

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Psalm 84 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the psalm. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

PSALM 84:1-12 ESV

1 To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Selah 5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. 6 As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. 8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah 9 Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed! 10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

STRUCTURE

- I. Longing for rest in the courts of God's house (1-4)
- II. Finding strength on the journey to God's house (5-9)
- III. Choosing to trust, whether near or far from God's house (10-12)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Written by one of the singers from the tribe of Korah, Psalm 84 centers on God's house. Each of the three stanzas includes a beatitude (a blessing pronounced), which highlights the theme of that stanza. Overall, the song emphasizes profound longing for God's house and the blessedness of journeying with God—and toward God. This explains the diversity of names for God in this psalm: "LORD of hosts" (vv. 1, 3, 8, 12), "the LORD" (v. 2, 11), "the living God" (v. 2), "King" (v. 3), "God" (vv. 3, 7, 9, 10), "God of Jacob" (v. 8), "LORD God" (v. 11). The psalmist focuses on God's house not because of architecture or nostalgia but because God lives there. For the psalmist, God's many names poetically depict, "who God is to me."

The first beatitude focuses on the pleasure of resting in God's house. This stanza includes words like "lovely" (v. 1), "joy" (v. 2), and "sing/singing" (vv. 2, 4). The central imagery is pleasant also: families of birds and their young, nesting in the temple precincts (v. 3). Despite these happy words and images, the psalmist does not currently live in the reality he dreams about. He "longs" and "faints" for the enviable state of these lowly birds in lofty Zion. He desires not prominence but proximity to the temple's Chief Resident.

The second beatitude appears right next to the first, shifting the scene from rest in God's house to a weary pilgrimage toward it. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you"—because pilgrims need strength for the journey. Even if we feel far from God, He will fill us with fortitude if we keep our hearts in the right place: longing for His presence above all else.

This second stanza also introduces the king of Israel—"your anointed" (v. 9), asking God to grant him favor in battle. This agrees with God's most oft-repeated name in the song, "LORD of hosts," which means LORD of armies. It seems strange that Israel would include her king in songs of worship, especially in an intimate song such as this. But in Jewish culture, the "anointed one" represented God before the people. The emphasis on Israel's king in the Psalms points forward to Jesus, our true and greater "Anointed One", who defends us against our greatest enemy, the devil.

The third beatitude focuses neither on the loveliness of God's house nor the journey toward it but rather on faith. When we string the three beatitudes together, we see how this final stanza emphasizes the need to trust God, no

matter where we're at—whether near or far from His house. For this reason, we must not fall for the illusion of worldly provision and protection, which don't endure. Instead, we must trust that “no good thing does he withhold” from His children (v. 11).

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

—“choirmaster... Gittith... Sons of Korah”:

- “choirmaster” and “Gittith” are musical terms, with the meaning of the latter unknown.
- Kidner: “Longing is written all over this psalm. This eager and homesick man is one of the Korahite temple singers...”
- Ross: “This composition begins the second collection of Korahite psalms (84-85 and 87-88) and matches the first group (42-43 and 44-49) in that both collections begin with the psalmist’s longing to go to the holy city and participate in the festive procession to the sanctuary.”

—“How lovely is your dwelling place”:

- This verse sets the theme: God’s “dwelling place”—His temple. Temple imagery fills the psalm: “courts” (vv. 2, 10); “altars” (v. 3); “house” (vv. 4, 10); “Zion” (v. 5, 7); “doorkeeper [in God’s house]” (v. 10). This psalm centers upon God’s house.
- The loveliness of God’s house owes not to the architecture but to the One who dwells there. It is His “dwelling place.”
- Kidner: “‘How lovely’ is more exactly ‘How dear’ or ‘How beloved’; it is the language of love poetry.”
- For believers today, God’s “dwelling place” is His people. We should feel homesick when away from our home church and lovesick when away from God’s beloved.
- This reminds me of a quote by Charles Spurgeon where he refers to the church as “the dearest place on earth.” Here is the quote: *“Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. **Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us...** All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord’s people. How else is there to be a Church on the earth? If it is right for anyone to refrain from membership in the Church, it is right for everyone, and then the testimony for God would be lost to the world.”*

—“O LORD of hosts”:

- This name for God depicts Him as the commander of armies—angelic and human. This name for God appears in vv. 1, 3, 8, and 12. The psalmist’s emphasis on armies links with later references to “strength” in God (v. 5, 7) and God as our “shield” (vv. 9, 11).
- What about God’s house evokes martial images (armies, strength, shield)?
 - The pilgrim (v. 5) traveling through an arid valley (v. 6) would require strength (v. 7) and protection (v. 9).
 - Naturally, this pilgrim would associate the king (“your anointed”, v. 9) with strength and protection.
 - When Israel chose Saul as a king, they sought one who might “go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:20).
 - Therefore, the pilgrim to God’s house sought God’s strength and protection for the journey, and he expected God to provide this by showing favor to the king.
 - At the same time, the psalmist resists political idolatry—finding hope in a king rather than God (as Israel did with Saul in 1 Sam. 8:7). The psalmist places his ultimate hope in “the LORD God” to be his “sun and shield.” God is the source of the three-fold beatitude pronounced in Psalm 84 (“Blessed”—vv. 4, 5, 12). Even if God should bless through a king, the ultimate source of blessing flows from the throne above, not the throne below.
- It could be that some national crisis heightened the sense of danger and urgent call for the “LORD of hosts/armies” to rescue. If true (it seems that way to me), the psalmist’s longing for God’s house

becomes all the more powerful. In a time of crisis, where does he want to be? Not in a fortress, but in the “lovely... dwelling place” of God.

- When troubles threaten us, what do we most long for? The removal of the threat or the presence of God?

2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Selah

—“My soul longs.. faints”:

- NEB: “I pine, I faint with longing”; NIV: “my soul yearns, even faints”; NET: “I desperately want to be in the courts of the LORD...”
- From the deepest places—the “soul”—the psalmist pines away for God’s house. Again, not for the architecture, but for the one who dwells in His “dwelling place.”

—“heart and flesh sing”:

- The psalmist longs for God from within, but the longing manifests outwardly in song. “heart and flesh” means “my whole being—inward and outward.” Worshipers cannot feel inward effects that do not translate into outward expression. Anglo cultures tend to be less emotive in worship, and we attribute it to personality. “I’m just not the expressive type,” we say. We can grant some grace for that—but not a total pass. The least expressive earthly saint will shout, leap, dance, kneel, tremble, bow, and lie prostrate when we finally behold God’s unmediated radiance. If it will happen there, then it can happen here. We must be a people who worship not just with our hearts but with our bodies. With our total being.
- There is danger on the other side too. Some worship with their flesh but not their heart. Jesus told the Pharisees, “You worship with your lips, but your hearts are far from me.”
- God’s people are to worship in integrity by employing our total being. God is worthy of our “heart and flesh.” Not our heart without our flesh—cold worship. Not our flesh without our heart—hypocritical worship. But our whole heart and flesh.
- O Lord, have all of me!
- “sing”: singing provides an outlet for deep emotion. It carries our deepest aches (“my soul longs, yes, faints”, v. 1) and soaring emotions (“joy”, v. 2) on wings of melody.

—“longs... faints... joy”: I find it fascinating that the psalmist’s longing, fainting, aching soul belts out a song “for joy” (v. 2). Humans are complex. Our hearts can feel opposite emotions at once. While we hurt for more of God, our hearts can simultaneously flutter with heaven’s mirth. In the words of the Apostle, “we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10).

—“the living God”:

- This name for God makes sense in the context of God’s “dwelling place.” God lives in His house. He dwells in His dwelling place. The psalmist fixates His heart on “the living God,” not dead temple furnishings.
- The first time in the Bible where “the living God” is used comes right after the giving of the Ten Commandments:
 - 22 *"These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me. 23 And as soon as you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders. 24 And you said, 'Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire. **This day we have seen God speak with man, and man still live. 25 Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived? 27 Go near and hear all that the LORD our God will say, and speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it.'** 28 *"And the LORD heard your words, when you spoke to me. And the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. 29 Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their**

descendants forever! 30 Go and say to them, "Return to your tents." 31 But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you the whole commandment and the statutes and the rules that you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess.' 32 You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. 33 You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

- Israel felt so terrified of God's glorious presence revealed at Mount Sinai in the giving of the Ten Commandments that they marveled. How could they hear the voice of the living God—and live (Deut. 5:27)?
 - In this context, “the living God” conveys not only that He is alive but that the fire of His presence threatens their very lives. Unlike the dead idols of the nations, which threaten nobody, the living God cannot be crossed.
 - In other passages, “living God” communicates that God acts on behalf of His people and against His enemies (Jos. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; 2 Kgs. 19:4; etc.). The main point of this title is to show that God acts. Dead things do nothing. Living things do things. The living God acts—both to judge and to save.
 - The significance of “living God” in Ps. 84 is to show that the psalmist pines for God to act while singing for joy in the God who acts. His faith in God's intervention deposits joy, even in the midst of His painful longing for God's temple and a safe nation.
- “sparrow... home... swallow... nest... her young... your altars”:
- What are common birds—the “sparrow” and “swallow”—doing in God's “altars”?
 - The temple complex was huge, and birds would have no doubt flown into the outer courts, including where the altar of burnt offering was.
 - Since “altars” is plural, this must also include the altar of incense, which would have been inside the Holy Place. It's feasible that birds flew in there sometimes, just like they sometimes fly into our homes. But it would have likely been uncommon (just as it's uncommon in our homes).
 - The psalmist probably isn't literally referring to birds that nest on the actual altars. He probably intends to say “in the area of the altars”—aka, the temple.
 - The psalmist yearns to just be one of these common fowl. He envies the access these lowly creatures have to the lofty “Mount Zion.” He is distant from God's house, and he pines for proximity. He wishes he could just fly right into God's house and raise his family in the temple precincts like a bird nest that goes unnoticed. He does not long for prominence; He longs for God's proximity.
 - The “nest” where birds raise their “young” represents the psalmist's desired home. He longs to make his home in God's home. This leads right into the beatitude of verse 4—the blessing on those who dwell in God's dwelling.
 - Kidner: “Note here the two mentions of the word ‘house’ (or ‘home’), close together: one for the sparrow (3), the other for God (4), a touch that brings out His tender hospitality; and if for the birds, then surely for the servant!”

—“O LORD of hosts, My King and my God”:

- Four names of God in this verse:
 - “LORD”—Yahweh, the personal name of God.
 - “...of hosts”—He is the commander of God's army, both angelic and human.
 - “King”: later the psalm will mention God's anointed—His human king. The human king always represents the King of Kings. The psalmist hopes ultimately in the latter, not the former. However, in a “messianic” sense, the human king is Jesus. It is appropriate to hope in God and His Messiah (cf. Ps. 2).
 - “God”: the Creator, who is distinguished from creation by His many features, including independence (unlike creatures, God depends on nothing), immutability (unlike creatures, God does not change), infinitude (unlike creatures, God is infinite in time, space, and every attribute; i.e., infinite love, infinite goodness, infinite holiness, etc.), and invisibility (see 1 Tim. 6:16).

- What do these four names of God accomplish in the psalm? They remind us that God is not just one thing to us; He is everything. He is personal, as the personal name Yahweh suggests; He defends us as the commander of the armies; He rules over us as King; and He is transcendently capable of meeting every need as only God can.
- "My" makes it extra personal. The psalmist longs for deep intimacy.

—"Blessed... dwell in your house":

- Like the sparrow and swallow that nests by the altars, the psalmist pronounces a blessing on temple-dwellers. To dwell in God's dwelling is to be continually in His presence. This pilgrim longs to no longer be a pilgrim.
- This is one of three beatitudes in the psalm. This one focuses on the blessedness of dwelling with God (v. 4); the next one highlights the blessedness even of those on pilgrimage to God's dwelling place (v. 5); the last one summarizes both by pronouncing a blessing on those who "trust in you" (v. 12). If we trust in God—whether near or far from Him—God will bless us.
- Following the pathway of these beatitudes, we learn that whether we are near or far from God and His felt presence, we are blessed for trusting in Him. Yes, we are specially blessed in our seasons of nearness to God, but there is another kind of blessing when we are "on pilgrimage." As long as we trust, no matter where we go, we are blessed.
- Kidner: "Three times he uses the word 'Blessed', or 'Happy': once wistfully (4), once resolutely (5), once in deep contentment (12)."

5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. 6 As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. 8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah. 9 Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed!

—"Blessed... strength in you": first, we were blessed for dwelling in God's house. The image was one of comfort, rest, peace. Now, we are blessed with "strength." Why the shift?

—Because this stanza shifts from imagery of God's house (vv. 1-4) to journeying toward God's house (vv. 5-8). It shifts from the longing for rest in God's presence to the strength God provides while we journey with Him.

—Pilgrims need "strength" for the journey. These "Blessed" ones who find their "strength" in God (v. 5) travel from "strength to strength" (v. 7)—growing in fortitude rather than wearing out.

—This journey would have taken them from Israel's borders to Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

—"in whose heart are highways to Zion":

- The people who find their strength in God are the ones "in whose heart are highways to Zion." Highways provide ease of travel. God's people are pilgrim people. Ancient Israelites made a pilgrimage from Egypt to Sinai so they could worship. Then, they made a pilgrimage to the Promised Land to establish a permanent place for worship. Then, God's law required them to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for worship feasts. In John 4, Jesus said that God's temple would no longer reside in Jerusalem; a new age had arrived. Now, we worship "in Spirit and in truth"—anywhere, any time. Nevertheless, we are still a pilgrim people, journeying from Babylon to New Jerusalem, from the worldly city to the city of God, from the world-as-it-is to the world-as-it-will-be.
- On our pilgrimage to the City of God, we grow weary like these ancient sojourners to Jerusalem. But we travel from "strength to strength", turning our "Valley of Baca" into "a place of springs"—how?—by setting our "heart" on the "highways to Zion." In other words, when we refuse to settle in Babylon; when we refuse to settle for the worldly city; when we refuse to find our hope and foundation and security in the world-as-it-is, but rather when we set our "hope fully on the grace that will be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13)—then, God's strength fills us.
- This reminds me of Hebrews 11:
 - *9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.... 13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people*

who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

- Every time the patriarchs settled somewhere—in Haran, in Egypt, Gerar—they sinned. The fathers were at their best when they lived in tents and built altars. They were at their worst when they settled in foreign lands as their homelands; they never built altars in Haran, Egypt, or Gerar. The pilgrim people of God must avoid settling in this world. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Pilgrim people are worshipers whose hearts are set on Zion.
- As New Covenant believers, we set our hearts on Zion by placing our hope in the return of Jesus. In Revelation 11, this return is portrayed as an opening of the heavenly temple—of heavenly Zion. In Christ's death, the veil tore on the earthly temple, granting us access to God's presence by faith. But at Christ's return, the veil tears on God's heavenly temple, granting us access to God's presence—not by faith, but by sight (2 Cor. 5).
- The best New Covenant equivalent to having highways in our heart toward Zion would be 2 Timothy 4:8 (NIV), where God promises a heavenly crown "to all who have longed for his appearing." The longing for Zion is a longing for God. We long for God in our daily devotions and weekly church gatherings, but more than that, we long to see God in the face of Christ. We long to "look full in His wonderful face." Whatever we long for most—a better job, a better life stage, or the appearing of Christ—is where our true hope lies.
- Everyone's heart has a highway. If not to Zion, we are seeking the fast track to success, the fast track to pleasure, and the fast track to bigger and better things. Lot settled on the outskirts of Sodom, seeing that it looked like "the garden of the LORD"—a reference to Eden. Before Lot knew it, he was not on the outskirts but at the heart of the city, and his soul had become so entangled that an angel had to snatch him out of there before the so-called garden went up in flames.
- Abraham, in contrast, set his heart on pilgrimage. He chose tents over Sodom's security. He yielded the better land to Lot, trusting that his inheritance was in God, not to be acquired through selfish scheming to get ahead.

—"Valley of Baca": Along the way, pilgrims might encounter this infamous valley. Like Death Valley, the Bermuda Triangle, Area 51, or Ground Zero, geography assumes symbolism in every culture. Scholars debate the significance of this valley, but the contrast at the end of verse 6 with "springs... rain... pools" suggests it was an arid place that sapped you of natural "strength."

—The Valley of Baca probably resembles the "Trail of Tears" in terms of symbolism.

—"they make it a place of springs... early rains... pools":

- "they make" indicates proactivity. Not every pilgrim has the same experience. Some gripe and moan about the Valley of Baca. Others make it a fresh spring.
- The various water sources speak of life and vitality. A dehydrated person has no strength, but a hydrated person can endure any arid valley. Symbolically, the "springs" point us to the Holy Spirit:
 - John 4:13-14: Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
 - John 7:38-39: Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
- So what do these pilgrims do differently from others to "make" their desert a pool of Holy Spirit awesomeness? They don't cross their arms and demand God meet them on their terms. They adopt the posture of Psalm 84. They center their longing on God's presence more than anything in this world. They yearn not for prominence but for proximity to Yahweh. They cry out to God as "My" God. They make Him their everything: their personal friend, Yahweh; the One who fights their battles; their ruling King; their God over all. And as we'll see later, the God of Jacob, their sun, and their shield. These pilgrims gamble their fortunes on God alone. He's worth the hardest journey. He

makes Death Valley a spring-fed oasis. When you set your heart on God above all, whether He feels near or far, you are blessed—even on pilgrimage.

- Kidner: “they make it a place of springs’... is a classic statement of the faith which dares to dig blessings out of hardships.”

—“each one appears before God in Zion”: these pilgrims will reach their destination. If others die in the valley or turn back home, these pilgrims march ahead until they arrive, moving from “strength to strength” as they journey to Zion.

—Verse 8 relates to verse 3 in that both get personal, multiplying names for God. Added to the catalogue of names is “God of Jacob”, which equates to “God of my fathers.” The psalmist remembers not just his own history with God but the history of his people. It stirs faith. For the first time, he petitions God—“hear my prayer; give ear.”

—We don’t learn what he prayed until verse 9.

—Why does he wait to petition God until verses 8-9? These verses reflect the desperation of a pilgrimage through the Valley of Baca. The air is dusty and hot. The psalmist cries, “O God!” like a high-pressure geyser, bursting in a world of pain. His petition reflects the state of his heart.

—“Behold our shield... look on the face of your anointed”:

- The psalmist prays for God to “Behold” and “look”. All of us have felt the pain of being overlooked. To not feel seen is deeply hurtful. When Hagar flees a horrific family situation, God reveals Himself to her as “El Roi”—the God who sees me.
- When the Psalmist prays this way, He asks for God to see. But more than that, He asks God to act on what He sees.
- In his longing for God’s house, he struggles to feel the “strength” he’s believing for. We should not suppose that a supernatural cloud of strength, glory, and comfort will envelop us the first moment we pray. Turmoil often tarries. God seems to delay. He has good purposes for every delay. This is why “blessed is the one who trusts in you” (v. 12).
- “Behold our shield” means, “make our shields effective in battle.”
- “look on the face of your anointed” parallels “Behold our shield.” The “anointed”—king of Israel—led Israel’s armies. The psalmist is thus praying for God to show favor to the king and his armies.
- But what does this have to do with Psalm 84? As mentioned earlier, we cannot divorce the martial themes of the song from its central emphasis on intimacy with God. It really does seem that foreign armies endanger the nation. The psalmist looks to the king for protection, but more than that, he looks to “my King and my God” (v. 3). Even in danger, we find our greatest hope in God, not kings, armies, or worldly comforts. When we fix our hearts on God, He makes our hearts and bodies secure.

10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

—“For”:

- The following statements about delight in God flow from the previous section about the psalmist’s painful pilgrimage and desperate prayer for protection.
- What is the correlation? The whole reason for his pilgrimage—his willingness to endure exhaustion and danger—is to be in God’s presence. He cries out to God in verses 8-9 because the journey afflicts him (vv. 5-7) and God awaits Him (vv. 10-11).

—“day... thousand”: temporary association with God surpasses permanent residence anywhere.

—“courts... elsewhere...”:

- The “courts” are temple courts. The psalmist prizes God’s house above every mansion, beach, or mountain vista.
- The “courts” of the temple are not even the most intimate parts. They lie beyond the heart of God’s house—the “Holy Place” and “Most Holy Place”—which reside indoors, surrounded by walls and curtains.
- An equivalent expression might be, “I’d rather dwell in the corner of God’s house than anywhere near the wicked.”

—“doorkeeper/house of my God... dwell/tents of wickedness”:

- The first contrast is between being a “doorkeeper” and to permanently “dwell.” Temporary association with God surpasses permanent association with the wicked. We saw this above also in the contrast between “one day” and “a thousand elsewhere.” Here, the contrast is similar, but it layers in God’s holy abode, contrasted with that of sinful men. This comes to light in the next contrast.
- The second contrast is between “house of my God” and “tents of wickedness”:
 - This contrast includes irony. The most logical verb would be “dwell in the house of my God” and “stay in the tents of wickedness.” Houses are places to dwell, but tents are places to temporarily stay. In this case, however, the psalmist associates “dwell” (permanence) with “tents of wickedness (transience). He furthermore links “house of my God” with “doorkeeper”—which parallels “day in your courts.” The irony is that “house” conveys permanence and “doorkeeper,” transience.
 - Let me summarize that: the psalmist ironically associates a permanent word (“dwell”) with a transient one (“tent”). He does the same on the other side, linking a permanent word (“house”) with a transient (“doorkeeper” which parallels “a day”—not a thousand days—“in your courts”).
 - What purpose do these ironies serve? They show the illusion of worldly permanence and heavenly impermanence.
 - The “tent of wickedness” looks permanent—like we could “dwell” there. In truth, the wildest worldly pleasures are like tent camping: temporary. Soon the pleasures are gone. The tent of worldly satisfaction, security, and significance staves off our boredom and anxiety for a time, but not eternity.
 - The “house of my God” appears temporary—like serving as “doorkeeper” for only a “day in your courts.” As Karl Marx once claimed, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” Others have labeled it a crutch for weak people. I would contend that Christ is not my crutch; He is my wheelchair. One day, however, I’ll receive my resurrection body. On that day, all will see that Christianity’s comfort was not a temporary opiate but the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14). In contrast, Karl Marx’s claim to sobriety was a drunken haze that yielded nothing but earthly anguish for millions and an eternal hangover for Marx himself.
 - Things are not as they appear! O Lord, save us from illusions!!
- Some note that the “doorkeeper” or “gatekeeper” in Scripture was an honored position, but this psalm seems to portray it as lowly. For this reason, Ross translates it, “I choose waiting at the threshold of the house of my God more than dwelling in the tents of wickedness.”

—“For the LORD God is a sun and shield”:

- Why would he rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God? Because God is a “sun and shield to him.”
- As a “sun,” God...
 - Illuminates (His Word, our world, our hearts, etc).
 - Inspires (fills our spiritual eyes with light, aka hope).
 - Gives life (to our hearts and bodies and to everything around us)
 - Comforts (providing warm comfort during cold hardships)
- As a “shield,” God...
 - Defends us from human enemies
 - Defends us from spiritual enemies
 - Defends us from all manner of hardships and trials
- Putting these together: the psalmist would rather spend a moment in God’s presence because God does all these things for him. The “tent of wickedness” offers none of these blessings. Even if the world attains temporary satisfaction, security, and significance, it will not remain. The godless will never enjoy the blessedness of our “sun and shield,” who illuminates, inspires, gives life, comforts, and defends us.

—“favor and honor”: it seems that “favor” relates to God as the “sun”—His light shines upon us—and “honor” correlates to God as our “shield”—the honor of victory on the battlefield.

—I cannot merit God’s favor; I cannot manipulate God into honoring me.

—Man shows favor based on bias, but God shows no partiality. Moreover, man manipulates perceptions to win worldly esteem (it's called "spin"), but God cannot be manipulated. God "bestows favor" according to His own good pleasure, and He honors those who honor Him (1 Sam. 2).

—"No good thing does he withhold": I can't speak any better than Kidner on this: "It may seem a truism that what God will 'withhold' is not 'nothing', but 'no good thing' (Ps. 34:10); yet the gospel showed the unimagined length and breadth of this (Rom. 8:32; Phil. 4:6-19)." God did not withhold His own Son! Why would God withhold any good thing if He didn't withhold Jesus?!

—"from those who walk uprightly": we can't enjoy the blessings of the gospel if our hearts are not given over to it. Friendship with the world is enmity towards God (Jam. 4).

12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

—"LORD of hosts": for the fourth time, he uses this title. The psalmist feels danger from enemies. Perhaps his pilgrimage is in wartime. Our journey to New Jerusalem is likewise in wartime.

—For this third and final beatitude, see comments under verse 4.