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Psalm 84

“Journey through the Valley”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Life is a journey, and life will have its share of joys and sorrows along the way, until we all stand one day before God in heaven. In the meantime, Psalm 84 teaches us some life lessons about how to handle the dark valleys we will sometimes pass through. The psalmist pointed out three different principles, which, if practiced, will bring blessing from God. The word *“blessed”* is from a Hebrew word that means, “O, how happy!” God will turn our valleys into places where we experience his happiness if we would worship him, lean on him, and trust him.

Historical Background

1. There are three psalms in the Bible that were written *“according to gittith.”*
 - a. Psalms 8, 81, and 84.
 - b. This term is difficult to interpret, and some Bible scholars believe it means, winepress, with the idea that this was sung while the grapes were being treaded in the winepress, but most believe it refers to the Gittite people, who lived in Gath, a city in the land of the Philistines.
 - i. This area today is located in what is known as the Gaza Strip.
 - c. The Jewish Targum indicates that a gittith was a musical instrument much like a harp.
2. The Sons of Korah were descendants of Korah, who led a rebellion against Moses.
 - a. The biblical account of Korah’s rebellion is found in [Numbers 16](#).
 - b. The descendants of Korah had become musicians and choral directors in the house of God.
3. This psalm is about a pilgrimage or journey to Jerusalem and to the Temple.

4. Every year, all Jewish men, 21 years of age and older, were required to go to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Passover, and the Feast of Pentecost.

5. It was unsafe to make the trip to Jerusalem because of robbers and bandits, so it would oftentimes be the case that people traveled in large groups.
 - a. Pastor Gary illustrated the concept of large groups of people journeying together to Jerusalem when he mentioned [Luke 2:39-52](#), and the account of the time when Joseph and Mary thought Jesus was traveling along with them in the crowds.

6. What is the difference between the Temple and a synagogue?
 - a. The Temple of God was a unique place that was located on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.
 - b. A synagogue was essentially a house of assembly or what we might think of today as a community center.
 - c. Every town or village, in which there were more than ten men, would have a synagogue.
 - d. People would gather at the synagogue on the Sabbath to read the Torah and pray, and some would go to the synagogue on daily basis.
 - e. The Temple was the only place that the sacrifices were made.
 - f. Priests were not on duty at synagogues.
 - g. The most important distinction of the Temple was that it was the place where God's Spirit dwelt, in the Holy of Holies.
 - h. [Psalm 80:1](#) - *"Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim..."*
 - i. God's presence was manifested in the interior of the Holy of Holies, between the two cherubim.
 - j. The High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies one time each year to offer the blood of the sacrifice for the sins of the people.
 - k. People who made pilgrimage would have understood how special and exciting it was to go to the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - l. [Psalm 84:1-2](#) - *"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."*

7. The psalmist envied the sparrows and the birds because they had found a home at the Temple!
 - a. [Psalm 84:3](#) - *"Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young - a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God."*

8. The psalm writer delighted in the thought of spending just one day at the Temple!
 - a. **Psalm 84:10** - *“Better is one day in your courts that a thousand elsewhere...”*

9. The writer considered it to be an honorable and worthy calling to be a doorkeeper at the Temple!
 - a. **Psalm 84:10** - *“... I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.”*
 - b. A doorkeeper stood at the threshold and looked into the Temple.
 - c. Pastor Gary spoke as though he were the psalmist expressing his desire to be a doorkeeper: “I’d rather be on the outside of God’s house, wanting to get in, than [be] on the inside of anywhere else, wanting to get out!”

10. Pastor Gary said: “I want you to notice with me that it’s in the middle of this chapter [that] the tone changes from all of [the] excitement [and] all of [the] exuberance; there’s this kind of [a] reality check...”
 - a. **Psalm 84:6-7** - *“As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”*
 - b. The Valley of Baca is only mentioned in this verse, and it is commonly understood among Bible scholars that this is not a literal geographical location, because there are no biblical references or archeological evidence to demonstrate otherwise.
 - c. Pastor Gary said: “... most Bible scholars believe... the psalmist is using literary, allegorical terms to communicate something bigger. It’s a picture. The Valley of Baca represents something... In Hebrew, Baca (spelled Baka) [means], weeping, mourning, [or] grieving.”
 - d. Sometimes on the journey to God, we will sometimes go through a valley of weeping, and there will be some hard days, dark valleys, and places of sorrow.

11. Pastor Gary said: “When I read Psalm 84 I see it as a parallel. Now, it’s a literal story about a real pilgrimage among real people going to a real house of God in the real city of Jerusalem... [Often] the Bible gives a dual meaning to things, so that we can understand its application, not just its context... We are also on a journey. We are, if you will, making pilgrimage. Life is a journey, and there is an ultimate destination... [All] of us will one-day end [our] pilgrimage... standing before God, not in Zion, but in heaven... All of us will face God one day.”

12. For all who have believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, heaven will be their final destination!

- a. [John 5:24](#) - *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he [or she] has crossed over from death to life."*
 - b. [Romans 8:1-2](#) - *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."*
 - c. There should be no fear of standing before God if you have put your trust in Christ! (Emphasis added)
13. Pastor Gary said: "In the meantime... we live out our life on earth, and there will be times when we pass through the Valley of Baca... I don't know if somebody told you that when you became a Christian you have no more problems and no more anything wrong; it's all going to be butterflies and rainbows! Let me tell you something, that's the gospel of the Candy Man not the gospel of Jesus Christ! When you become a Christian... you will know in whom you have hoped... [You] will know who will rescue [you], and be [your] strength and be [your] help... [There] will be Valleys of Baca along the way, and we need to prepare ourselves for this reality. The road of life is not always paved with ease and comfort. There will be times of weeping. There will be times of mourning. There will be times of grief... I don't care how much you have or how much you think you have your act together, the Valley of Baca is something all of us will have to pass through on [the] journey toward the destination of being with the Lord."
14. [Isaiah 53:3](#) - *"[Jesus] was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."*
15. [John 16:33](#) - *"... In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

We Will Not Be In The Valley Forever; We Will Get Through It

16. [Psalm 84:5-6](#) - *"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they **pass through** the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs [refreshing]..."* (Emphasis added)

We Bear Some Responsibility In Making Something Better Of Our Valley

17. [Psalm 84:6](#) - *"... they make it a place of springs [refreshing]..."* (Emphasis added)

18. Pastor Gary said: “I want you to hear me because I want to say this with all gentleness, and I want to be careful how I say this. I don’t want anybody to ever think that I’m suggesting – and if anybody ever suggests this to you, shame on [him or her] – that you should just get over it! You know, when you are in a bad place the worst thing is when somebody says, ‘You just need to get over it...’ That’s not what I’m insinuating at all, but when I look at this verse and I see how it says *‘they pass through the Valley of Baca’* and *‘they make it a place of [refreshing]*, [the question is,] who is they? It’s the ones in the valley... We bear some responsibility in making something better of our valley. I say that with all gentleness and with respect... If we are not careful we could grow accustomed to being in a bad place. It can almost seem normal to us. We can grow comfortable in our grief or our bitterness or our unforgiveness or our fear or our sorrow or whatever [the Baca valley represents]. It becomes so familiar to us that we don’t know anything else, because we’ve stayed there so long.”
19. The psalm writer mentioned three things we can do to make something better of our valley experience(s).
- a. The Hebrew word *esher*, is “*blessed*” in our English Bible, and it literally means, “O how happy!”
 - b. Worship the Lord
 - i. **Psalm 84:4** - *“Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.”*
 - ii. It’s not easy, but we can worship our way out of the valley.
 - iii. Paul and Silas praised the Lord in jail!
 1. **Acts 16:25** - *“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...”*
 - iv. King Jehoshaphat went out to engage in battle with the Ammonites and the Moabites, and he sent the “worship team” out in front of the army to worship God!
 1. **2 Chronicles 20:20-21** - *“Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.’ After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.’ ”*
 - v. When David grieved the death of his child, he made a conscious decision to worship the Lord.
 1. **2 Samuel 12:20** - *“Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes,*

he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.”

2. Pastor Gary said: “David knew that through worship, God [would] comfort [his] grief... You can worship your way out of the valley, because God [will show] up in a wonderful way when we lift our praise to heaven.”
- c. Lean on the Lord
 - i. **Psalm 84:5** - *“Blessed are those whose strength is in you...”*
 - ii. We may not have the strength needed to endure, so we must learn to lean on the Lord.
 - iii. **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** - *“But [God] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*
- d. Trust in the Lord
 - i. **Psalm 84:12** - *“O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.”*
 - ii. **Psalm 91:2** - *“I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

God Will Help Us In Our Valley

20. **Psalm 84:6c** - *“... the autumn rains also cover it with pools.”*
21. God is the one who brings the “autumn rains” of refreshing and he will be the one who helps us in our valley experiences.
22. **Psalm 46:1** - *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*
23. **Psalm 84:11** - *“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.

2. Read [Psalm 84](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Share experiences about times when you've longed to go to and be in the house of the Lord.
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's illustration concerning the note Elvis Presley wrote in his room at the Las Vegas Hilton, in December 1976, when he was in the Valley of Baca.¹
5. Allow the people in your group to tell their Valley of Baca experiences. (See #10 through #15 above)
6. How has the Lord been a help and a blessing to you as he helped you through the valley? (See #16 above)
7. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments about staying in the Valley of Baca. (See #18 above)
8. What are some of the ways you have made your valley experience a time of refreshing?
9. How has worshiping the Lord helped you make something better of your valley experience? (See #19b above)
10. What are some specific examples of the ways you've leaned on the Lord to help you in your valley experience(s)? (See #19c above)
11. What are some specific examples of the ways you've trusted in the Lord? (See #19d above)
12. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).

¹ <https://lindahoodsigmontruth.com/wayne-newtons-song-the-letter-was-inspired-by-a-note-written-by-elvis-elvis-handwritten-notes-a/>