

October 24 Lesson 8 (NIV)

## PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PRESENCE

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Psalm 84

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 84

### PSALM 84

**For the director of music. According to *gittith*.**

**Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.**

<sup>1</sup> How lovely is your dwelling place,  
LORD Almighty!

<sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.

<sup>3</sup> Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young—  
a place near your altar,  
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

<sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baka,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.

<sup>8</sup> Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;  
listen to me, God of Jacob.

<sup>9</sup> Look on our shield, O God;  
look with favor on your anointed one.

<sup>10</sup> Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

- <sup>11</sup> For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD bestows favor and honor;  
no good thing does he withhold  
from those whose walk is blameless.**
- <sup>12</sup> LORD Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.**

## **KEY TEXT**

*Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.—Psalm 84:4*

## **CELEBRATING GOD**

Unit 2: Called to Praise God

LESSONS 5–9

## **LESSON OUTLINE**

### Introduction

- A. Longing for Home
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Opening Appeal (Psalm 84:1–3)
  - A. For God’s Presence (vv. 1–2)  
*Your Fainting Heart*
  - B. For a Place with God (v. 3)
- II. In God’s Presence (Psalm 84:4–7)
  - A. Constant Praise (v. 4)
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- III. Closing Appeal (Psalm 84:8–12)
  - A. For Self (v. 8)
  - B. For the Lord’s Anointed (v. 9)
  - C. Statement of Trust (vv. 10–12)  
*Called to Come “Chome”*

### Conclusion

- A. Longing for God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## **HOW TO SAY IT**

Babylonian Bab-ih-low-nee-un.

Baka*Bay*-ka.

Kohath*Ko*-hath.

Korah*Ko*-rah.

Levi*Lee*-vye.

Psalter*Saul*-tur.

Reuben*Roo*-ben.

Selah (*Hebrew*)*See*-luh.

tabernacle*tah*-burr-*nah*-kuls.

Zion*Zi*-un.

## Introduction

### A. Longing for Home

One of my greatest earthly blessings is the home life that graced my upbringing. My family moved into a large house in the country in south-central Indiana when I was 4 (that was in 1957). I had no idea that this house would remain “home” until May 2018, when the house was sold about two and a half years after my mother’s passing.

Over the years after going away to college, I made many trips back home, always with a great sense of anticipation. Eventually I brought my bride-to-be there, where we announced our engagement to my parents. Over the course of the years that followed, we brought our three children there for visits.

Thus more memories of home were added to those that I amassed while growing up. The sense of stability and security made home a very special place to visit. The question “Are we there yet?” was one asked by me, not by our children. Of course, the key to home being the place that it became was the people who lived there. My father and mother were very caring, godly individuals.

In today’s text, the psalmist expresses his intense, fervent longing to be in a different kind of “home,” which becomes instructive for us.

### B. Lesson Context

Psalm 84 is one of the 17 psalms that constitute Book III of the Psalter (see the Lesson Context of lesson 5 for explanation of the psalms’ arrangement in terms of five “books”). Expressions of praise characterize many of these psalms (see the visual for lesson 5). A total of 11 psalms are written “of the Sons of Korah,” 4 of which are in Book III—namely, Psalms 84; 85; 87, and 88—

according to their superscriptions (compare Lesson Context: Superscription in lesson 6). This could mean either that the songs were written *by* those descendants of Korah or that they were written *for* them to sing. In either case, the sons must have been musically gifted (2 Chronicles 20:19).

Regarding Korah himself, he was a descendant of Kohath, a son of Levi (Exodus 6:16–21). Korah, accompanied by members of the tribe of Reuben, had led a rebellion against the God-given authority of Moses and Aaron during the exodus. As a result, Korah was put to death along with 250 others (Numbers 16:1–2, 35).

Despite this blemish on the family line, Korah’s descendants (Numbers 26:58) became prominent in the temple worship that King David arranged before his death, toward the day his son Solomon would complete the building of the temple. The record of the service of Korah’s descendants as gatekeepers is found in 1 Chronicles 9:19; 26:1.

If Psalm 84 was written *for* rather than *by* the sons of Korah, one guess about its author is King David. This is based on the occurrence of the word translated “shield” in Psalm 84:9, 11 since this word occurs also in Psalms 3; 5; 144, and others—the superscriptions of which attribute them to David.

This would date the psalm’s composition before David’s death in 970 BC. But other psalms that are not attributed to David also have that word, so the conclusion is not ironclad.

The occasion of the composition may have been that of a pilgrimage to the temple, perhaps for a new-year festival. This, though speculative, is as good a guess as any (see on Psalm 84:5, below).

Regarding the superscription’s “For the director of music,” see discussion in Lesson Context: Superscription in lesson 6. The meaning of the phrase “According to gittith” is uncertain. The word *gittith* is likely a musical term, perhaps a musical instrument or a reference to a certain type of celebratory melody (see also Psalms 8 and 81).

## I. Opening Appeal (PSALM 84:1–3)

### A. For God’s Presence (vv. 1–2)

#### 1. How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty!

In older translations of the Bible, the Hebrew adjective translated *lovely* (which might suggest a focus on beautiful appearance) is more commonly rendered “beloved”, and that is the sense here (see Deuteronomy 33:12; Psalms 60:5; 108:6; etc.). The term suggests that this poem will focus on love or attachment—in this case the high degree of fondness the writer has for the Lord’s *dwelling place* (see Psalms 27:4; 43:3; 132:1–8). There is no place the psalmist would rather be!

The Hebrew word translated *dwelling place* is translated “tabernacles” (tents) in older versions of the Bible. The Israelites had constructed a tabernacle to be the portable home of the Lord’s symbolic presence (Exodus 26). After the people had been established in the promised land for many generations, King David desired to build God a permanent dwelling in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7:1–5). But the task fell instead to his son Solomon (2 Chronicles 3:1). It seems likely

that the word “tabernacles” refers to courts or other divisions within the temple instead of multiple locations.

The designation *Lord Almighty* (appropriately translated “Lord of hosts” in other versions) is used over 200 times as a title for God in the Old Testament. We may find it surprising that only nine of those occur in the Psalter, with three of those nine in this psalm alone (Psalm 84:1, 3, 12). This designation celebrates the Lord’s power in various contexts (examples: 1 Samuel 17:45; Isaiah 1:24). The word translated “hosts” in the older translations may refer to angelic beings who serve the Lord as he directs (see Psalm 148:2; compare Hebrews 1:13–14). It also may refer to stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies that he created (Nehemiah 9:6).

**2a. My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD;**

The writer’s absence from *the courts of the Lord* (understood as the temple courts) could be explained in one of several ways. More important to this psalm, however, is not why he wasn’t there, but the effect the absence had on the man. Such was his fervent desire that, even though he may have had no specific call to be there (annual pilgrimage feast, etc.), he *yearns* and *even faints* to be in God’s presence nonetheless.

**2b. my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.**

We see parallelism here with the previous half-verse, with increasing intensity: *heart* and *flesh* are added to “soul” to indicate the man’s entire being. A similar piling up of terms occurs in Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (compare Matthew 22:37).

The temple, with its surrounding courts, was understood to be the dwelling place of God’s glory (Psalm 26:8; compare 27:4). Thus to be able to be in those courts was to be as close to *the living God* as possible.

**B. For a Place with God (v. 3)**

**3a. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar,**

We detect a note of jealousy for birds that were able to build nests within the Lord’s *home*. As in some public buildings today, this was probably confined to the rafters or other high structures. The *altar* itself would be far too active for a bird nest. But the winged creatures could be present for every sacrifice without ever leaving home. The psalmist desired to be as intimately linked to the temple as the birds were.

**3b. LORD Almighty, my King and my God.**

The psalmist described his committed relationship with his sovereign. Yes, the psalmist affirmed, he is *Lord Almighty*; but he is also *my King and my God*. The possessive pronouns suggest closeness while the titles emphasize God’s greatness. This is the great paradox of faith: the Creator of everything, seen and unseen, desires undivided relationships with those created in his image. Jesus was the one who demonstrated how close God wants to be to us (Matthew 1:23), as well as the great depths of love he was willing to go to in order to heal our relationship with him (John 3:16–17).

**II. In God’s Presence**

(PSALM 84:4–7)

**A. Constant Praise (v. 4)**

**4. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.**

Because of their duties at the temple, priests and Levites were privileged to spend much of their time in those sacred surroundings. Their tasks gave them ample reasons and opportunities to offer praise to the Lord. When they honored the Lord by faithfully carrying out his work, the *house* was indeed a *blessed* place to be.

Though the temple of antiquity and church buildings today are very different in function and purpose, something similar can be said about our gathering places: when ministry through faithful preaching and teaching of God’s Word and serving one another in love are carried out within the walls of the building, it is a blessed place to be. Why then shouldn’t a person anticipate being in the place of worship as the psalmist did? If such good things are taking place, others will be attracted to what is happening.

Today, our bodies are temples of God’s Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Even so, we should view our church buildings as tools to be used for the Lord’s grace and glory. They are places to praise the Lord in corporate worship and where people should experience his love in the midst of his people.

The word *Selah* at the end of this verse occurs 71 times in the psalms. (“Selah” is found in the 1984 edition of the *NIV* but not the 2011 edition, although it is sometimes found in a footnote.) The meaning is unknown, but most believe it to be a musical notation. It may direct the instruments to play more loudly while the singers are silent, or it may mark a pause for reflection since it usually comes after a significant or challenging statement has been made.

**B. Continuing Strength (vv. 5–7)**

**5. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.**

This verse bolsters the possibility that this is a psalm of *pilgrimage* (see Lesson Context). Unlike the yearning and fainting of verse 2a, those who find themselves either physically on the way to the temple or at least determined to begin the journey find *strength* in the Lord.

**6. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.**

This verse goes well with the description in the preceding verse of the pilgrimage to the place of worship. However, there is no place in recorded Scripture called *the Valley of Baka* in Israel; elsewhere, the Hebrew word behind the translation *Baka* refers to a certain kind of tree (2 Samuel 5:24; 1 Chronicles 14:14–15). Some think the reference is to a narrow valley near Jerusalem. Another idea is that this is a figurative description of the spiritual dryness that is relieved by arriving at the Lord’s house.

**7. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.**

The Hebrew word translated *strength* twice here is different from the one translated “strength” in Psalm 84:5, above. Thus the psalmist piles up terms for emphasis. No matter the challenges one confronts on this pilgrimage, the strength available in the Lord can never be

exhausted! Paradoxically, the longer the travelers walk, the stronger they become, upheld by *God* (see Isaiah 40:31). *Zion*, another name for Jerusalem (see Psalms 51:18; 102:21; etc.), is the location of the temple (2 Kings 21:4).

For Christians, the word *Zion* represents the blessings and privileges of “a new covenant” in Christ (Hebrews 12:22–24). This blessing will culminate in a residence for eternity in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1–5). Whatever “dry spells” are encountered along the way, the one who draws strength from the Lord will find relief.

### III. Closing Appeal

(PSALM 84:8–12)

#### A. For Self (v. 8)

##### **8. Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty; listen to me, God of Jacob.**

This verse in Hebrew and older English translations shows us parallelism in an X-shaped format:

Recognizing the *Lord ... Almighty* (see commentary on Psalm 84:3, above) to be the same as the *God of Jacob* reminded the original reader that the Lord God had exercised his power to choose the family of Jacob to be the covenant people (Psalm 105:10; Acts 7:8). The repetition of sentiment found in *hear my prayer* and *listen to me* amplifies one’s desire for God to hear and take notice. All these elements taken together emphasize the full range of God’s power: his attending to an entire nation is set side by side with the psalmist’s conviction that God is willing and able to hear the prayer of an individual.

#### B. For the Lord’s Anointed (v. 9)

##### **9. Look on our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.**

It is possible that God is the one being designated as *our shield* as in Psalm 84:11, below (compare 59:11). But the parallelism that often characterizes Hebrew poetry (see above) suggests that the *anointed one* (that is, the king of Israel) is the shield—the one appointed by God to lead the people in faithfulness.

To *look with favor* is similar to the “listen to me” request in the previous verse. The psalmist desires God’s attention in certain ways.

#### C. Statement of Trust (vv. 10–12)

##### **10. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.**

The psalmist now adds elements of time quantity (duration) and position status (role) to his preference for the *courts* of the Lord’s *house*. The contrast between *one day* and *a thousand* (duration) is quite sharp. To *be a doorkeeper* in the temple is the position of a low-level attendant

(2 Kings 23:4). The contrast with *the tents of the wicked* is seen in Psalm 83:5–7, where high-level leadership is in view.

**11a. For the LORD God is a sun and shield;**

Noteworthy here is the fact that the Hebrew noun being translated as *a sun* is *not* accompanied by a definite article, which, if present, would result in God's being "the sun." Thus there is no hint of sun worship here as was common in pagan practice at the time (Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 23:5, 11; Jeremiah 43:13; Ezekiel 8:16). Rather, the idea is one of spiritual light (Psalms 13:3; 18:28).

References to God as a *shield* and similar items of protection are common in the Old Testament (example: Psalm 18:2).

**11b. the LORD bestows favor and honor;**

Other translations for *favor* and *honor* are "grace" and "glory" (examples: Zechariah 12:10; 2 Chronicles 7:1, respectively). These words together represent everything we should ultimately desire from *the Lord*. Echoing this is James 1:17:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

**11c. no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.**

The idea of an upright *walk* is found several places in Scripture (see Genesis 6:9; 17:1; Psalms 15:2; 101:2, 6; 119:1; Proverbs 28:18). While God does indeed bless even those who do not do so (Matthew 5:45), special favor falls on those who seek his ways. *Blameless* implies integrity or wholeness, found particularly in Psalm 18:20–25. Next to salvation itself, the ultimate *good thing* God gives to Christians while we are on earth is the gift of the Holy Spirit, conferred at baptism (Acts 2:38).

**12. LORD Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.**

The final reference to being *blessed* in this psalm (previous ones were in Psalm 84:4–5, above) again acknowledges God as the *Lord Almighty* (see commentary on 84:1, above), who nonetheless is still concerned about the individual (*the one*). Anyone who *trusts in* him is blessed in the ways this psalm indicates and more.

This is heart of the psalm. While fervor for the Lord's temple and the annual pilgrimage feasts can indicate that a person's heart is yielded to God, such excitement itself is not enough. Yes, it is good to be in the house of the Lord, but that is not an end in itself. The key is trusting in the Lord of the house, living in daily fellowship with him.

## Conclusion

### A. Longing for God

While the psalmist was quite passionate about being in the Lord's house, readers today may wonder whether such passion is fitting for Christians. To this we can answer *yes* in terms of the need to gather with other Christians (Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:25) while at the same time



remembering that church buildings of the New Testament era are not equivalent to the temple of the Old Testament era.

More than location, the psalmist's heart was set on spending time with God. It was God's presence that made the place of worship the sacred place that it was. While our houses of worship today bear little to no resemblance in form and function to the temple in Jerusalem, the psalmist's longing to be in God's presence still stands.

But how seriously do we take the truth that we are always in God's presence, given that *we* are the new-covenant temple? See 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; and Ephesians 2:19–22. Christians long to be with Jesus and in his presence for eternity, and that is a good thing. But as we anticipate that great day, what a tragedy it would be to not draw on the good thing we have now: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### **B. Prayer**

Father, thank you for the presence of the Holy Spirit! We are humbled that you have promised to dwell with those who turn to you in simple trusting faith. We thank you for your presence with your people when we gather in worship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Remember the Lord's presence and be blessed!<sup>1</sup>

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