who is a friend today, but over some insignificant event, becomes an enemy tomorrow.

c. “Nor takes up a reproach against a friend”

The word “*reproach*” means “*something sharp or cutting.*” This is speaking of one who does not say sharp or cutting things (scornful things) about others, either behind their back or to their face. There is honesty and gentleness in their character. The word “*neighbor*” is changed to “*friend*” in this verse, and speaks of those who are closest to us. After all, the cuts inflicted by friends go deeper because we have perhaps often made ourselves vulnerable to them by opening up our lives and exposing our frailties to them. The one who would enjoy close fellowship with God does not speak in a sharp or cutting way to or about those who are his friends.

3. Describe the meaning of these phrases in verse 4:

a. “In whose eyes a vile person is despised”

This has to do with those with whom we keep company, or with whom we associate. Some translations call the “*vile*” person a “*reprobate.*” The word “*reprobate*” means a “worthless person.” It is a very strong word reserved only for those who are an avowed unbeliever who despises the things of the Lord -- someone who is totally disinterested in spiritual things. We have no regard for a “*vile*” person regardless of their political or social rank, or their economic power. Those who are genuine believers, and who are concerned about maintaining their integrity, will think seriously about the impact such a person will have on his own walk with God, and will not

cultivate an association with him. The individual who wishes to have a close, intimate fellowship with the Lord will find it impossible to have an intimate friendship, or to be closely associated with, those who despise all things we hold sacred. Paul put it this way, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

b. “He honors those who fear the Lord”

In contrast to despising the vile person, or the reprobate, those who long for a close fellowship with God will honor *“those who fear the Lord.”* One of the most obvious marks of a Christian is the respect, support and appreciation given to those who fear God -- regardless of their background, position, race. The word *“fear”* conveys the idea of *“reverential respect”* for God, rather than dread. The believer who walks with the Lord operates on a value system governed by Biblical principles found in the Word of God. Therefore, he is naturally drawn to those who operate by the same value system. Since we become like those with whom we spend most of our time, a Christ-like friend needs to be sought out for companionship. And those who desire to please the Lord and have a close fellowship with Him, will seek out and associate with others who desire to please the Lord in all things.

c. “He swears to his own hurt and does not change”

This means we perform what we promise, even when keeping our word is difficult to achieve. Our word should be our bond. The child of God makes it his aim to do what he says he will do, even when it hurts -- even when it is inconvenient. Simply

put, Christians keep their promises. When we give our word to do something, we do it. In the eyes of others, the credibility of the Christian will always be dependent upon our personal reliability, whether it has to do with paying back a debt, doing a good job, sticking to a job, or any other means of keeping our word. Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 reads, *“Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed; Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.”* If we need to keep our vows to God, then we need to do the same with our fellow man, for it is *“better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”*

4. Explain the following characteristics in verse 5:

a. “He does not put out his money at usury”

The word *“usury”* originally pertained to *“legal interest, or a premium paid for the use of money.”* A more common definition of the word is *“a premium or compensation paid for the use of money borrowed that is **beyond the rate of***

interest established by law.” But the Hebrew word used here means *“a premium or compensation paid for the use of money for any purpose, or to any extent.”* The reference is to law of the Hebrews which forbade the loaning of money at interest to the poor, especially poor Israelites. Two Old Testament passages forbade this practice -- Leviticus 25:35-37 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20. *“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit.”* (Leviticus 25:35-37). *“You shall not charge interest to your brother; interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”* (Deuteronomy 23:19-20). A Jew was not supposed to charge interest on a loan to another Jew. Why? Because love should prompt one person to assist another, rather than the greed of making a profit off someone in need. They were required under the Law of Moses to assist one another generously and unselfishly. The believer in Christ who offers to extend a personal loan to assist his brother in Christ should do so without charging interest -- love being the only motive. Needless to say, we should also be discerning when loaning money to anyone -- even to a brother in Christ. Otherwise, we may end up with more love than money! Not every financial need among believers is a

genuine “*need.*” Some “*needs*” may stem from careless spending or financial irresponsibility.

b. “He does not take a bribe against the innocent”

A bribe is defined as “*money or favor bestowed on, or promised to, a person in a position of trust to pervert his judgment or corrupt his conduct.*” In other words, bribery refers to “*influence peddling,*” or a willingness to “*pervert the truth against one and in favor of another for gain.*” Simply put, the believer cannot be bought, whether on a jury, in a business relationship, or in other matters of trust. Nothing will cause the one who seeks close fellowship with God to pervert justice or to subvert righteousness in hope of some kind of gain -- financial or otherwise. The Scriptures are filled with condemnations against this kind of practice: “*And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous*” (Exodus 23:8; also see Deuteronomy 16:19), or “*A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back To pervert the ways of justice*” (Proverbs 17:23).

III. The Promise (v. 5b)

1. What is meant by the phrase “He who does these things shall never be moved?” (Compare: Daniel 6:1-4; Matthew 7:24-27)

The one who practices the traits revealed in Psalm 15 will be able to enjoy a life secure in the knowledge that we are living in keeping with the commandments of the Lord, and that because we faithfully serve Him, we also have an intimate fellowship with Him. This person shall live a life of having a solid foundation of hope because he is a friend of God, and enjoys His favor. Daniel’s critics could

find no fault in him. And neither will others find fault with us if our house is built on the foundation of the principles of the gospel of Christ. We will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water (Psalm 1). The visible part of our life -- our outward walk -- is like the trunk and the branches of the tree. But underneath the surface are found the inward qualities that provide deep roots and stability during the storms of life. A person who puts these principles into practice will not have to worry about constantly wavering on moral or ethical issues -- his foundation is in living a life pleasing to God.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 23

Background:

This psalm of David is among the best known, and reflects his own experiences as a shepherd which parallels God care over His flock Israel, and the loving care and protection Jesus gives to His flock, the church. However, one unique feature of this psalm is that it was written from the perspective of the sheep as it beholds the loving care of the shepherd. Another unique characteristic of this psalm is that it is distinctly personal. Rather than depicting the shepherd's care of the flock as a whole, this psalm reflects God's care and concern for the individual. The sheep of this psalm speaks as if it were the only one under the shepherd's care. Although there is no way of knowing for certain the period in David's life when this psalm was written, it seems to have been written during a time when he needed reassurance, and drew strength from reflecting on God's providential care for each individual sheep under His charge. In a broader sense, this psalm serves as a guideline for those men who shepherd the flock of God today (1 Peter 5:1-4), and shows the nurturing care and protection these shepherds need to give to the flock of God in their charge. The psalm can be viewed in three main parts. Part one consists of verse 1 and identifies our Shepherd. Part two is composed of verses 2 through 5 and speaks of the Shepherd's care. Part three is found in the last verse, verse 6, where the psalmist reflects on the results of the Shepherd's care.

■ **Historical Note:** In the ancient east, shepherds were very close to their flocks, and would give each sheep their own name: a name which they came to know, and to which they would respond. When flocks occasionally intermingled, the shepherds would simply go to opposite sides of the flock and call their sheep, and the sheep would respond accordingly. In Palestine, most shepherds owned their sheep, and would lay down their life to defend the flock. But other shepherds, known as “hirelings,” were employed for a set amount of money per day. Since hirelings were only in the business for the money, they would often flee for safety in the face of danger, leaving the flock defenseless. The shepherd’s equipment was very simple. The *staff* was a long stick with a large curved hook on the end. When a nearby sheep showed signs of straying, the shepherd would reach out and gently pull it back. The *rod* was a club about three feet long. It was used to drive off wild beasts, or defend the flock against robbers who often tried to steal sheep. When trails to fertile pastures led through dark, narrow valleys where wild beasts and thieves often waited, the shepherd was constantly alert and ready to use his rod and his staff. Every evening, the shepherd would gather the flock into the fold, a large circular corral made from stones or bushes clumped together. As each sheep entered the fold, the shepherd stretched his rod across the narrow entrance, making each sheep pass “under the rod.” This allowed the shepherd to quickly examine each sheep to see if it had suffered any injury during the day, and treat them with oils if necessary. Once the flock was safely inside the fold, the shepherd would lay down across the entrance so no sheep would get out, and no threat could enter. In this way, the shepherd literally became a door.

Outline:

I. The Shepherd (v. 1)

Key Words:

LORD, shepherd, not want

Observation:

The psalmist begins by revealing WHO his shepherd is. It is the LORD -- Jehovah, God the Father. God was the Shepherd of the nation of Israel. He is the one who cared and provided for the people of Israel as a shepherd would tenderly care for his own flock of sheep. But in the New Testament, Jesus reveals Himself to be the *“Good Shepherd,”* who has come to shepherd both Jews and Gentiles in one flock.

II. The Shepherd’s Care (vs. 2-5)

Key Words:

Lie down, green pastures, leads me, still waters, restores my soul, paths of righteousness, walk through the valley of the shadow of death, rod, staff, comfort me, table, my enemies, anoint my head, cup runs over.

Observation:

These verses show the Shepherd’s care for His sheep. David knew what it was to be a shepherd, and knew how to provide for and protect the sheep under his care. But the LORD does the same for Israel, and the Good Shepherd does the same for us. The Lord’s provisions and protection are demonstrated throughout these verses. He provides for our most basic needs, and He protects us from all that would harm us, and lovingly cares for us when we are wounded.

III. The Results of the Shepherd's Care (v. 6)

Key Words:

Goodness, mercy, follow me, dwell, house of the LORD, forever.

Observation:

The Shepherds care and protection of His sheep provides lasting benefits, not only to the sheep, but to all who benefit from association with the Lord's flock. Ultimately, we will dwell safely in the *"house of the LORD forever"* -- dwell eternally with the Father and His Son (our Good Shepherd) in heaven.

The Exposition:

I. The Shepherd (v. 1)

1. Since the LORD (Jehovah) is his Shepherd, the psalmist says, "I shall not want (lack)" for anything. (v. 1) Read Jesus' description of Himself as our Good Shepherd (John 10:7-18, 27-29) and answer the following:

a. What benefits are there to Jesus being "the door of the sheep?" (John 10:7-10; 27-29)

John 10:7-10 reads, *"Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.'" Jesus continues to say, "My sheep hear*

My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." (vs. 27-29). There are two crucial benefits of Jesus being "*the door of the sheep.*" First, just as sheep had to enter "*the door*" to enter the safety of the sheepfold, so we must enter through Christ to be saved. Eternal salvation does not exist outside of the Lord's fold, and the only way we can gain eternal life is through Jesus Christ. Second, just as the shepherd being "*the door*" protects the sheep from those who come "*to steal, and to kill, and to destroy,*" so Christ protects us from the powers of Satan who likewise comes to steal, kill and destroy. The apostle Paul tells us that God has limited the power of Satan in tempting us: "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, no one can "*snatch*" us out of the Lord's hand. If we are ultimately lost, it won't be because the Lord wasn't there to protect us from Satan's attack, rather it will be because we intentionally left the safety of the sheepfold, and wandered into the wilderness where we fell prey to Satan.

- b. Contrast the Good Shepherd with the hireling. (John 10:11-13)
 Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the*

shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.” (John 10:11-13). There are several things that are characteristic of the “*hireling*.” First, he is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. He has no interest in the sheep other than what he can earn by taking care of them. There is no special bond between the “*hireling*” and the sheep. Second, because the “*hireling*” has no genuine financial interest in the sheep, he flees in the face of danger rather than fight to protect the flock. He is more concerned about his own safety than he is about the safety of the sheep under his care. The shepherd who owns the flock would fight to the death, if necessary, to protect the flock -- not only because they provide him a livelihood, but because every shepherd developed a genuine love for the sheep of his flock. Jesus, our Shepherd, has done the same thing for us. He literally laid down His life for the sheep.

- c. What is the significance behind the Good Shepherd knowing His sheep and being known by His sheep? (John 10:14-16)

Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”* (John 10:14-16). First, Jesus knows His sheep in two ways: (1) He knows those who ARE His sheep, and (2) He **knows** His sheep in the sense of understanding

them as distinct individuals and knowing what is best for each and every one. The Lord knows who **is** and who **is not** part of His flock. Simply because we hang out with the Lord's flock, and graze along with His sheep in the same pasture, doesn't mean we belong to Him. He knows those who are His and those who are not. Furthermore, He knows each and every one of us individually. We are not some "number" in God's global scheme of things. The second thing Jesus tells us here is that just as He knows His sheep, His sheep know Him and follow His voice. Sheep always knew the voice of their own shepherd. When flocks would intermingle, shepherds would simply go to opposite sides of the flock and call their sheep. And the sheep of each shepherd would turn to follow the voice of **only** their shepherd. The way we can know if we truly **know** our Shepherd is to ask ourselves whether or not we are truly following **only** His voice, rather than the voice of others who would have us follow them. Shepherds didn't have multiple flocks. They tended only **one flock**. Neither does the Lord have multiple "*flocks*" today -- only **one** -- the one of which He is the true Shepherd.

II. The Shepherd's Care (vs. 2-5)

1. Explain the significance of each of the following phrases from verses 2 and 3:
 - a. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures"

With sheep, it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met. (1) They must be free from fear, (2) they must be free from friction with other sheep,

(3) they must be free from aggravating flies and parasites, (4) they must be free from hunger, and do not feel the need to find food. A flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated and hungry never does well. Let's look at each one of these essential requirements. First, nothing calms sheep as much as seeing the shepherd in the field with them. The mere presence of their master brings calm and assurance. The same is true in our relationship to the Good Shepherd. Knowing the Shepherd is near brings peace and assurance during times of trouble. The apostle Paul told Timothy, *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* (2 Timothy 1:7). The *"sound mind"* is a *"disciplined mind."* The idea of a sound mind is that of a mind at ease -- at peace -- not perturbed or harassed or obsessed with fear for the future. Knowing the *"the LORD is my Shepherd,"* gives us a confidence that we are constantly under the protective watch of Almighty God and His Son, Jesus Christ -- our Good Shepherd. Second, tension and rivalry and cruel competition within the flock itself leads to unrest. In the animal world, we often talk about the *"pecking order"* -- among sheep it's called the *"butting order."* Generally, an arrogant, domineering old ewe will be the boss of a bunch of sheep by constantly butting and driving away other ewes or lambs from the best grazing grounds. A vivid word picture of this process is found in Ezekiel chapter 34. *"I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. 'I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment. And as for you, O*

My flock,' thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture; and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.' Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: *'Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.'*" (Ezekiel 34:15-22). Because of rivalry, tension and competition for status and self-assertion, there is friction in a flock. There is no rest when sheep are constantly having to stand up and defend their rights and contest the challenge of the intruder. These sheep become edgy, tense, discontented and restless, and lose weight and become irritable. The same is true for the flock of God. When conflict and jealousy are a constant threat to the flock of God, people are forever on edge, preparing for the next quarrel or heated rivalry. The apostle Paul said, *"Now godliness with contentment is great gain."* (1 Timothy 6:6). He also said, *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"* (Galatians 5:14-15). Third, sheep can be driven to absolute distraction by flies and ticks, especially during the summer months. A watchful shepherd

will apply various repellents to his sheep, or see that they find pasture where these pests are minimal. The same applies to the flock of God. There are always small irritations that threaten peace and security among the people of God. Annoyances, petty frustrations and disagreeable experiences can be kept in check when we depend on the Good Shepherd to help us overlook these minor irritations before they become completely blown out of proportion and infect our peace and security. Finally, sheep must be free from hunger in order to lie down in peace and comfort. Green pastures don't happen by chance, they are carefully prepared by the shepherd. Pasture lands were prepared by clearing our rocks and brush, stumps, even seeding and planting special grains, and providing fresh irrigation or springs cleared of debris from which the sheep can drink. A hungry, ill-fed sheep is constantly on its feet, looking for something to feed on. The same applies to the sheep of the Good Shepherd's flock. Christians must be fed spiritually or they will die. All too often, people are hungry for solid spiritual nourishment and will wander from "field to field" in an effort to find something of value. Others simply wither away spiritually, and become unproductive in the Good Shepherd's flock. Therefore, freedom from fear, tension, aggravations and hunger are essential before we can lie down in green pastures and rest.

b. "He leads me beside the still waters"

While it is true that sheep can survive in dry, semi-arid country, they still require water. The wise shepherd knows where the best sources of water are to be located, and he always leads

his flocks there. Water is essential for the health of every flock. This is also true of the flock of God. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, made it clear that thirsty souls can only be satisfied in Him. When speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus spoke of *“living water”* that can provide everlasting satisfaction from thirst. *“Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?’ Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’”* (John 4:9-14). Jesus also spoke of those who *“hunger and thirst after righteousness”* (Matthew 5:6), *“for they shall be filled [satisfied].”* David knew that God alone was the source of still, quiet, deep, clean, pure water. Sheep can get water from three sources: (1) dew on the grass, (2) a deep well, or (3) springs and streams. Unless water comes from one of these sources, it is usually polluted and unhealthy. When sheep get thirsty enough they will drink from anything -- mud puddles, stagnant pools or filthy water, etc. In such cases, they will often become ill or diseased. However, a

caring shepherd leads his flocks to places of “*still waters*” -- fresh flowing streams or springs, or wells that are constantly replenished by fresh, pure water. Sheep cannot drink from raging rivers or else they will be in danger of falling in and being swept away to their deaths. The same principles of finding a pure, clean source of “*water*” applies to the flock of God. People who are constantly thirsting for spiritual water will eventually drink from anything -- regardless of how polluted it is. And they run the risk of becoming spiritually ill and diseased. Jeremiah spoke about the people of Israel coming to drink at cisterns (reservoirs) that were broken and empty. God said, “*For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns; broken cisterns that can hold no water.*” (Jeremiah 2:13). The people of Israel in Jeremiah’s day had forsaken the only true source of pure, clean spiritual water, and had chosen rather to find their own source by hewing cisterns that were broken and could hold no water -- could hold nothing of real value. If we are not careful, we can end up doing the same.

c. “He restores my soul”

David experienced times during his life when he felt cast down and dejected -- times when his soul needed to be restored. He has tasted defeat and had fallen under the weight of temptation. He felt hopeless and without strength. In Psalm 42:11, he asks himself, “*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my*

God.” Shepherds are familiar with sheep that are “cast” or “cast down,” and are constantly on the lookout for sheep in this situation. Cast down sheep are sheep that have turned over on their backs and cannot get themselves up on their feet again. Their feet flay wildly in the air, and they become weaker by the minute. This is especially common among sheep who are close to delivering their lamb, but can happen to other sheep who are heavy with wool. They lie down in a slight depression in the ground, turn slightly to get more comfortable, then suddenly roll over on their backs. Gasses begin to build in the sheep’s stomach, cutting off circulation. Unless they are rescued soon, they will die. Among the flock of God there are those who occasionally lose their footing spiritually, emotionally or physically, and need to be helped up onto their feet again. The apostle Paul put it this way: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* (Galatians 6:1-2). He also said, *“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”* (Romans 15:1-2). Peter said, *“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only*

for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:1-5).

- d. "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake"

Sheep are creatures of habit. When left on their own, they will follow the same trails until they become ruts, graze the same hills until they become barren, and pollute their own ground until it produces all kinds of parasites and diseases. Isaiah spoke of the people of God who are left to their own devices: "*All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way...*" (Isaiah 53"6). For sheep to prosper, the shepherd must constantly be leading them in paths that lead to fertile pasture lands. They are shifted from pasture to pasture constantly, according to a well-planned, deliberate form of management. Everything is kept fresh and healthy. The same is true for the sheep in the fold of God. Either the child of God moves forward and progresses, or he slips back. There is no such thing as maintaining the status-quo. Neither will the sheep in the flock of God prosper without being challenged with something fresh and new -- as long as it remains scriptural. Monotony can be as devastating among the people of God today as sheep constantly grazing the same pasture was in the days of David. Those who have the leadership responsibilities in the church (God's appointed shepherds) need to keep leading the sheep of God's flock in "*paths of righteousness*" toward an abundant life in Christ.

2. Shepherds were constantly on the alert, especially when leading their flocks through the narrow valleys that led to the high pasture lands. They stood ready to use their rod and staff at the first sign of danger. In light of this, explain the significance of the following phrases from verse 4:

a. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”

From the shepherd’s point of view, this statement marks the halfway point of the psalm. Up to this point, the sheep has been boasting of how excellent its care has been. Now it turns to address the shepherd directly. The personal pronouns “**I**” and “**you**” enter the conversation. It becomes a most intimate discourse of deep affection. In Palestine, it was common for sheep to spend the summer months in the close companionship and solitary care of the shepherd in the high hill country where the greenest of pasture lands were located. To reach these pasture lands, it often required the shepherd to take the sheep on long “drives.” The sheep often move slowly, feeding as they go, gradually making their way up the mountains. By mid-summer, they are able to enjoy the rich pasture lands of the high plateaus in the mountain ranges. Toward the end of summer, the shepherd will once again lead his sheep back down the mountain to the safety of the valleys below, as the first of the late fall storms begin approaching. But during the summer months, the sheep are entirely alone with the shepherd, and under his most personal care and attention. The only way to the high plateau pasture lands is to make a very dangerous trek through deep, dark valleys, where

dangers of every kind await an unsuspecting shepherd and his flock. These dangers include wild animals such as mountain lions, bears, coyotes, and wolves, to natural disasters such as landslides and rock slides, to thieves and robbers who would steal choice lambs, or steal the flock as a whole. There are basically two reasons for taking the flock through such dangerous valleys: (1) valleys are the easiest way to the high pasture lands, (2) plenty of food and fresh running water are found along the way.

b. "I will fear no evil; for You are with me"

However, the sheep in Psalm 23 are not afraid of passing through this "*valley of the shadow of death*" -- a valley which is overshadowed by the constant threat of death -- because the Shepherd is with them. He is ever-present during threatening times, and times of trouble and distress. There are a number of passages that speak of God's care and concern for us as His people. Here are two of the most important. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). The word "*comfort*" in this passage comes from the Greek "*parakaleo*," which means "*to call along side.*" God can be called along side to give us peace of mind during times of trouble. "*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'* So we may boldly say: '*The LORD is my*

helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6). It is most reassuring for the child of God to know that even in the dark valleys, we can find strength and courage in knowing that God is with us. Storms may break out, predators may attack, but because the Lord is in the situation with us, we have no need to fear. There are going to be some valleys that will be hard for some of us to traverse. But to know that the Lord is with us all the way gives us strength and courage to face whatever challenges may arise. Jesus Himself promised, *"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33).

c. "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"

Among middle-Eastern shepherds today, you can still see them carrying a rod and staff. The **rod** was a short club, while the staff was a long pole with a curved hook on the end. Each served a specific purpose. The rod was used as a club to fight off attacks from man or beast, and was in fact, an extension of the owner's own arm. It stood as a symbol of his strength and power, as well as his authority in any situation. Shepherd boys would often select their own rod from hard wood, and would then carve the club so that it had a rounded head at one end. Generally, the rod never left the shepherd's hand. But on occasion, the rod would be tossed in front of a straying sheep to turn him back. Shepherd boys would often spend hours practice tossing their rods to see who could toss it the furthest with the most accuracy. In this psalm, the sheep asserts that the shepherd's rod is a source of comfort to him. As long as the shepherd has the rod in his hand, anyone or

anything that attacks the flock will be warded off, and any sheep that begins to wander away will be warned by the rod suddenly dropping to the ground in front of its nose. Another use of the rod is seen in the prophecies of Ezekiel. *“Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord GOD. ‘I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”* (Ezekiel 20:36-38). The idea of *“passing under the rod”* not only meant coming under the control and authority of the Lord, but also subjecting ourselves to His most careful examination. A sheep that *“passed under the rod”* was one which had been counted and looked over with great care to make sure it had not been injured during the day, nor was sick from some disease that could affect the entire flock. The shepherd would extend his rod across the sheepfold each evening to allow one sheep at a time to enter by first passing *“under the rod.”* Perhaps this is the same thought the psalmist had in mind in Psalm 139. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”* (Psalm 139:23-24). As far as the shepherd’s **staff** is concerned, it is used for several reasons, including: (1) a means of support for a tired shepherd as he stands watch over his flock, (2) a means of drawing sheep together by gently tapping them on the side to keep them in tight formation while

traversing a dangerous area, (3) a means of lifting a small lamb or sheep from a deep crevasse, and (4) a means of warding off attackers. Generally speaking, the staff is used for guiding the sheep while the rod is used for protecting them. The sheep in Psalm 23 draw comfort from the staff as well because they know it is a constant source of gentle guidance and rescue from harms way.

3. Prior to the arrival of the flock in the high pasture lands (frequently called “table lands”), the shepherd would prepare the pastures by building a sheep fold, then remove plants that might be harmful, and take special notice of tracks left by potential predators who might be watching from a distance. After the flocks arrived, the shepherd would examine each sheep every evening upon entering the fold to see if any treatment was needed. With this in mind, explain the significance of the following phrases from verse 5:
 - a. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”
 In thinking about this statement, it should be remembered that the sheep are making their way through the valleys up to the high mountain country where they will spend the summer. This area is known as the “*tablelands*” or “*mesas.*” However, long before the sheep arrive in these mesas or tablelands, every caring shepherd will take the time to journey to that area months in advance of the sheep and make the area ready for the eventual arrival of the flocks. While there, the shepherd will examine the grazing lands in the high mountain plateaus very carefully. Shortly before the sheep arrive, he will make another trip or two to make the final preparations. He will decide which grasslands will be best suited for grazing, and

where the best location will be for the sheepfold to be built. He will check to see if there are any poisonous weeds growing in these fields, and if so, he will spend days eradicating them by pulling them up by the roots. The shepherd will also clear out the watering holes, springs and other drinking areas for his stock. He will have to clean out the debris and plant growth that have stopped up these sources of clean, fresh water. The shepherd may even have to repair small earthen dams he has made to hold fresh water. Another task will be to examine the ground for the spoor and tracks of predators such as wolves, coyotes, mountain lions and bears. He will need to know what animals are in the area that will pose a threat to the flock and he will either have to hunt them down, or take extra special care to keep a watchful eye and protect his flock against them. All the time while the shepherd is alone in the high tablelands preparing them for the eventual arrival of the sheep, these predators are watching from the rock and ridges high in the mountains. The shepherd is literally preparing a tableland in the presence of the enemies of the sheep. There are many spiritual applications to all that the shepherd does to make preparation for this flock. For example, Jesus Christ has prepared everything His sheep need to be safe and productive. He has already encountered every situation that we could possibly encounter in life (Hebrews 4:14-16), and He is able to provide us with the help we need in dealing with those things that threaten our peace and security. All we need to do is *“come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* He understands us, and he sympathizes with us when we are

attacked by the adversary. But, as the good Shepherd, Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”* (John 10:11-18). Later in the same chapter, Jesus said, *“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.”* (John 10:28-29). No one can take us by force away from the Good Shepherd. We wander off on our own. We place ourselves in situations and circumstances where Satan will find it much easier to attack and destroy. This is why we need to constantly keep close to the Good Shepherd, who protects His flock with a zeal that no caretaker (hireling) shepherd could or would do. Regarding the spiritual shepherds of the Lord's flock (elders), there are many parallels here as well. Just as unsuspecting sheep will eat anything, so

unsuspecting Christians (especially new Christians) may attempt to digest false doctrine and false teachings that can be just as poisonous to the soul as toxic plants are to the sheep. There are a number of admonitions against false teaching and false teachers found in the scriptures (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:23-26; 4:2-5; etc.). Elders also need to make sure that the quality of teaching and preaching done within the congregation is as pure and clean as pure the pure water needed to keep a flock healthy. Just as polluted water can be the source of infectious disease to a flock of sheep, polluted teaching can destroy the flock of God. Those who are elders (shepherds) in the local congregation likewise need to be prepared to deal with false teaching and false teachers (Titus 1:6-16). Paul warned the elders at Ephesus about false teachers as well (Acts 20:28-31). And just as predators are constantly lurking in the rocks and ridges high above the flocks, so it is that Satan poses a constant threat to our peace and security. This is why Peter warned New Testament Christians to *“be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...”* (1 Peter 5:8-9a). The apostle Paul also warned Christians about how Satan can take advantage of those who do not, or cannot, forgive (2 Corinthians 2:6-11). The word *“devices”* (verse 11) comes from the Greek *“methodeia”* which pertains to trickery by lying in wait to attack. Satan uses the same tactics as a lion would use to lay in wait to attack someone at the most opportune moment. Lions attack prey who are either unsuspecting and wander too far away from the

herd and too close to where the lion is hiding, or attack prey that is not strong enough to escape -- often those who are either young, or those who are weak. Satan will do the same thing to us as well. Therefore, shepherds had to keep a constant eye out for predators that would come down from their hiding places and sneak up on the unsuspecting flock. Likewise, elders (shepherds) need to keep a close eye on every sheep in the flock, to make sure none wander too far away, and to be prepared to step in and defend those who are weak -- either because of their spiritual age, or who have been weakened by the disease of sin.

b. "You anoint my head with oil"

While sheep are grazing in the tablelands during the Summer months, there is another threat facing sheep -- flies. Hordes of insects emerge with the warm weather and can pose a serious threat to the flocks of unsuspecting shepherds. Sheep are especially troubled by a wide range of flies -- warble flies, bot flies, heel flies, nose (nasal) flies, deer flies, black flies, mosquitoes, gnats and other winged parasites that proliferate at this time of year. Sheep and other animals can literally be driven crazy by these attacks. One particular fly that is most troublesome is the nose (or nasal) fly. These flies constantly buzz around the sheep's head, attempting to deposit their eggs on the damp, mucous membranes in the sheep's nose. If they are successful, the eggs will hatch in a few days, and form small, slender, worm-like larvae that work their way up the nasal passages into the sheep's head where they eventually burrow into the brain. At first, sheep will run, stomp,

fling their head back and forth to allude the threat of these flies. But once the infestation has occurred, the infected sheep will literally go crazy, running in blind panic. Eventually, the sheep will lose the ability to either stand or walk and will collapse onto the ground where it with either die, or be left helpless to predators lurking nearby. Therefore, Palestinian shepherds constantly applied medicated oils made from olive oil mixed with sulfur and other spices to the sheep's head to keep the flies away. As Christians, we know that most of our contamination by the world, and that would defiled us and cause us to become spiritually diseased, comes through our minds. Our thoughts, our ideas, our emotions, our choices, impulses, drives and desires, are all shaped and molded through the exposure our minds have with the world around us. This is precisely why the Scriptures urge us with this admonition: *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”* (Philippians 4:8-9). What could the anointing oil of Psalm 23 compare to? Perhaps the answer is found in another psalm -- Psalm 119: 9-11: *“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!”* When our minds have been *“anointed with the Word of God”* so to

speak, we have all the defense necessary to keep from losing our minds to the constant threat of that which seeks to invade our minds. Paul told the Colossians, *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”* (Colossians 3:1-2). (Also See: Romans 8:1-8)

c. “My cup runs over”

The psalmist describes a *“cup of contentment”* when saying *“my cup runs over.”* When shepherds cared for their flocks as described in Psalm 23, the flock enjoyed a *“cup of contentment”* which literally overflowed. There was peace and security in the flock. As children of God, we know the Good Shepherd also cares for us in such a way that brings peace and security to us as well -- contentment. The Lord is the One who has all knowledge, wisdom and understanding regarding our affairs, and He is capable of coping with every situation we could possibly encounter -- whether good or bad. Therefore, we can be continually satisfied with His care. In a wonderful way, our *“cup”* overflows with benefits of all kinds. Likewise, the spiritual shepherds of God’s flock (elders) must provide for this same constant care and concern for the flock under their charge so that there will also be peace and security. A well-cared-for flock is a contented flock.

III. The Results of the Shepherd’s Care (v. 6)

1. Explain how “goodness and mercy” will follow the Shepherd’s sheep.

Everywhere sheep graze will prosper and be productive land -- if the shepherd takes care not to over-graze the fields. The sheep literally fertilize the fields, and groom the grasslands enabling even more productive growth in the future. In a literal sense, “*goodness and mercy*” follow herds of sheep wherever they go. The same is true of the flock of God. It can be a powerful source of goodness and mercy within any community. A scripturally sound, loving, caring group of saints, can be a source of countless blessings for those around them by the way they lead their own lives. Jesus spoke of the lasting influence we need to have in His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:13-16). Because the Good Shepherd takes care of us as His sheep, we are able to be a source of blessing to others. The same holds true for a flock of God that is under the care of loving, caring spiritual shepherds (elders). If managed properly, this flock will likewise be a blessing to others.

2. What does it mean to “dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

When the season for grazing in the high tablelands is over, the sheep are carefully herded back to the lowlands where they will spend the protection of the winter months. Throughout the year -- from one summer to another -- the sheep have been given the very best provisions and care any shepherd could possibly provide. It is a comfort to sheep living under the care of that kind of shepherd. Likewise, it is a constant source of comfort to us to know that we are sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock. We dwell in His house. He is our shepherd, and we are His sheep. No sheep that is well cared for wants to leave that kind of shepherd. We want to dwell forever in that kind of environment.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 26

Background:

This psalm of David deals with a very challenging question; namely, are we truly as faithful and loyal to God as we imagine ourselves to be? There are no specific indications as to when this psalm may have been written, however it is not difficult to determine David's state of mind when the psalm was composed. The psalmist is asking God to search him and judge his heart to see if he has walked in integrity. David recalls his faithfulness to God, and the evidence that shows he is truly a friend of God. Without wavering, the psalmist served God in honesty and faithful service. But still, he wants God's evaluation of his faithfulness. He wants to approach the alter of God to worship with a pure and unblemished heart. He also wants to make certain that he is never counted with sinners or bloodthirsty men. The psalm is divided into three parts. Part one consists of verses 1 and 2, which is David's plea for God to examine his heart. Part two includes verses 3 through 8, which is a statement of the evidence David gives to prove his loyalty and friendship to God. And part three is found in verses 9 through 12 where David expresses his desire to be found among the friends of God and not among the sinners.

Outline:

I. The Plea (vs. 1-2)

Key Words:

Vindicate, integrity, trusted, slip, examine, prove (try), mind, heart.

Observation:

David begins by asking the Lord to do three things: (1) examine the psalmist's heart, (2) uncover any flaws that may be found there, and (3) remove any and all impurities.

II. The Evidence (vs. 3-8)

Key Words:

Lovingkindness, Your truth, idolatrous mortals, hypocrites, hated, congregation of evildoers, sit, wicked, washed my hands, innocence, Your alter, thanksgiving, wondrous works, habitation of Your house, glory dwells.

Observation:

David speaks in his own defense to God, offering several items as evidence to support his claim made in verse 1: of having "*walked in my integrity*" and also of having "*trusted in the Lord,*" and therefore having not slipped. David was claiming a true and genuine friendship with God.

III. The Desire (vs. 9-12)

Key Words:

Soul, sinners, life, bloodthirsty men, sinister scheme, right hand, full of

bribes, walk, my integrity, redeem me, merciful, foot, stands, even place, congregation, bless.

Observation:

David's greatest desire was to be listed among the friends of God -- those who faithfully serve the Lord -- rather than listed among the enemies of God (sinners and bloodthirsty men). He prays to this end. He also reaffirms that he continues to walk in integrity, therefore he asks the Lord to redeem him and be merciful to him. And he also reaffirms that he has not slipped ("*my foot stands in an even place*"), therefore he will bless the Lord within the congregation of the Lord.

The Exposition:

I. The Plea (vs. 1-2)

1. David begins with the words "vindicate me" (other translations use the phrase "search me," or "judge me." In what way would this *searching* or *judging* vindicate David? (v. 1)

There are actually three words David uses here. First, he asks the Lord the "**vindicate me**" ("*search me*" or "*judge me*"). This comes from a Hebrew word "*bahchan*" which means to "*examine, prove or scrutinize.*" It is the same idea conveyed in Psalm 139:23-24 where the psalmist asks the Lord to "**Search** me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting." Literally, David is asking God to "*make an examination*" of his inner being, "*to scrutinize*" him thoroughly. The second word found in Psalm 26: 2 is the word "**examine**" (also translated "*try*"). This comes from

the Hebrew word *“nahsah,”* which means to *“test, try, prove.”* The same word is used in Deuteronomy 8:2 along with its intensive stem (piel) to suggest an **intensive** test. *“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”* (Deut. 8:2). God put the Israelites to an intensive test to uncover the real condition of their hearts. The third word used in Psalm 26:2 is the word **“prove”** (also translated *“test”*). It comes from the Hebrew *“tzahraff,”* which literally means *“to smelt, refine, test.”* Of the thirty-two times the verb form of this word is used in the Old Testament, twenty-two of those times it is linked to the activity of refining gold or silver, removing the dross and impurities. David is actually asking the Lord to do three things here. First, he is asking the Lord to make an internal search and examination of his life for the purpose of determining his character. Second, he is asking the Lord to undertake an intensive, in-depth process of revealing to the psalmist the real condition of his heart. And third, he is asking the Lord melt and refine him -- to remove the dross and impurities that may be found in the psalmists heart. James uses a similar idea when he speaks of the value of trials in the life of the Christian (James 1:2-4). So does Peter (1 Peter 1:6-7). Perhaps David was going through a similar trial of his faith, and was asking the Lord to use it for the purpose of (1) examining David’s heart, (2) uncovering flaws that may be found there, and (3) removing any and all impurities. How many of us would ask the Lord to conduct this same kind of an examination? Obviously, we should consider doing this very thing, and doing it often.

2. What assurance does the psalmist have for saying he “shall not slip?” (v. 1)

In David’s own mind, he claimed to have “*walked in my integrity,*” and “*also trusted in the Lord.*” If these character traits were really to be found in the life of the psalmist, then he was confident that he could not be moved. He felt his footing in a spiritual sense, and his relationship with Jehovah, was on firm ground -- safe and secure. And yet, the psalmist was not so bold as to be completely confident of his own character. He felt that there was perhaps a possibility that he had deceived himself into thinking he was more faithful to the Lord than he really was. Therefore, he asks the Lord to conduct His search of the psalmist’s heart. There is a real lesson here for us as well. It is quite possible for us to deceive ourselves into thinking we are okay in the Lord’s sight because we often compare our faithfulness with that of others -- we may not be all that much **better** than they are, but we are certainly not any **worse**. The problem of making that kind of comparison is that we are a flawed, sinful person comparing ourselves to another flawed, sinful person. But when we compare the level of our faithfulness to that demanded by God in His word, what do we see?

3. What is the difference between the psalmist’s “mind” and his “heart?” (v. 2)

The KJV says “*try my reins and my heart.*” The word “*reins*” comes from a Hebrew word that literally means “*kidneys,*” and was used to describe the most inward part of the mind -- the seat of all desires and affections. The word “*heart*” was most commonly used by the Hebrews to describe the seat of all intelligence and knowledge. Taken together, these words, which are actually used

interchangeably, speak of the very depths of a person's soul -- from which all desires and emotions as well as all knowledge and understanding comes. In a very strict sense, there is no discernible difference between the words since they are used to describe the same thing -- the soul. David was asking the Lord to *"try my mind and my heart"* (or *"test"* the very depths of his soul) with the idea of removing any and all impurities found there.

I. The Evidence (vs. 3-8)

1. In verses 3 through 6 David offers several items of evidence in defense of his claim of being a true friend of God. In your own words, briefly give an explanation for each. (See next page.)

- a. "Your lovingkindness is before my eyes"

David was able to look at every situation that he encountered in life as being the product of God's lovingkindness, regardless of whether those situations brought him joy or sorrow. This is similar to the attitude displayed by Joseph in what is typically called "**The 50-20 Principle**" which derives its name from Genesis 50:20. When Joseph confronted his brothers about their treatment and betrayal of him, he said, *"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."* (Genesis 50:19-20). This attitude sees a purpose of God in everything that happens in our lives -- a purpose that will serve our ultimate good (see: Romans 8:28). God's favor and friendship was also constantly before David because it was the object of his desire. He sought to please God in everything he did, and

was therefore confident that God took notice of that fact in the psalmist's life. David's eyes were on God's love. However, David was well aware of the fact that he may have simply deluded himself into believing he had this kind of an attitude toward God's involvement in his life, and toward God's lovingkindness. This is why he asks the Lord to search to find out if he is indeed telling the truth.

b. "I have walked in Your truth"

David claimed to have embraced the truth. He "*walked*" in it, which conveys the idea that it was a manner of life with him to be living daily by the truths contained in God's Word. It governed every area of his life. David's actions were rooted in God's truth. But again, David wanted the Lord to investigate his life to see if the psalmist was in fact walking in the Lord's truth.

c. "I have not sat with idolatrous mortals"

The idea expressed by the word "*sat*" is that David could not be numbered among, or counted with, "*idolatrous mortals.*" He did not make this kind of person his companions. The NKJV calls these "*idolatrous mortals,*" while the KJV calls them "*vain persons.*" The expression would encompass men who are false and hollow as opposed to those whose character was sincere and solid. David says not only could he not be found among these "*idolatrous mortals,*" but neither could he be found to take part with them in their wicked ways. However, once again, David says this with the idea that he is willing for God to conduct the examination to see if his claim is true.

d. “Nor will I go in with hypocrites”

Other translations render “*hypocrites*” as “*dissemblers*.” These words convey the idea of someone who is “*hidden*” or “*concealed*” -- someone who hides or conceals their purposes and designs as well as their true character from others. The word “*hypocrite*” literally means “*to speak from behind the mask*,” and has its origin in Greek theater when actors spoke their lines from behind masks depicting comedy or tragedy. Eventually the word came to mean an actor, or someone who played a part. The psalmist says that he has not associated with such people, but that he has been open, honest and sincere. But the psalmist is also willing to see if this is how God sees him --open, honest and sincere.

e. “I have hated the congregation of evildoers”

The phrase “*congregation of evildoers*” pertains to any gather or assembly of persons for the purpose of doing evil -- of plotting and promoting acts of rebellion to get their way in a matter, either through subversion or through overt threats and intimidation. The psalmist has no sympathy with those who resort to these tactics, and challenges God to find such sympathies within his life.

f. “I will not sit with the wicked”

The word “*sit*” in this verse conveys the idea of “*having no association with*.” The psalmist has refused to have association with, or to have as his companions those who are classified as wicked -- those whose pursuits are contrary to standards of righteousness -- whether in business, social, civil

or religious life. But again, the psalmist is willing to be examined by God to see if this claim is true as well.

g. “I will wash my hands in innocence”

The phrase “*wash my hands in innocence*” pertains to the symbolic act of claiming innocence. It is symbolic of moral and ethical purity. The word “*innocence*” literally means “*clean and pure*.” Before priests in Old Testament times approached the altar to minister or before they entered the Tabernacle, they were required to wash their hands and feet in the bronze laver (Exodus 30:17-21). Pilate also washed his hands as a symbol of claiming innocence in the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:24; also see Deuteronomy 21:1-7). The psalmist has just listed several areas in which he offered evidence of his faithfulness to Jehovah by claiming what he has **not** done. But here, the psalmist is stating where his true sympathies lie -- namely in doing that which is motivated out of a clean, pure and innocent heart. He has removed from his heart and from his mind anything which God would find offensive. However, as before, the psalmist is willing to put this claim to the test of God’s close and unfailing examination.

2. David’s purpose for all he has mentioned above is so that he may worship God acceptably, and do two other things. What are they? Explain each. (v. 7)

- a. David reason for all this was so that he could come before the altar of God with his offering of purity and truth. Once there, he would do two things. First, he would “*proclaim the voice of thanksgiving,*” Literally, “*make known to others*” what he has

learned from God, and teach them the joys of also serving and worshipping God. David would do this while remembering the many ways God had blessed his own life (compare Psalm 22:22; 66:16). Because of the blessings conferred upon him, David would endeavor to win others to the Lord's service.

- b. The second thing David would do is *"tell of Your wondrous works."* The *"wondrous works"* David seems to have in mind are the works beyond what God has done in the psalmists life, to those *"wondrous works"* God has done for all mankind in the works of creation, His providential care for us, and in providing us with salvation from sin. The psalmist is keenly aware of all God has done in the world, and wanted to make this known far and wide (compare Psalm 145:5-6). This should also motivate us to lead others to Christ -- our thankfulness for all He has done for us in providing the priceless gift of eternal life, and our willingness to return His blessings by telling others of the Savior. David summarizes by saying, *"I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells"* (Psalm 22:8). The psalmists greatest joy was coming into the house of God, the place of public worship, where he could be with the people of God as they joined together in solemn praise to Jehovah. It was the place where God's *"glory dwells."* Other translations render this as the place where God's *"honor dwells."* However, the more correct translation is that David was desiring to be where the *"glory"* (Hebrew *"Shekinah"*) of God dwells -- the symbol or manifestation of His presence.

III. The Desire (vs. 9-12)

1. What does David mean by the words “do not gather my soul together with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men?” (v. 9)

Other translations suggest David was saying, “*Do not take my soul away with sinners, nor my life with men of bloodshed.*” The word “gather” means “to collect,” or “take away.” The ideas expressed by David in this verse seems to be that he is pleading with the Lord to not take him away along with sinners and bloodthirsty men when the Lord comes to execute His avenging judgment upon the wicked. This is not a reference to the final judgment, but rather to God’s judgment against any man who would persist in sin or shed the blood of the innocent. Since David had refrained from being associated with these kinds of people, he asks the Lord to spare him from whatever wrath God may bring upon these people in the future. David fully expected God to punish evildoers in their lifetime -- some of whom may have been among David’s own household (Absalom), and among his own government. When the hand of God swept through the land of Israel to punish these evildoers, David wanted the Lord to spare him from that wrath.

2. Explain how David describes these sinners and bloodthirsty men. (v. 10)
 - a. First, David says they are those “*in whose hands is a sinister scheme.*” Other translations render this “*in whose hands is mischief.*” The word means “*an evil or wicked purpose, counsel, or plan.*” The “*sinners and bloodthirsty men*” which David described were constantly plotting and scheming to do evil and wicked things. They would resort to dishonesty, robbery, theft and even murder to accomplish their own selfish

desires. David constantly had to face this kind of threat during his reign as King -- especially from his own son, Absalom.

- b. David also describes these men as being those “*whose right hand is full of bribes.*” The Hebrew text literally reads “*whose right hand is **filled** with bribes.*” A bribe is defined as “*money or favor bestowed on, or promised to, a person in a position of trust to pervert his judgment or corrupt his conduct.*” In other words, bribery refers to “*influence peddling,*” or a willingness to “*pervert the truth against one and in favor of another for gain.*” The idea conveyed by the psalmist is that these “*sinners and bloodthirsty men*” have hands that are filled with bribes they have taken from others in the way of gifts and presents to render verdicts or decisions that are unjust and unfair. These “*sinners and bloodthirsty men*” were obviously in positions of power and influence, either as judges or as politicians, or both.
3. If David walked in integrity, why would he say “redeem me and be merciful to me?” (v. 11)

David boldly vowed to God that his walk will be a walk of “*integrity*” or moral and ethical perfection. But David still recognized his own failures in the past. Therefore, he asks God to “*redeem me and be merciful to me.*” The word “*redeem*” is from the Hebrew “*rahdah,*” which means “*to ransom, deliver*” as in the sense of delivering someone from death. In connection with being “*redeemed,*” David was also asking the Lord to “*be merciful to me.*” Asking for mercy is always an admission of guilt. While it was the psalmists goal to live a life of moral and ethical perfection, he had to admit that there was sin in his own life over which he grieved, and with which he

constantly wrestled. David never tried to deny or hide his own failures from God or from himself. The first step in curing any disease is for the patient to admit there is a disease which needs to be cured. Patients in denial will die of what may have been a treatable and curable disease. The same is true of the disease of sin. Far too many deny their lives are being destroyed by this treatable and curable disease.

4. How does David describe where his foot “stands?” Explain. (v. 12)
- David said his foot stands *“in an even place.”* Other translations call it a *“level place.”* The Hebrew word is *“mishor,”* which can be traced back to the verb *“yahshaar,”* and which means *“to be smooth, straight.”* The word *“mishor”* is also used in a theological sense to convey *“righteousness and justice.”* Some translators render this as *“a right path.”* The idea is that David was standing in a smooth, straight path which is characterized by righteousness and justice. This stands in contrast to the crooked and perverse path chosen by those who were wicked. Because David had chosen a smooth and straight path, he would not stumble. By contrast, the wicked had chosen a path filled with obstacles that will eventually cause them to fall. David has offered several items as evidence of his devotion to Jehovah, and felt confident that he was living his life in such a way as to win God’s approval. This confidence is seen in the final statement in which David says, *“in the congregations I will bless the Lord.”* David was confident that the Lord’s examination of the psalmist’s life would reveal that he was pleasing to the Lord. Therefore, he would offer praise to God in the assemblies of His people. David would go to the House of God and offer public praise for all God has done for him. Like

David, we can also have this same kind of confidence if we are truly willing to ask the Lord to examine us, expose to us any faults, and remove them from our lives.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 27

Background:

This psalm deals with the theme of dependence and trust in God during times of adversity. There are no indications in this psalm as to what period of David's life it may have been written, although the Septuagint includes in the title of Psalm 27 the words, "A psalm of David before his anointing." However, many Jewish scholars believe the psalm dates to the latter part of David's life, possibly when he was delivered from death by the intervention of Abishai (2 Samuel 21:16-17). The psalm is divided into four main parts. Part one consists of verses 1 through 3, where David expresses his confidence in God's intervention and deliverance during times of danger. Part two is comprised of verses 4 through 6, which states David's desire to always dwell where God is found. Part three covers verses 7 through 12, in which the psalmist prays for God to hear him and grant his request to be saved from his enemies. And finally, part four is comprised of verses 13 and 15 in which David gives the exhortation to wait on the Lord, and for all to put their trust in Jehovah.

Outline:

I. David's Confidence (vs. 1-3)

Key Words:

Light, salvation, fear, strength of my life, afraid, wicked, enemies, foes, stumbled and fell, army, encamp, war, confident.

Observation:

The psalmist was confident of his relationship with the Lord. The Lord has been the source of his enlightenment, his deliverance (salvation) from enemies, and his source of strength (endurance) when encompassed by his enemies. Therefore, he would not fear or be afraid, but rather be confident in the Lord's continued protection and blessings.

II. David's Desire (vs. 4-6)

Key Words:

Desire, seek, dwell in the house of the Lord, beauty of the Lord, inquire, temple, trouble, hide, pavilion, secret place, tabernacle, head shall be lifted up, enemies, sacrifices of joy, sing praises.

Observation:

More than anything, David wanted to maintain a close fellowship with the Lord. He wanted to constantly be in the Lord's presence so that he could behold the *"beauty of the Lord"* – the Lord's pleasantness, delights and splendor – and so that he could search out and understand (inquire) the Lord's greatness and majesty. He needed this closeness because his enemies were all around him, and when times of trouble came, he needed the Lord's protection – to be hidden, as it were, *"in the secret place of His tabernacle."* The result of this kind of divine protection will enable to psalmist to break forth in praise to Jehovah – singing at the top of his voice.

III. David's Prayer (vs. 7-12)

Key Words:

Cry with my voice, mercy, answer, seek My face, hide Your face, anger, my help, forsake, my salvation, father and mother, take care of me, teach me, smooth path, adversaries, false witnesses, breathe out violence.

Observation:

David felt the constant threat of his enemies – perhaps even more than ever before. Therefore, he comes to the Lord in prayer, knowing that while his desire has been to keep the Lord's commandments, he hasn't always lived perfectly. So, he depends on the Lord's grace and mercy to protect and deliver him – to not desert him. David realized that even his most cherished earthly relationships might someday turn against him, but he could always count on the Lord. Because David is surrounded by enemies who are constantly waiting for him to stumble and fall, he pleads with the Lord to instruct him with the Lord's wisdom, and for the Lord to guide him along a smooth path – free from obstacles that might trip him up.

IV. David's Exhortation (vs. 13-14)

Key Words:

Lost heart, believed, goodness of the Lord, land of the living, wait on the Lord, courage, strengthen your heart.

Observation:

David ends by saying he would have lost hope had it not been for his confidence that God would respond, and deliver the psalmist from

danger. He knows that even though the immediate future may look bleak, the day will come when David will be delivered and see the “goodness of the Lord” while he still lives. Therefore, he admonishes all, including himself, to depend on the Lord for strength – conveyed in the words “*wait on the Lord.*” All who will cling to the Lord, and who will exchange their weakness for His strength, will likewise be delivered from harm. David was content to let the Lord fight his battles.

The Exposition:

I. David’s Confidence (vs. 1-3)

1. In what two ways does David describe the Lord? Explain each. (v. 1)
 - a. The first way David describes the Lord is with the words, “*The LORD is my light and my salvation.*” It’s interesting to note that David doesn’t say the Lord **gives** “light” and “salvation,” but that the Lord “**is**” all of these things. In other words, the psalmist recognized the greatness of God Himself rather than His works. To David, the Lord is very personal, and always there to help him in time of need. God is not some distant Deity – not some impersonal, abstract, theological Being who hides above the clouds. He is David’s close and intimate companion. To David, the Lord is his “**light**” – meaning that the Lord is the source of light. Even though the darkness of distress and troubles may envelope the psalmist, God leads and guides. To David, the Lord is also his “**salvation**” – meaning that the Lord is the one who saves and delivers. Because of this, David asks, “*Whom shall I fear?*” The Hebrew term “*fear*” is from “*yahrah,*” and is a

very common phrase to indicate worry or concern. With the Lord as his “*light*” and “*salvation*,” David had nothing to worry about – nothing which would overly concern him.

- b. The second way David describes the Lord is by saying, “*The LORD is the strength of my life.*” The term “*strength of my life*” conveys the idea of God being the One who “*supports and sustains my life.*” In other words, the Lord is the One who is keeping David alive. David understood that life was very fragile and temporary. It can be extinguished in a moment of time. But the psalmist also knew that no one has the power to take away life as long as the Lord defends it. To those who trust in God’s power, He is a stronghold, a fortress, a place of safety and life. Therefore, David said, “*Of whom shall I be afraid?*” The term for “*be afraid*” (also translated “*dread*”) is from the Hebrew “*phahchad*” which means “*to be in awe, to be filled with dread.*” The Lord was so significant, so impressive, so overwhelmingly essential in David’s life that no other one and no other thing could make him stand in awe. David knew that if God were on his side, there would be nothing to fear or dread. Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China, once wrote, “*It does not matter how great the pressure is. What really matters is where the pressure lies – whether it comes between you and God, or whether it presses you nearer to His heart.*” It’s encouraging to notice that in Psalm 23, David said “*I shall not want,*” and in Psalm 26, he said, “*I shall not slip.*” Now in this Psalm, David says, “*I will not fear.*” In each case, the psalmist could have this kind of confidence because of the personal presence and provisions of God.

2. What were the benefits for David trusting in the Lord? (vs. 1-3)

In addition to not fearing and being afraid (or “dreading”), David said, *“When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident.”* (vs. 2-3) There are several things here that are important to take note of. First, David vividly describes the intensity of his enemies. They came *“to eat up my flesh,”* and to raise up army to *“encamp against me.”* These enemies were like hungry wolves or ravenous lions on the prowl. David fully realized that pressures were mounting, danger was imminent, and severe conflicts were just ahead. But he describes himself as *“confident.”* The word *“confident”* comes from a Hebrew word that means *“to trust, to be secure, to have assurance.”* The Arabic counterpart means *“to throw oneself down upon one’s face, to lie upon the ground.”* David confidence was not in his own strength, but rather in God. When pressures mounted, David *“threw himself down on his face”* before God from Whom he received his strength and confidence. Furthermore, David realized that his enemies *“stumbled and fell”* when they came against him. They stumbled and fell by their own devices – they tripped themselves up. Their plans backfired because God intervened to save and deliver the psalmist.

II. David’s Desire (vs. 4-6)

1. Explain David’s one desire. (vs. 4-5)

David’s greatest desire was to maintain a constant and intimate relationship and fellowship with God. David said it was the *“One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek.”* What was it?

“That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.”

Notice the repeated references in verses 4 and 5 to the God’s house, His temple, His tabernacle, His tent. All these are poetic expressions of being in a place where close contact and intimate fellowship with God exists. David’s greatest desire was to constantly strive for this closeness in this life, so that he could ultimately enjoy it eternally in heaven. Therefore, the psalmist came into places where God is worshipped. To him, worship was not some burdensome task or some imposition. How can anyone expect to enjoy heaven if they find worship to God on earth a boring or unwanted, time-consuming task? David realized this was where he could *“behold the beauty of the LORD,”* meaning a place where he could enjoy the *“pleasantness, the delights, and the splendor”* of the Lord. And it was here that he could also *“inquire in His temple.”* The word *“inquire”* comes from *“baqar”* (pronounced “baw-KAR”) and means *“to search or seek out for the purpose of admiring.”* David came into the Temple of the Lord for the purpose of seeking instruction, or to obtain understanding pertaining to God’s greatness and His majesty. The psalmist’s greatest desire was to constantly draw closer to Jehovah for the purpose of enjoying His delightful provisions and to learn more of His divine character. That’s the sign of a true worshipper of God – one who seeks to draw close to Him to enjoy His blessings and to learn more of His character so that we can imitate that charter in our own lives.

2. When trouble comes, where did David want to be? Explain. (v. 5)
As a result of maintaining a close fellowship with God, David knew that when trouble came (not *“if”* but *“when”*), the psalmist said the

Lord will “*hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.*” First, the psalmist says the Lord would “*hide*” him, which comes from the Hebrew “*tsaphan*” (pronounced “tsaw-FAN), and means “*to keep secretly, and to protect.*” The Lord would protectively hide David from all harm, as if he were being hidden in some secret place safe from his enemies. But the place where the Lord would hide His servant is even more important. The place is the Lord’s “*pavilion,*” which comes from a Hebrew word “*cok*” (pronounced “*soke*”), and literally means “*a hut formed from green branches that are interwoven.*” It is a word that is also applied to tents made of skins, and is therefore a reference to the tabernacle – the dwelling place of God on earth. The psalmist is saying when trouble comes, the Lord will hide him safely within the Lord’s own dwelling place (he will be near the Lord), and will protect him as if the psalmist were a member of the Lord’s one family – just as a man would protect those whom he admits into his own house. Furthermore, we are told by the psalmist that the Lord will hide him “*in the secret place of His tabernacle,*” which pertains to inner most, private place within the Lord’s house. Jehovah would not only allow David to take safety in the Lord’s presence, but the Lord would conceal him in the most private, secret places within the Lord’s house. Nothing could convey the idea of close, intimate friendship and fellowship than the way David describes the Lord’s care and protection over him. Finally, the reference that “*He shall set me high upon a rock*” is just another way of describing a place that is secure and inaccessible – where David’s enemies cannot reach him. Rather than fight his own battles, and rather than attempt to defend himself against his

enemies, David turned to the Lord and depended entirely on Him for protection in times of trouble.

3. What will be the result of God's care for the psalmist in times of trouble? (v. 6)

Two things are mentioned here. First, the psalmist says, *“and now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me.”* Just as affliction causes a man to bow his head in sorrow, deliverance and triumph causes a man to lift his head in joy and exultation. David will lift up his head in praise to God even though he is surrounded by his enemies. He can do this because he knows he is under the protection of God. It is a posture of praise to lift our head to God, and is especially meaningful during times of adversity when we can rejoice that God provides deliverance and triumph to us as well. Second, he says, *“therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.”* The *“sacrifices of joy”* that David will offer is to *“sing”* – to *“sing praises to the Lord.”* The word *“joy”* comes from the Hebrew *“teruw'ah”* (pronounced *“ter-oo-AW”*), and literally means *“to clamor, to make a loud noise, or to shout.”* David's sacrifice would be to joyfully sing out loud – almost in a shout. There would be no whispered songs of praise coming from his lips. Rather, David would sing at the top of his lungs to Jehovah for all He has done. His heart would be filled with joy and his lips would be filled with shouts of praise in song.

III. David's Prayer (vs. 7-12)

1. What was the main point of David's prayer in these verses, especially in verse 9?

Some commentators suggest David sudden shift to prayer may be from a growing sense of impending danger. He has been assured of God's divine protection, and had found the Lord ready to safely hide David from his enemies. Now David calls on the Lord for that protection and deliverance to take place. He understands that he cannot simply assume God will come to his aid unless he humbly petitions the Lord for divine help. And so, he says, *"Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me."* The phrase *"cry with my voice"* pertains to an audible prayer. David did not pray mentally during times of distress, but prayed audibly. The psalmist affirms that, *"When You said, 'Seek My face,' My heart said to You, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek.'" This phrase pertains to a state of mind, or to a disposition of heart, which seeks to obey the commandments of the Lord. David's heart was such that he desired nothing more than to be a keeper of God's commandments. Therefore, the psalmist pleads with the Lord in verse 9, "Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation." While the desire of David's heart has been to keep the commandments of the Lord, his actions haven't always been such. David knew he had to depend on the grace and mercy of God during times of distress because his life had not been perfect, nor the thoughts of his heart always pure. But the psalmist reminds the Lord that God alone has been his help, and the source of his salvation in the past, and he is depending on that same singular source of help and salvation now and in the future.*

2. What does the psalmist mean by his father and mother forsaking him? Did that really happen? (v. 10)

When David speaks of his father and mother forsaking him, he is not speaking of some particular event in the past, but rather speaking of the possibilities of the future. David realizes that he can, in reality, count on no one to stand by him at all times – not even his father and his mother (symbols of our closest earthly relationships). Even if a person’s family deserts him, the Lord won’t. There is an interesting parallel to a statement of Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 49, the Lord speaks these words of encouragement to the prophet, *“Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands...”* (Isaiah 49:15-16). God says mothers may forget their infant babies, but the Lord does not forget those who are His. David was assured that *“When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.”* He was realistic enough to understand that a time may come when even his most cherished earthly relatives may forsake him or turn against him. But even then, *“the Lord will take care of me.”*

3. Why was it so important for the Lord to lead David in a “smooth path?” (v. 11)

David’s enemies were constantly looking for him to slip and fall, so that they could rush on him and defeat him. Therefore, David needed to walk in a “smooth path,” where he would not be in danger of falling. The only way David could accomplish this was to be instructed by the Lord of His (the Lord’s) way. He desired that God would be his instructor in how to walk in righteousness. David’s

enemies were harsh and cruel, were constantly looking for opportunities to overtake him, and were consistently laying snares and traps for him. He didn't know how to act so as to escape his enemies, therefore he asks God to instruct him.

4. How does verse 12 apply to David and to Jesus Christ? (Compare with Psalms 2:1-2; Matthew 26:59-60; and Mark 14:56)

When David said, *“Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence,”* he was speaking of the enemies he faced. They were bringing false accusations against him, and making threats of violence. However, the same thing happened to Jesus. In Psalm 2, a Messianic psalm, it begins, *“Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed...”* (Psalm 2:1-2a). In the book of Acts we find the fulfillment of Psalm 2 (Acts 4:23-28). Peter says it was Herod, Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel who were gathered against Jesus. The Jewish leaders brought false witnesses against Jesus (Matthew 26:59-60, and Mark 14:56) for the purpose of finding something for which they could put Him to death. In both cases, David's and Jesus', there were those who wrongfully accused them, charging them with crimes they never committed, and persecuting them as if they were already found guilty. These enemies are characterized as such that *“breathe out violence,”* meaning they meditate on cruelty and violence – they are intent on bringing cruelty and violence upon those who are their enemies – in the same way as Saul of Tarsus was *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”* (Acts 9:1).

IV. David's Exhortation (vs. 13-14)

1. What is meant by David's statement about seeing the "goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?" (v. 13)

When David says, *"I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living,"* he is speaking of his confidence that the Lord will deliver him from his adversaries, and allow him to see first-hand the "goodness of the LORD" while he still resides *"in the land of the living."* This is another way of saying David believes the Lord will preserve his life. The "goodness of the Lord" pertains to the blessings and joys given by the Lord to those who faithfully keep His commandments, and who seek a close, intimate fellowship with Him. We receive blessings and joys now on earth, and eternal blessings and joys in heaven.

2. What does it mean to "wait on the Lord." Explain. (v. 14)

To *"wait on the Lord,"* means to come to Him in times of trouble, to depend on Him, to trust in His divine power to deliver, and to take comfort in His divine protection. The word *"wait"* comes from the Hebrew *"qavah"* (pronounced *"kaw-VAW"*), and means *"to bind together by twisting."* The idea being expressed is the making of a strong rope or cord by twisting and weaving. The spiritual application is that we form a powerful and unbreakable rope or cord when we wind and twist ourselves around the Lord, so that our weakness and frail character are replaced by His power and strength. It describes what has often been called "an exchanged life." We exchange our weakness for His strength. Isaiah uses the same term, *"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth,*

Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:28-31). The same idea is expressed by the apostle Paul in the Philippian letter, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* (Philippians 4:13). David knew the sole source of his strength was the Lord, and that the Lord would also be the source of strength for anyone else who trust completely in Him. Therefore, the psalmist concludes with this admonition to all, *“Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!”*

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 32

Background:

This psalm of David was composed during a time of great sorrow over the guilt of some terrible sin he had committed that alienated him from God's good favor. There is no way of knowing for certain what period of David's life this psalm refers, although many believe it is connected with the sins of David involving his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11:1-27). The psalm is divided into five parts. Part one consists of verses 1 and 2, which is a statement regarding the blessings of forgiveness. Part two, includes verses 3 and 4, and describes the state of David's mind while under the guilt of sin. Part three is found in verses 5 through 7, and shows the effects of confessed sins, and David's encouragement to others in similar circumstances. Part four is comprised of verses 8 and 9, where the psalmist instructs regarding the proper spirit for all who would benefit from God's rebuke. And part five, is composed of verses 10 and 11, where David speaks of the blessings of trusting in the Lord in times of sorrow and sin.

Outline:

I. The Blessings of Forgiveness (vs. 1-2)

Key Words:

Blessed, transgression, forgiven, sin, covered, impute, iniquity, spirit, guile.

Observation:

Like a movie that begins with the end, then goes back to tell the story, so David begins with the results of the forgiveness of sins which marked the darkest period of his life. David is literally overjoyed at the prospect that God has been gracious and merciful to him. Not only has God forgiven the sins, He has forgiven the guilt of those sins.

II. The Mind Under Sin (vs. 3-4)

Key Words:

Kept silent, bones, groaning, Your hand, heavy, vitality, the drought of summer, Selah.

Observation:

David is describing the “*psychosomatic*” symptoms of depression brought on by the guilt of unresolved sins. These were not imagined illnesses, but real, physical and emotional pain. The problem was compounded by his silence -- trying to deny to those around him, and to God that any sin had been committed. It is highly unlikely that the sin of David with Bathsheba and the subsequent sin of Uriah’s murder was a secret in David’s palace. Those closest to him knew what had happened. And it was certainly not a secret to God. Denial is a common defense of those who have sinned. But refusing to admit to the sin only complicates matters, and deepens guilt and depression and all its accompanying physical ills.

III. The Effects of Confessed Sins (vs. 5-7)

Key Words:

Acknowledged, confess, godly, pray, found; a flood of great waters, hiding place; preserve, trouble, surround, songs of deliverance.

Observation:

When David acknowledged his sins to God, he was in essence telling God what He already knew. David was agreeing with God's assessment that the psalmist was a sinner. As a result of this confession, David not only received forgiveness of the sins, but was relieved from the associated guilt of those sins -- thus relieving his depression and its accompanying physical discomforts. Therefore, David wanted everyone to follow his example -- to pray to God while it is still possible to be moved to genuine godly sorrow leading to repentance. The reason for this is obvious. If we have allowed our hearts to become so hardened, we will find it impossible to pray when a *"flood of great waters"* come near. The ultimate effect of David's confession was his confidence in knowing that God was once again the psalmist's *"hiding place"* where he could be preserved from trouble, and where he could find deliverance.

IV. The Proper Spirit (vs. 8-9)

Key Words:

Instruct, teach, the way, guide, my eye, horse, mule, no understanding, harnessed with bit and bridle.

Observation:

Turning his remarks specifically to those who may still be in their sins,

David urges them to allow themselves to be taught and guided by his divine wisdom. The psalmist offers to give all who will listen to him special counsel, and personal instruction -- he will keep his eye on them and won't let them go wrong. Therefore, David urges his readers to not be like the horse or the mule, who have no understanding, but have to be led around with a bit and bridle. It is impossible to reason with these animals. They will do by nature what they want to do. But we don't have to do by nature what we may be predisposed to do. We have the ability to think, reason, and understand the long-term and short-term consequences of our actions.

V. The Blessings of Trusting in the Lord (vs. 10-11)

Key Words:

Many sorrows, wicked; trusts, mercy, surround him, be glad, rejoice, righteous, shout for joy, upright in heart.

Observation:

Finally, David reminds the wicked of the results of their lifestyle, which is "*many sorrows.*" But to the one who "*trusts in the Lord,*" they shall have a lifetime of mercy (gracious, unmerited forgiveness). Therefore, to the "*righteous*" and the "*upright in heart,*" David says "*be glad in the LORD, and rejoice.*" Genuine, true and lasting joy comes from having the right kind of relationship with God.

The Exposition:

I. The Blessings of Forgiveness (vs. 1-2)

1. What does the word "blessed" mean in verse 1?

The Hebrew word for “*blessed*” is “*esher*” (pronounced “*EH-sheer*”) and can be translated “*how happy or how blessed.*” The word pertains to happiness many times over, or an abundance of joy. The idea is that of multiplied, numberless blessings. It is unrestrained and exuberant gratitude to God. David is describing a condition or state of mind in this opening phrase in which he is overjoyed at the prospect that his sins have been forgiven. When compared to his former state of mind (when he was bowed down with the guilt of sin), he is now experiencing unrestrained joy over God’s gracious forgiveness. He no longer has anything to fear as the result of his past sins. The guilt has been removed, and he now feels at peace with God.

2. In what four ways does David describe God’s forgiveness? Explain each.
 - a. The first way David describes God’s forgiveness is with the words, “*whose transgression is forgiven.*” The word “*transgression*” is from “*pesha*” (pronounced “*PEH-shah*”) and is defined as “*a revolt (whether national, moral or religious), rebellion, sin, or trespass.*” David had revolted against the Law of the Lord in committing his sin, as well as having rebelled against the Person of God Himself. But he says his revolt and rebellion has been “*forgiven.*” This word is from “*nasa*” (pronounced “*naw-SAW*”) and is used in a variety of ways, including “*to lift up, carry away, cast forth, and to pardon.*” David’s sins had been “*carried away, cast forth, and pardoned,*” therefore he has been “*lifted up and exalted*” to his rightful place as a child of God.

b. The second way David describes God's forgiveness is with the words, *"whose sin is covered."* The word *"sin"* is from *"chata'ah"* (pronounced *"khat-aw-AW"*), and in its simplest form means *"an offense."* David's actions had been *"an offense"* to God's honor and character, as well as to His grace and mercy. It's always a serious matter to offend the honor, character and graciousness of another. But it is unthinkable to offend the honor, character and graciousness of God. However, David said his *"sin is covered."* The word *"covered"* is from the Hebrew word *"kacah"* (pronounced *"kaw-SAW"*), which means *"to conceal, hide or cover over as in an act of keeping a matter secret."* The idea conveyed by these words is that David's sin has been covered so that they no longer appear or come into view either before God or before man. The psalmist used a word which suggests that his sins are *"concealed"* as if there had never been a sin.

c. The third way David describes God's forgiveness is with the phrase *"the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity."* The word *"impute"* is from *"hashab"* (pronounced *"khaw-SHAB"*), and conveys the idea *"to consider, to think, regard, reckon, or to make an account of."* In this context, David says the Lord no longer charges the debt of the psalmists own sins to his account. He is debt free. He regards himself as having been freed from the unpayable, overbearing debt of his own sins. It was an act of complete pardon on the part of God toward one who could never repay the debt. The word *"iniquity"* is from *"avon"* (pronounced *"aw-VONE"*), and pertains to *"a moral perversity, an evil, or a moral or ethical fault."* This word gives us some special insights into the actual sin committed by David. The psalmist says it was *"a moral*

perversity.” This would certainly be a fitting way to describe the sin David committed with Bathsheba. His sin of adultery and the consequent sin of Uriah’s murder was a moral outrage, and a moral and ethical perversity committed by one who certainly knew better.

d. Finally, the psalmist describes the forgiveness of God with the words, *“in whose spirit there is no guile.”* The word *“spirit”* comes from the Hebrew word *“ruwach”* (pronounced *“ROO-akh”*), and is literally translated, *“wind; or breath.”* The word is used to refer to the mind of a rational being, or to the thinking, reasoning part of a man that is the seat of all thoughts and emotions. David says, because his sins have been forgiven, there is no *“guile”* in his mind. The word *“guile”* is from *“emiyah”* (pronounced *“rem-ee-YAW”*) and means *“treachery, or to act deceitfully, false, or hypocritical.”* Because David’s sins have been forgiven, there is no sense of *“treachery, deceit, or hypocrisy”* in his heart (mind). There is no sense of self-deception here. His mind is free from the treacherous, deceitful and false way in which he had lived. He no longer speaks from the lips of a hypocrite.

II. The Mind Under Sin (vs. 3-4)

1. What does David mean by the fact that he “kept silent?” (v. 3)

The words *“kept silent”* pertain to the life David had lived prior to his forgiveness. He has *“kept silent”* about his sin. He attempted to conceal the evidence of his wrongdoing. He knew he was a sinner, but he could not admit to the fact, nor could he confess his sin to others or before God. This kind of reaction is common among all who commit a grievous sin against God and against others. First comes the rebellion or revolt against God, then comes the sin, and

finally, the attempt to conceal the sin from the eyes of others -- sometimes even from ourselves. Self-deception. Without the relief from the oppressive guilt of sin, a person can literally be driven mad. There are two passages to consider here. The first is Proverbs 28:13, *“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”* The second is 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

2. Describe David’s physical and emotional condition when he “kept silent?” (v. 3-4)

David mentions four consequences from keeping silent about his sin. His inner conflict created psychosomatic illnesses -- the presence of actual physical pain resulting from unresolved mental or emotional conflicts. These were not “imagined” pains. They were real! The first consequence of keeping silent is found in the phrase, *“my bones grew old.”* This is another way of saying, *“my strength failed as though I was an old man, decrepit and exhausted.”* The words *“grew old,”* convey the idea of a gradual process of slow decay. Day by day, David grew physically and emotionally weaker -- unable to carry on the normal activities of life. He felt his body wasting away. The second consequence of David’s silence is found in the phrase *“through my groaning all the day long.”* These are cries of anguish and distress. His emotional and physical pain was so great that he cried loud, passionate cries *“all the day long”* -- continually, and without interruption or intermission. The psalmist’s mind was deeply troubled by the thought of his sin and the apprehension of the wrath of God. The third consequence of David’s silence is found in the phrase *“for day*

and night Your hand was heavy upon me.” He found no relief day or night. It seemed as if the hand of God was pressing down on him. He felt pressed down, burdened, and was completely unable to escape the torturous weight crushing out his very life. The final consequence mentioned by David is found in the words, *“my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”* The word *“vitality”* is from the Hebrew word *“leshad”* (pronounced *“lesh-AD”*), and is translated *“juice, or sap (as in a tree), moisture.”* (KJV uses *“moisture”*). We would call this the *“lifeblood”* of a tree. However, because of David’s unconfessed and unrepented sin, he felt like a tree being drained of its moisture during a summer drought. Like any plant in the heat of summer, when there is no moisture from rain or dew, David felt as if he was slowly dying.

III. The Effects of Confessed Sins (vs. 5-7)

1. To whom did David confess his sins? (v. 5)

In the same manner as the Prodigal Son in the parable of Jesus said, *“I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,”* (Luke 15:18), so David says he will confess his sins to his Father, God. The purpose for this was obvious. Although David’s sins were against Uriah and his wife Bathsheba, and against the national of Israel, they were ultimately against the holy character of God. David needed to confess his sins to God (acknowledge to God what He already knew about David’s conduct), and seek His forgiveness. In confessing his sins, David is saying he will no longer attempt to hide them, or attempt to suppress the guilt that had been eating at his soul. David knew the only way he could be forgiven of both

these sins and their accompanying guilt was to confess them to God.

2. What was the effect of David's confession? (v. 5)

The effects of David's confession were simple and direct. He was forgiven of his sins as if they had never been committed, and he was released from the overbearing guilt associated with them. David knew his sins were forgiven because he had confidence in God's grace and mercy. This is what brought him this overwhelming sense of joy and happiness described in verses 1 and 2. We can also have the same assurance in knowing that God will forgive our sins and remove the guilt of those sins, when we confess our sins to Him. John says, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."* (1 John 1:8-10). The promise is that *"if we confess our sins,"* God is both *"faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from **ALL** unrighteousness."* If we believe in the promises of God as David did, we should have no concerns about whether or not God has forgiven us. Nothing brings peace of mind more than knowing God has not only forgiven us, and that He has also cleansed us from ALL unrighteousness. We stand before Him completely free from the guilt of all our confessed sins. That should bring peace of mind and an indescribable joy.

3. What is the "cause" for which "everyone who is godly shall pray" to God? (v. 6)

David is encouraging everyone who is godly (those who have already been converted to God, and who are religiously disposed) to pray to God because they have also sinned at one time or another, and need forgiveness. The “cause” or reason for praying to God, is sin. No one escapes its power for long. Sooner or later, everyone succumbs to sins power. Therefore, David held himself up as an example for all to pray to God when they find themselves in similar circumstances.

4. What does it mean to pray to God “in a time when [He] may be found?” (v. 6)

God’s grace and mercy can only come to the sinner during times of genuine, heart-felt repentance and sorrow. However, it is possible to harden our hearts making it impossible to genuinely repent. The writer of the Hebrew letter gave this same warning from God to first century Christians facing the same threat. He wrote this warning of God: *“Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”* (Hebrews 3:8-13). This seems to be the same thought found later in the letter to the Hebrew Christians. The writer says, *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the*

good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” (Hebrews 6:4-6). As long as someone is crucifying for themselves the Son of God, and putting Him to an open shame, it will be impossible for them to be renewed again to repentance. They must first stop doing what they're doing to put Christ to an open shame before forgiveness can follow. But those who go this far in their departure from the faith seem to never come back. They may very well be beyond feelings of remorse and shame for their sins (cf. Ephesians 4:17-19)

5. What does the psalmist mean by the statement, “surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him?” (v. 6)

There is differing views on what this phrase means. To some, it symbolically means floods of judgment that come upon the wicked. In that context, it is said that those who genuinely repent of their sins and confess them to God, they will escape the floods that will come upon them. They will be safe, secure, unharmed, and untouched by the judgments of God against the wicked. However, that really seems to be the thought of verse 7 rather than the thought of verse 6. To others, the phrase seems to indicate that during troubled times, when the sinner most desperately needs help from God, he won't find it because prayers will not easily come to him (the sinner) during those times. The person whose life has been continually given to sin is the one who finds it virtually impossible to pray during a “*flood of great waters.*” Although either position would be correct, perhaps the latter fits better with the context of what David is saying.

6. What does David list in verse 7 as the ultimate benefit of confessed sins?

David understood the ultimate benefit of confessed sins is that he would be preserved by God during times of trouble. Jehovah would be his “*hiding place*,” where the psalmist would be preserved from troubles, and encompassed about with “*songs of deliverance*.” David faced a constant threat from his enemies -- both external as well as those within his own household. He knew he could find a safe hiding place in the presence of God. But he also knew that he could not come into the presence of God with sin on his heart. He must first remove the sin from his life through repentance and confession, then come to God for protection and deliverance. David understood that God would not only provide protection and deliverance in this world, but ultimate deliverance in the next.

IV. The Proper Spirit (vs. 8-9)

1. David now offers advice and instruction to others who find themselves in a similar situation to his. What does he mean by the phrase, “I will guide you with my eye?” (v. 8)

Some commentators believe this is a reference to God, as if He were now introduced as the speaker, and saying He would guide those who have come to Him in repentance and confession of their sins. But the context seems to indicate that David is still speaking. His own experiences qualify him to give advice and counsel to others who find themselves in a similar situation. He had learned from his own painful experience what happens to those who try to hide their sins from God, from others and from themselves. Now he offers counsel to those who are doing the same things with their sins. The phrase “I will guide you with my eye,” literally means “my

eye will be upon you.” It conveys the idea of watching someone to make certain they do not go in the wrong direction.

2. In what way does David warn sinners to not be like the horse or the mule? Explain the nature of these animals. (v. 9)

The horse, by nature, is a wild animal that is not willing to be caught and tamed, or to be made obedient. It is by nature, rebellious against attempts to bring it under subjection. David warns that it is possible for us to manifest the same wild, rebellious, untamed nature in refusing to subject ourselves to the will of God. By contrast, we need to be willing to follow the Lord’s lead, and submit to His will in every area of our lives -- especially when it comes to sin in our lives. The mule, by nature, cannot be controlled by reason, but is stubborn and self-willed. It is possible for us to manifest the same uncontrolled, stubborn, self-willed attitude -- stubbornly choosing to do our own will rather than the will of God. Neither the horse or the mule can be reasoned with. They have to be broken in order to be made submissive, and to be useful for service. Even then, their natural instincts have to be restrained by the use of the bit and bridle. David had learned through his own experience that God sometimes has to deal with us in the same manner as we deal with the horse and the mule. God has to “break” us before we can become useful in His service. However, David is urging his readers to not let matters reach that point. Unlike the horse and mule, we are rational, reasoning beings, created in the image of God, and capable of controlling our own will.

3. What is the proper spirit David is alluding to in these verses? (v. 8-9)

Obviously, David is urging his readers to be receptive to those, like himself, who have been through periods of sinful rebellion in their lives, and who are willing to offer their guidance in helping others avoid the painful consequences that rebellion brings. He is urging his readers to willingly submit to the leadership of God, and not wait until the Lord finds it necessary to break them as we would break the rebellious, stubborn will of a horse or mule.

V. The Blessings of Trusting in the Lord (vs. 10-11)

1. David says, “many shall be the sorrows of the wicked.” The righteous experience many sorrows as well. However, this verse suggests a key difference between “the wicked” and “he who trusts in the Lord.” (v. 10)

Those who trust in the Lord shall be surrounded by mercy. They will find mercy and favor everywhere and at every time of their life. Mercy, like grace, is unmerited. It is given to those who least deserve it. But those who trust in the Lord, who have confidence in the Lord’s divine guidance, and who willingly follow His lead, will find undeserved mercy everywhere they look -- both in this life, and in the life to come. By contrast, those who are wicked, and who do not trust in the Lord, they will find no mercy, now or later.

2. Why does David exhort the “righteous” and “upright in heart” to “be glad,” “rejoice,” and “shout for joy?” (v. 11)

The “*righteous*,” and “*upright in heart*” are such because God’s grace made them that way. No one is “righteous” and “upright in heart” on the basis of their own merit. We become these things

because, as the psalmist said at the beginning, our transgression is forgiven, our sin is covered, the Lord does not impute iniquity, and there is no guile in our spirit. We are truly blessed, happy many times over, exuberant, joyful. Therefore, David urges his readers to openly express this joy in an unrestrained manner, to *“be glad,”* *“rejoice,”* and *“shout for joy.”*

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 38

Background:

This psalm was one composed by David at a time when he faced bitter suffering, and was feeling the hand of God rebuking him because of sin. Although there is no way of specifically ascribing this psalm to a particular time or event in David's life, it seems to fit well with either the events surrounding his sin with Bathsheba, or more probably, the events immediately preceding the revolt led by David's son, Absalom (2 Samuel 13-18). The psalm is divided into three parts. Part one consists of verses 1 through 8, where the psalmist describes the physical and emotional anguish he feels as a result of his sin. Part two is found in verses 9 through 14, in which David describes feelings of loneliness and despair brought on from his rejection by loved ones, friends and kinsmen, and fear of his enemies plots. And part three consists of verses 15 through 22, in which David declares his sins and makes a final plea for deliverance.

Outline:

I. Physical and Emotional Anguish (vs. 1-8)

Key Words:

Rebuke, wrath, chasten, hot displeasure, arrows pierce me, hand presses me down, no soundness, health, sin, iniquities, burden, wounds, foul and festering, foolishness, troubled, bowed down, mourning, inflammation, feeble, broken, groan, turmoil of my heart.

Observation:

David has a deep sense of God's anger. His guilt for some unidentified sin has become too heavy to bear; and unless its removed by the pardon and mercy of God, he will sink into further despair. The psalmist describes the intense spiritual (emotional) and physical pain he feels as a result of his sin. He has become completely engulfed by his sins, and there is no relief from the constant pressure, sorrow and deep grief.

II. Loneliness, Despair and Fear (vs. 9-14)

Key Words:

My desire, my sighing, heart pants, strength fails, light of my eyes, loved ones, friends, stand aloof, plague, kinsmen, stand afar off, snares, hurt, destruction, deception, deaf man, mute.

Observation:

David understands that the Lord is well aware of his plight. His heart beats rapidly, and his strength has failed him. There is no sense of joy in his life. The psalmist finds himself abandoned by those whom he loved, and in whom he trusted. At a time when he needed them most, they are standing in the background, either unaware of how to help him, or unable to offer any help. His enemies, however, are growing in number and strength. They are wanting to take advantage of David during this period of weakness in his life. They lay snares and traps, speak of destruction and plan deception. Yet, in all this, the psalmist offers no resistance. He shuts out their wicked remarks, and he makes no response. He remains silent in the face of his accusers.

III. Declaration of Sins and Final Plea (vs. 15-22)

Key Words:

Hope, hear me, foot slips, magnify themselves, fall, sorrow, declare, iniquity, anguish, sin, vigorous, strong, hate, evil for good, adversaries, forsake, my salvation.

Observation:

In final desperation, David turns to the Lord for help and for deliverance. All his hope and trust is in the Lord. He calls for the Lord to hear, *“lest they rejoice over me, lest, when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me.”* David understands he is still God’s anointed king over God’s people. Therefore, he calls on the Lord to keep his enemies (and God’s enemies) from scoring a victory during David’s time of distress. He openly declares his own iniquity, and is in anguish over his own sin. David understood his enemies are returning evil for the good he has done for them, and he knows that his enemies hate him because they hate the goodness in his life. The psalmist, therefore, pleads to God, *“be not far from me”* Nothing brings fear into the heart of a believer more than believing he has been deserted by God. David knows he cannot win this battle alone, and without God’s help, he is doomed to fail. Therefore, he concludes, *“make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation.”*

The Exposition:

I. Physical and Emotional Anguish (vs. 1-8)

1. What is meant by the phrase “Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down?” (v. 2)

David begins describing the physical and emotional pain he feels as

a result of God's "*wrath*" and "*hot displeasure*" (v. 1). Some commentators believe David is speaking metaphorically of God's Word when making reference to God's arrows. However, it seems David is speaking metaphorically of being under attack -- an attack that is coming into his life by the hand of God. The words "*pierce me*" ("*stick fast*" KJV) come from a Hebrew word "*nachath*" (pronounced "naw-KHATH), and means "*to come down, to descend.*" This same expression is used in other Psalms (Psalm 7:11-13 -- compare to Job 6:4; Psalm 18:14; 45:5; 64:7; 77:17; etc.) The arrows of God are used metaphorically in other passages to speak of God's avenging judgment in the form of "*hunger... pestilence and bitter destruction*" (Deuteronomy 32:23-25). The idea being expressed by the psalmist is that God's arrows is similar. They are descending down upon David in waves. He is totally and completely defenseless, much like a soldier might be under the attack from the archers of an opposing army. The soldier finds that his meager shield is no protection from the barrage of arrows descending down upon him. He knows his body will become pierced with arrows from the enemy's bows. In this sense, the arrows are representative of God's "*wrath*" and His "*hot displeasure*" (v. 1). It descends upon helpless David in the same manner as the archer's arrows descend on the helpless soldier. The psalmist knows that his sin and iniquity has made him the enemy of God, and now he is facing defeat at the hand of God. There is a corresponding warning to anyone who would set themselves against God. Deliberate sin and rebellion against God places us in an adversarial position -- we become God's enemies. In the end, we will be the one who loses for no one can stand against God's "*wrath*" and his "*hot displeasure.*" This also suggests that God may

deliberately bring calamity into the life of the one who rebels against His will -- not for the purpose of destroying the sinner, but forcing him to see that he cannot hope to win.

2. Why did David say, “there is no soundness in my flesh...nor is there any health in my bones?” (v. 3)

David describes the intense physical and emotional pain he is feeling as a result of his deep distress and depression brought on by his rebellion against God’s will. The term “*soundness in my flesh*” simply means there is no part of my body that is free from the painful effects of God’s anger. The psalmist is describing someone whose body is completely diseased -- metaphorically speaking -- so that even those who are close to him in the flesh withdraw from him. God’s anger has brought intense emotional and physical pain to David. In the same sense he says, “*nor is there any health in my bones.*” This is an example of a common literary technique found in Hebrew poetry known as “*synonymous parallelism.*” Similar, or “*synonymous,*” thoughts are recorded in sequential lines for the purpose of either completing the thought of previous lines, or of creating the feeling of increased intensity. David is saying his whole body feels the intense physical and emotional pain and anguish that has been brought on by his sin and God’s anger. This why David goes on to say that his iniquities have gone over his head, and are like a heavy burden (v. 4). He feels overwhelmed, like a man who is swept off his feet by a wave, and God’s hand is pressing him down.

3. What three words does David use to describe his sin in verses 3 through 5? Explain the meaning of each.
- a. Sin (v. 3). The word “*sin*” is from “*chata'ah*” (pronounced “*khat-aw-AW*”), and in its simplest form means “*an offense*.” David’s actions had been “*an offense*” to God’s honor and character, as well as to His grace and mercy. It’s always a serious matter to offend the honor, character and graciousness of another. But it is unthinkable to offend the honor, character and graciousness of God.

 - b. Iniquities (v. 4). The word “*iniquity*” is from “*avon*” (pronounced “*aw-VONE*”), and pertains to “*a moral perversity, an evil, or a moral or ethical fault*.” This word gives us some special insights into the actual sin committed by David. The psalmist says it was “*a moral perversity*.” This would certainly be a fitting way to describe the sin David committed as a moral outrage, and a moral and ethical perversity committed by one who certainly knew better.

 - c. Foolishness (v. 5). The word “*foolishness*” is from the Hebrew “*ivveleth*” (pronounced “*iv-VEH-leth*”), and simply means silliness or a sense of being irresponsible. David sin was the result of his own irresponsibility. He could blame no one other than himself. He is directly and solely responsible for what he is now facing.
4. David vividly describes both the physical and emotional pain he experiences as a result of his sin in verses 3 through 8. In your opinion, why are these two related?

The psalmist has already described the fact that there is *“no soundness in my flesh... nor is there any health in my bones.”* (v. 3). As stated earlier, he is describing a body completely diseased -- metaphorically speaking. His whole body is wracked with physical pain. The end result is that he is now *“feeble and severely broken”* (v. 8), meaning he is physically weak and lacks strength, and feels as if he has been bruised all over -- like a man who is literally broken in pieces. He groans because his heart is filled with turmoil (*“by reason of the disquietness of my heart”* KJV). The word *“turmoil”* comes from the Hebrew *“nehamah”* (pronounced *“neh-haw-MAW”*), and literally means *“snarling or roaring.”* The word is used to describe a wounded animal that cries out in pain, or the *“roaring”* of the waves of the sea. David physical pain comes from the emotional pain in his heart. And only God can hear the cry that comes from the psalmists heart.

II. Loneliness, Despair and Fear (vs. 9-14)

1. What is meant by the expression, “all my desire is before You [God], and my sighing is not hidden from You?” (v. 9)
David’s desire -- his greatest need -- is not before men who cannot see the heart, but before God who knows the longings of everyone’s heart. The Lord knows all that the psalmist needs. He fully and completely understands David’s needs, and the psalmist believes that God alone is capable of responding to those needs. David has hidden nothing from the eyes of God. Even his “sighings” were not hidden from God -- the intense expression of his sorrow and grief.
2. Why do you feel David’s loved ones and friends were standing “aloof” from his plague? (v. 11)

David feels himself stricken of God. As a consequence, his *“loved ones and friends”* stand afar off. At a time when David needs help and reassurance from those closest to him in the flesh, he finds none. There are several possible reasons for this. One, it’s possible that David’s *“loved ones and friends”* don’t know how to help him. They know he is undergoing extreme physical and emotional (spiritual) pain, and they feel helpless to offer any real, meaningful consolation. So, they draw back, away from the very one who needs their help the most. Another possibility is that David’s *“loved ones and friends”* are too concerned about their own life to be involved with his. They don’t want to be involved. They selfishly guard their own happiness, and don’t want to put themselves into a situation where their happiness will be in jeopardy. Or, a third possibility is that the *“loved ones and friends”* of David stand in the background because they know he is the victim of God’s *“wrath”* and *“hot displeasure,”* and they don’t want to become an enemy of God by offering aid and comfort to God’s enemy. They fear for their own safety. For whatever reason, David feels he has been deserted by those in whom he trusted most. They have left him alone to suffer on his own -- like a wounded animal that has been deserted by the rest of the herd.

3. Why would this time in David’s life cause him to fear his enemies?
(v. 12)

David’s enemies were seeking after his soul and preparing violence against him because he was weak and vulnerable. Furthermore, it was apparent to even his enemies that the psalmist had fallen out of favor with God -- he was the victim of God’s *“wrath”* and His *“hot displeasure.”* Therefore, he could not rely on God to help him as

long as he remained an enemy of Jehovah. The time was right for David's enemies. This is why they were busy laying snares (traps) for him so that they might ruin him and bring him down. They were also seeking his hurt by speaking evil and mischievous things against him (slander), and they were plotting deceits -- cooking up schemes that would accuse him falsely, and would bring unfounded accusations against him.

4. What is David describing when he says he was like a "deaf man," and "a mute?" (vs. 13-14)

David had nothing to say to his enemies. It is as if he refused to hear his enemies or respond to their accusations. He took no notice of what his enemies were saying. He also refused to speak in his own defense -- not that he was incapable of reproofing his enemies, but that he simply chose not to respond. He withdrew into himself, leaving himself even more defenseless and vulnerable to his enemy's attacks. David would offer no resistance against those who wanted to do him harm. His deliverance would come from his own hand, but from the hand of God. Only in this way would his enemies understand that he was still God's anointed king, and that he was still the friend of God. There is a parallel to something Peter said about Jesus Christ: *"who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously"* (1 Peter 2:23). Like Jesus would do when He stood before His enemies, David simply committed himself to God.

5. Verses 11-13 are also Messianic in nature. Compare these verses with similar Messianic prophecies, and the fulfillment of those

prophecies in the New Testament, and record your observations below. (Compare verse 11 with Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; and Luke 23:49. Compare verse 12 with John 11:47-54. Also compare verse 13 and Isaiah 53:7 with Matthew 26:63; 27:12-14; and Acts 8:32-35)

When comparing Psalm 38:11 with Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40 and Luke 23:49, we find a vague Messianic prophecy. In a literal sense, the kinsmen of Jesus stood afar off while the body of Jesus was being prepared for burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. There was nothing they could do for Jesus at that time. His spirit was in the hands of God and His body was in the hands of the men preparing Him for burial. David's kinsmen also stood afar off because there was apparently nothing they could do for him. When comparing Psalm 38:12 with John 11:47-54, we see another Messianic prophecy. The enemies of Jesus were plotting how they might capture Him by laying a snare to take Him at a time when He would be most vulnerable -- at a time when the crowds that followed Jesus would be at a minimum. Finally, when comparing Psalm 38:13 to Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 26:63; 27:12-14; and Acts 8:32-35, there is a clear Messianic prophecy. Jesus offered no defense in the hands of His accusers. He had come to do the will of the Father in heaven by dying for the sins of mankind. Therefore, *"He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."* (Isaiah 53:7).

III. Declaration of Sins and Final Plea (vs. 15-22)

1. What was it that David needed to do to remedy his situation? (vs. 17-18)

David understood that he first needed to put all his hope and trust in the Lord (v. 15). He chooses, rather than attempt to defend himself, to commit his whole cause to God. The psalmist knew God was capable of taking care of his reputation, and vindicating him of all charges of wrongdoing. He seems confident that God will protect his character while at the same time defeat his enemies. Eventually, all would see that David had been in God's heart all along. But to gain God's much needed favor, David needed to first declare his iniquity and be in anguish over his sins. He understands that he cannot hide the fact that he has been guilty of "*sin,*" "*iniquity*" and "*foolishness.*" He cannot conceal the fact that he is a sinner and that his sin is the source of all his troubles. Therefore, rather than deny it, he will openly confess it. He will admit the truth of what his conscience has been charging him with all along. He will repent, confess and be forgiven of all his sins. The end result is that God will forgive his "*sin,*" "*iniquity*" and "*foolishness,*" and will cease His attack. David will no longer be an enemy of God, but will suddenly become God's ally. Although his enemies were "*vigorous*" ("*lively*" KJV), "*strong*" and have "*multiplied,*" David is confident of the ultimate victory. He knows these enemies have been his adversaries because he has tried all his life to "*follow what is good,*" and that they nearly gained a victory over him because at one point in his life he stopped following what is good.

2. What was David's final plea? (vs. 21-22)

The final plea is two-fold. First, there is the plea "Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, be not far from me!" (v. 21). David is pleading for God to not abandon him to his enemies, or leave him in his hour of deepest need. The psalmist had always enjoyed a

certain closeness with God, and he pleads for God to “be not far from me.” The second part of David’s plea is “Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!” (v. 22). This is David’s plea for immediate deliverance and rescue from the hands of his enemies. He recognized that God was his only hope and the only source of his salvation. He could not deliver himself, nor would he even try.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)

Psalm 51

Background:

This psalm of David, according to the title, was written “To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” This psalm was intended to be a public expression of David’s repentance for the sin he had committed against God, and against the people of Israel (2 Samuel 12:1-24). Some commentators believe this psalm was not actually written *by* David, but rather *about* David. These commentators place the writing of this psalm during the time of Israel’s Babylonian captivity, since the statement is made in verse 18, “build the walls of Jerusalem.” During the Babylonian captivity, the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins and its walls were destroyed. The walls of the city would not be rebuilt until the time of Nehemiah. However, other commentators believe the expression “build the walls of Jerusalem” could either be interpreted figuratively, or literally -- suggesting the extension of the walls around the city may not have been completed at the time David penned this psalm. More than likely, the phrase, “build the walls of Jerusalem” is being used metaphorically, and may be David’s request for Jehovah to rebuild or restore the Divine protection for God’s people that David’s public sin had torn down. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that this psalm was written by David at the time he felt a deep need for public repentance and confession. However, this psalm was not simply intended to express David’s private feelings, but was also designed to be used in public worship. The psalm is divided into two main parts, verses 1 through 12, in which the psalmist confesses his guilt and prays for forgiveness; and verses 13 through 19, in which David shows how

his life will change and what new purposes he will serve if the Lord grants forgiveness. These two main sections are further divided into two parts each. For example, in verses 1 through 4, the psalmist prays for mercy and forgiveness; and in verses 5 through 12, David pleads for restoration and renewal. Likewise, in verses 13 through 17, he speaks of what he will accomplish if he is forgiven; and finally, in verses 18 and 19, the psalmist prays for God's blessings on the people.

Outline:

I. Prayer for Mercy and Forgiveness (vs. 1-4)

Key Words:

Mercy, lovingkindness, multitude, tender mercies, blot out, transgressions, wash me, iniquity, cleans me, sin, evil, just, blameless.

Observation:

David begins this section of the psalm pleading for mercy and forgiveness. The forgiveness David seeks is based on God's lovingkindness and His many (multitude) tender mercies. David asks God to blot out his transgressions, to wash him from his iniquity, and to cleanse him from his sin. The psalmist is very candid about his sin, and makes no attempt to hide it any longer. He openly confesses it, and says his transgressions are ultimately against God's grace and mercy -- even though he had also sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, and the people of Israel. David is willing to accept any punishment God has in store for him, and knows that whatever may come his way, God is just and right in handing down that punishment.

II. Plea for Restoration and Renewal (vs. 5-12)

Key Words:

Iniquity, conceived, truth, inward parts, hidden part, wisdom, purge, hyssop, clean, whiter than snow, joy, gladness, create, clean heart, renew, steadfast spirit, presence, Holy Spirit, restore, uphold, generous Spirit.

Observation:

Beginning with verse 5, the psalmist describes his own depravity. He does not say he inherited sin, or was literally conceived in sin, but that he is so depraved, and that depravity has been such an integral part of his nature, it seems as if he has always been depraved -- even from the moment of conception. Therefore, David pleads with God to cleans him of all wickedness, forgive him, allow the joy and gladness to return, to create in him a new clean heart, to repair his spirit, to not cast him away, or remove God's influence from his life, but restore the joy of salvation, and a heart that desires to always be obedient.

III. Promise if Restored (vs. 13-17)

Key Words:

Transgressors, sinners, converted, bloodguiltiness, sing aloud, righteousness, lips, mouth, praise, sacrifice, burnt offerings, broken spirit, broken and contrite heart.

Observation:

David promises to use his own life experience to teach and convert transgressors. Furthermore, he will sing praises once again to God -- lips that were silenced by sin will now sing for in praise. David acknowledges that God does not merely desire the outward trappings of religion, but rather sacrifices for sins that come from hearts that are

broken and contrite. Anything less, God will despise.

IV. Prayer for God's Blessings on the People (vs. 18-19)

Key Words:

Zion, walls, Jerusalem, sacrifices of righteousness, alter.

Observation:

Finally, David prays for the nation whose will has been weakened, and whose influence has been damaged. Just as the literal walls of Jerusalem kept back her enemies, so David prays that God will metaphorically repair the breach in the walls that protected Israel's integrity as a nation. David's actions had given Israel's enemies hope to rise up against her. Now David prays that the enemies of God's people be denied that opportunity by having God's providential protection restored.

The Exposition:

I. Prayer for Mercy and Forgiveness (vs. 1-4)

1. David asked God to do three things. List and explain each. (vs. 1-2)
 - a. On the basis of God's mercy and lovingkindness, David asks the Lord to first "*Blot out my transgressions*" (v. 1). The words "*blot out*" are from the Hebrew "*machah*" (maw-KHAW), which, among other things, means "*to rub out, or erase.*" The word "*transgressions*" is from "*pesha*" (PEH-shah), and pertains to "*a revolt (national, moral or religious), a rebellion, or trespass.*" The first word has reference to removing or erasing a debt from an account -- blotting out a ledger entry that shows a charge has been

made. The second word describes the kind of debt David wants erased -- a moral revolt and rebellious act against the grace and mercy of God. This is another way of saying David wanted the Lord to hold him debt free from sin in the spiritual sense. He had openly rebelled against God in the terrible sin he committed, and how he is asking that debt of sin be erased. It is not unusual that David began his prayer with a plea that his transgressions be blotted out. This is something we should begin our prayers with as well.

b. The second thing David asks God to do on the basis of God's mercy and lovingkindness is to "*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity*" (v. 2). The word "*wash*" is from the Hebrew "*kabac*" (kaw-BAS), and literally means "*to trample; or to wash by stamping a soiled garment with the feet.*" The word "*iniquity*" is from "*avon*" (aw-VONE), and pertains to a "*moral perversity, or a moral evil or outrage.*" David acknowledges that his sin was a moral outrage and he now asks God to "*wash*" him from the guilt of that sin with the same intensity that a woman would wash a soiled garment in a stream by stomping the garment underfoot to drive out the stains.

c. The third thing David asks God to do on the basis of His mercy and lovingkindness is to "*Cleanse me from my sin*" (v. 2). The word "*cleanse*" is from the Hebrew "*taher*" (taw-HARE), and means "*to make bring, pure, or clean by purging or purifying.*" It is a word commonly used convey the idea of making that which is unholy or unclean, holy and sanctified. David's use of the word "*sin*," from the Hebrew word "*chatta'ah*" (khat-taw-AW), shows that he had committed "*an offense*" which is sometimes the result of habitual sinfulness. He pleads for God to make him holy and sanctified once

again by forgiving him of his offense against God's law and against God's mercy and lovingkindness.

2. David depended on God's "lovingkindness" and His "tender mercies" to forgive his sins. (vs. 1-2) Explain the meaning of each.
 - a. The term "*lovingkindness*" comes from the Hebrew word "*cheched*" (KHEH-sed), and implies God "*favor or kindness, pity and mercy toward some wicked thing.*" David's sin was so great and his offense was so far reaching that he had no hope of forgiveness without God's "*lovingkindness*" and His infinite compassion.
 - b. Likewise, the term "*tender mercies,*" which comes from the word "*racham*" (RAKH-am), means simply "*compassion.*" However, the word describes the kind of tender compassion a mother has toward the unborn child in her womb. It is an intense kind of tender affection that is being described here. David was as defenseless before God as an unborn infant is in the womb of a mother, and he pleads for God to be as merciful toward him as a loving mother would be toward her unborn child.
3. What was meant by the phrase, "my sin is ever before me?" (v. 3)

David's sin was constantly before him mind. There was no escape from the constant memory of the terrible offense and moral outrage he had committed against Bathsheba, her husband Uriah, and most importantly, against Almighty God. David simply could not keep from thinking about all he had done and the terrible consequences of those sins. It haunted him day and night. He could find no refuge from the guilt that constantly ate at his mind and robbed him of his joy and peace of mind.

4. Why did David say, “against You [God], and You only have I sinned? Didn’t David also sin against the people of Israel? Explain.

Although no sins could be more against mankind than adultery and murder, David feels that the seriousness of these sins do not even begin to compare in seriousness to the fact that he had sinned against God. In this phrase, David is describing the enormity of his sin. Although he had clearly sinned against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, and even against the people of Israel, his sin was mainly against God. Every sin is eventually against God’s holiness, His goodness, and His lovingkindness and mercy. This shows us that David’s heart was truly repentant. He is not denying his sins against Bathsheba or Uriah, but acknowledging even more so his sin against God. Unless there had been this feeling in his heart, there is little doubt that he would have ever repented. He might have rationalized his sin against the woman and her husband, but he could not rationalize his sin against God. He said, *“Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.”* His sin was clearly done in the sight of God, as if God had seen every act the psalmist had committed -- and indeed, He had witnessed David’s sin, as He sees all our sins. In another psalm we read, *“O God, You know my foolishness; And my sins are not hidden from You.”* (Psalms 69:5). Nothing escapes His notice, and nothing is hidden from His eyes.

5. What did David mean when he said of God, “that You may be found just when You speak; and blameless when You judge?” (v. 4)
David realized that his sin demanded punishment, and he

acknowledges that God has every right to vindicate His Holy character by demanding David pay the price for his offense and moral outrage. David knew that he deserved whatever the Law prescribed for these kinds of sins -- namely, death. He is saying that God would have every right, and would be completely within the realm of justice if He required David's life. God's judgment, whatever it might be, and however serious it might be, would be right, holy, just and deserving. David stands before God defenseless, and ready to accept any punishment the Lord chooses to hand down. In David's case, his life would not be required (2 Samuel 12:7-15a), but he would suffer the terrible consequences of seeing the newborn son of Bathsheba die, and live in a household that would be torn by internal strife and division, even open rebellion against David as king (in the revolt of his son Absalom).

II. Plea for Restoration and Renewal (vs. 5-12)

1. Explain verse 5 in the light of Psalm 58:2-5, and in the light of Ezekiel 18:19-20.

The psalmist begins this psalm by pleading for God's mercy and forgiveness, and by openly confessing his transgressions against God. When we come to verse 5, David expresses the fact that this sin was not something that happened as a result of a sudden thought that struck him in some unguarded moment. Rather, he acknowledges that the sin came about as a result of his own corrupt and depraved nature which led him to commit the sin. In verse 5, the psalmist describes his sinful nature, and tells us that it is so sinful that it is **as if** it had been with him since birth. When looking at his sin, and contemplating his own birth, it seems to David **as if**

sin has been a prominent part of his life since his birth, and even since his conception. David is not saying he was **literally** “brought forth in iniquity,” nor is he saying “in sin my mother (**literally**) conceived me.” Rather he is looking back at his life and saying in an exaggerated sense that he has never been anything but sinful in nature. There is nothing in this passage that speaks of the sin of another being **imputed** to David, nor is there anything here that says he was **responsible for**, or in some way **inherited**, the sin of Adam, or that he was **guilty** of sin because of Adam’s sin. While we may have been born with a propensity for, or inclination toward sin as part of our human nature, the Scriptures are silent regarding our inheriting sin, having the sin of another imputed to us, or being held responsible for and guilty of the sins of another. There is another psalm of David that may help shed some light on Psalm 51. This is Psalm 58:3. In this psalm, David is speaking of his enemies, and he writes, “*The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.*” (Psalm 58:3). The word “wicked” in this verse is not specifically referring to the entire human race, but more to those men whose lives demonstrate a wicked character. David says it is **as if** they were wicked from the very moment they were “*estranged from the womb.*” It is **as if** “*they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.*” These are clearly exaggerations made for the purpose of defining the wicked character of David’s enemies -- it’s as if they have always been wicked. This passage cannot be used to speak of original sin, although many attempt to use it in that way, because David is not speaking of the entire human race. Furthermore, this passage, if applied to the entire human race, would contradict the very doctrine

of imputed sin because the psalmist says *“the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born”* -- not before. There are several other passages that will help answer the argument that man is somehow born in sin. For example, God told the Israelites that they couldn't enter the promised land because of their sins, but their children would: *“Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.”* (Deuteronomy 1:39). Solomon wrote, *“Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”* (Ecclesiastes 7:29). God told Ezekiel, *“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”* (Ezekiel 18:20). The Lord Himself said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 18:3-4). If a child is born totally depraved, then why would the Lord say we must be like them -- totally depraved? Obviously, Jesus wanted His disciples to become like little children -- sinless and pure -- otherwise we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. The apostle Paul said, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23). All have fallen short of the glory of God because all have sinned -- not because all have been born in sin. In the same Roman letter, Paul said death has spread to all men, then proceeds to explain why: *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men,*

because all sinned." (Romans 5:12). Death has spread to all men because all have sinned -- not because all were born in sin. Paul also speaks of his own spiritual condition before reaching an age of reason (accountability), *"I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."* (Romans 7:9-11). There is simply no Scripture that in any way indicates man is born in sin -- Psalm 51:5 certainly doesn't teach it, nor does any other passage.

2. In what way were David's "bones" broken? (v. 8)

The psalmist expressed a similar idea in Psalm 32:3, where he said, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old..." David's bones were not literally broken, nor did they literally grow old. However, these expressions describe the intense physical pain associated with the overbearing guilt of his sin. David's bones were broken symbolically by the weight of sin, and by God's hand of judgment pressing down on him.

3. What was David asking for in verse 10? Explain.

The word "create" is from the Hebrew *"bera"* which is used to describe the act of creation -- that is, bringing something into existence where nothing existed before. It is the same word used in Genesis 1:1, where *"God created the heavens and the earth."* David seems to be asking God to create in the psalmist something that had, in his own estimation, never existed before -- namely, a clean heart. David is pleading for God to use His creative powers to bring something into existence that had never existed prior to this

time. Keep in mind, this is not an admission on David's part that his heart has never been clean, as some who believe in "original sin" teach, but an expression of David's own sense of worthlessness. He has already described himself (verse 5) as one who is so depraved that it seems as if he has been that way since birth (even since conception). Therefore, David wants God to start all over again: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me."* The "steadfast" spirit David seeks is a spirit that stands upright (from the Hebrew "nachon" which literally means "erect"). The word David chose here means that which is upright and proper, as well as that which is right, true and sincere. While David wanted God to *"create"* in him a clean heart, he asks for God to *"renew"* in him a steadfast spirit. The word *"renew"* conveys the idea of rebuilding or repairing something that has been damaged. This seems to indicate that the psalmist knew his spirit had been upright and proper, as well as right, true and sincere at one time in his life. That alone should show David had served the Lord faithfully at an earlier period of his life. But now that upright spirit needed repair. It had been damaged by David's sin, and needed to be rebuilt.

4. Since it is not likely that David understood the Holy Spirit to be the third member of the Godhead, what was he asking for when he said to God, "do not take Your Holy Spirit from me?" (v. 11)

The language seems to indicate that David understood there was some divine influence that came from Jehovah, as if God breathed it into the psalmist's own soul. Whatever it was, David understood it was something he possessed and did not want taken away from him.

5. What was the main thing missing from David's life as a result of his sin? (v. 12) Explain.

Clearly, David was missing the joy that comes from knowing one is saved. He wanted that restored. This certainly implies that the psalmist had once known that joy, but since his sin, he had lost it -- there was no longer a peace of mind of knowing he was in a right relationship with God. Sin always produces that effect. Not only did David want the joy of his salvation to be restored, he wanted God to "*uphold*" him by God's "*generous Spirit*." The term "*generous Spirit*" (translated "*free spirit*") seems to indicate David was asking God to uphold, support and sustain the psalmist with a spirit that is ready and willing to obey God at all times. The text seems to indicate David was praying for a state of mind, which God would freely or generously grant to him, that would be constant and firm, and always ready and willing to be obedient.

III. Promise if Restored (vs. 13-17)

1. What was the first thing David promised to do if God granted his request for forgiveness, and how do you believe he would accomplish it? (v. 13)

As an expression of gratitude, David says he will "*teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You*" (v. 12). David will use his own experiences and the dreadful consequences of his own sin to warn other transgressors, and turn them from their ways. There is no sense of David wanting to hide his mistakes, but rather use them to persuade others not to follow in his own rebellious steps.

2. What was the second thing David promised to do if God granted his request for forgiveness? (vs. 14-15)

The second thing David promised was, *“my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness... and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.”* David’s sin had kept him silent. David’s forgiveness would result in praises and shouts of joy in song. Singing is an expression of joy from a heart that is devoted to God. When the joy of David’s salvation had departed because of his sin, so did the singing. But the joy of salvation restored, would result in songs of praise breaking forth from the lips of Israel’s king.

3. Explain verses 16 and 17 in the light of Micah 6:6-8.

Micah said, *“With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:6-8). The idea being expressed in Psalm 51:16-17 and Micah 6:6-8 are similar. The mere external offering, regardless of how extensive that offering may be, was not what God required. Unless that offering for sin was accompanied by a “broken and contrite heart” there was no genuine repentance. God demands worship from the heart. He also demands repentance from the heart. God has no pleasure in the mere external trappings of our service to Him. Those kinds of offerings are useless by themselves. But offerings accompanied by a heart

devoted to God, He will not despise.

IV. Prayer for God's Blessings on the People (vs. 18-19)

1. In addition to praying for the forgiveness of his own sins, why do you believe David felt a need to ask for God's blessings on Zion (a word used to represent Jerusalem and Israel)? (v. 18)

David's sins had not only affected his relationship with God, it had been a sin against God's people who looked to the psalmist as their leader. His sin had weakened the nation in the eyes of her enemies, and David pleads for God's blessings to continue. Perhaps he knew the old saying, "as goes the king, so goes the kingdom." Therefore, he prays that his damaging influence will not lead others to follow his own rebellious and sinful course.

2. Assuming David was speaking metaphorically when he said, "build the walls of Jerusalem," what would be the reason behind this request? (v. 18)

As we said earlier, David's sin had caused the nation to be weakened in the eyes of her enemies. Walls were always used to protect a city and its inhabitants from their enemies. Metaphorically speaking, David's sin had caused a breach in the walls that protected God's people. It has served as an evil influence which certainly weakened the moral fiber of the nation, and no doubt caused the enemies of Israel to realize the Israelites would soon fall out of God's favor if they continued to tolerate or practice such sins among the people. Therefore, David seems to be praying that God will repair the breach in the metaphorical wall he had caused as the result of his own sin.

3. Why would God “then” be pleased with the sacrifices and offerings of the people? (v. 19)

David seems to be saying that God will be pleased with the sacrifices of the righteous only after the hearts of the king and his people are turned around, and only after sacrifices for sins are made from hearts that are truly broken and contrite.

Theme and Application: (In your own words, briefly describe the general theme of this psalm, and explain how this can be applied to your life.)