

The Joy Of Worship

Bible Background • PSALM 84

Printed Text • PSALM 84 | Devotional Reading • 2 CHRONICLES 29:25–30

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCOVER why the psalmist expressed joy in worship, FEEL the joy of worship, and PROCLAIM the living presence of God throughout creation.

In Focus

“Make a left turn up here,” Mardelle told the driver. It had been nearly 40 years since she had been back to the family home in South Carolina. After college, she got married to Theodore, who soon became a Foreign Service Officer for the U.S. State Department.

Over their life together, Theodore had been given multiple postings outside the United States, all over Africa, Central America, and South America. They had only a few short years together after Theodore retired and passed away, Mardelle decided to return to her hometown and live in her parents’ house. She found herself wide-eyed on the way from the airport, taking in all the ways the neighborhoods had changed. But she was happy to see the things that were still standing, unchanged by time—the fountain in the square across from city hall, the restaurant where Theodore had proposed to her, the middle school where she first developed her love of French, which served her well in several of the places they had stayed.

And now, a warm, joyful feeling washed over Mardelle as she heard leaves crunching under the tires as the car made the turn onto the path leading to her family’s house. Ahead, she could see the gabled roof, the bay window at the front, and the wide wraparound porch. Mardelle breathed a word of thanks to God for all that had led to this moment, and a happy welcome home.

Where have you felt most at home? Have you ever had that feeling during worship?

Words You Should Know

A. Amiable (Psalm 84:1) yedid (Heb.)— Beloved, lovely

B. Baca (v. 6) baka’ (Heb.)—Weeping, lamentation

Say It Correctly

Selah. SAY-lah.

Baca. baw-KAW.

KJV

Psalm 84:1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!

2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.

6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.

10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

NLT

Psalm 84 For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of Heaven's Armies.

2 I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God.

3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young at a place near your altar, O LORD of Heaven's Armies, my King and my God!

4 What joy for those who can live in your house, always singing your praises. Interlude

5 What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

6 When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.

7 They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.

8 O LORD God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer. Listen, O God of Jacob. Interlude

9 O God, look with favor upon the king, our shield! Show favor to the one you have anointed.

10 A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.

11 For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The LORD will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.

12 O LORD of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you.

The People, Places, and Times

Korah. The sons of Korah (who wrote this psalm and others) were the remnant left after their ancestor was destroyed for rebellion against Moses. The rebellion of Korah angered the Lord, and He caused the Earth to open and consume Korah and those that rebelled with him

(Numbers 16:1–33). Then fire was sent to consume 250 men. The children of Korah, however, survived the judgment of God (Numbers 26:9–11). This remnant and their descendants proved faithful to God and are listed among their fellow Levites in various positions at the Tabernacle and Temple, often as singers or instrumentalists (1 Chronicles 6, 23–26).

Background

The sons of Korah were porters (1 Chronicles 9:17) and musicians (2 Chronicles 20:19) for the priests. These positions meant that they dwelt in God's house. This physical closeness to God's house prompted their love and desire of God in ways that others may not have felt. The sons of Korah long for the Lord's house because they long for the presence of the Lord. Those who can live in God's house should always respond in praise because nothing is better than being in God's presence. There is joy experienced in worship in God's presence, and the benefits of joyfully worshipping God are immeasurable.

At-A-Glance

1. The Tabernacle of Worship (Psalm 84:1–4)
2. The Valley of Baca (vv. 5–7)
3. Reverential Worship (vv. 8–9)
4. Joy in Worship (vv. 10–12)

In Depth

1. The Tabernacle of Worship (Psalm 84:1–4)

The Tabernacle was a sacred place where God manifested His presence and communicated His will. The physical Tabernacle of God is "amiable" or beloved because God dwells there (v. 1), and the psalmists' souls long to unite with God. They so intently desire the courts of the Lord, that they are weakened. Their committed love for God is passionate, so their flesh cries out for God. There is an insatiable desire to dwell in the house of God, as a bird desires a nest (v. 3). The Tabernacle of God is an honored place. Those who dwell in the presence of God should perpetually praise, worship, and adore God (v. 4).

How does your desire for the presence of God compare to the psalmists'?

2. The Valley of Baca (vv. 5–7)

Our definition of blessed should align with the Word of God. We are blessed only in God. The valley of Baca is the place of weeping or a valley of tears. Finding strength in God and having a heart fixed on God is the source of greatest blessing (v. 5) Even in sorrow and times of weeping, which we all experience in life, with God those places are made easier (v. 6). Faithful believers in God will experience the journey and grow from strength to strength (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). We all become stronger as we grow with God, never weaker (v. 7).

In your valley of tears, how did you keep your heart fixed on God?

3. Reverential Worship (vv. 8–9)

Recognizing God in all of His splendor should dictate how we approach Him. The reverence for God as the “LORD God of hosts” indicates the writers’ honor for God being Lord over heaven and earth’s armies. God is so vast, yet the psalmists approach God requesting attention to their prayer (v. 8). In the midst of His sovereign rule, they desire God’s ear to be attentive to them. They recognize God is their shield and protector (v. 9). We want God to look upon us when we call to Him. We must give humble attention to the majesty of God in the midst of our prayer requests. God is attracted to our reverential worship.

How do you approach God in reverential worship?

4. Joy in Worship (vv. 10–12)

Any day in God’s presence is more precious than a thousand days anywhere else (v. 10). Time with God should be the most dedicated and valued of all the time we have. No time on earth is more valuable. Our time should not be more concentrated on temporal moments than moments with eternal significance. The Lord our God is both our guiding light and our protector (v. 11). God gives us both grace and glory. He guarantees that we have grace in difficult times and glory in times of success in Him (v. 11). As God’s grace and glory is given to us, we are compelled to walk uprightly. And as we walk uprightly, God bestows wonderful things upon us (v. 11). When we trust God, we are blessed and have everything we need (v. 12).

How have God’s grace and glory caused you to walk uprightly?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did your desire for God’s presence change at your conversion (Psalm 84:2)?
2. Differentiate the respect for God’s Tabernacle and Temple, and the respect for God’s house now (v. 4).

Discuss the Meaning

1. How does the reverential worship of the psalmist impact your thoughts of expressing worship currently?
2. How do personal views of God impact how people embrace time spent in the sanctuary?

Application for Activation

Social Media. Family Gatherings. Work and domestic obligations. These often compete with time in the presence of God. The psalmist longed to be in the house of the Lord; the absence of God’s presence weakened them. Consider your time. Consider your ways. How much does your soul long for God’s presence? Has your longing of worship grown cold? What actions must be taken to return to worship in God’s presence?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Psalm 84

Psalm 84 is a reflection of the desire to worship in God's house. As the superscription indicates, this psalm is one of eleven psalms attributed to the sons of Korah (see 42; 44-49; 84; 85; 87; 88). Korah, the predecessor of musicians from the tribe of Levi, was among 250 conspirators who rebelled against Moses during the exodus to the Promised Land. As a result of this rebellion, God opened up the earth and sent fire from heaven to consume every one of them (Numbers 16:1-40). God preserved Korah's descendants (Numbers 26:11), and they remained faithful serving God as musicians in the Temple. In this psalm, one will feel the sense of joy, safety, and security as one worships the Lord in His tabernacle.

1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

The psalmist begins this song with a sense of awe and wonder. Addressing the Lord, he expresses how lovely and beautiful it is to be in God's house. The adjective "amiable" is the Hebrew yedid (yeh-DEED). It expresses how beautiful or delightful it is to be in the house of God. The word "tabernacles" is the Hebrew word mishkan (mish-KAWN'), and it means a dwelling place, a house, residence, or temple. The word is in the plural form here, which may suggest that the psalmist is not referring to a particular house or the Temple. Rather it is used metaphorically to express the idea of being in the presence of God.

It has, however, been suggested that the plural is used here to include all the places in or near the Temple complex where acts of divine worship were performed. Since we don't know when the psalm was composed, the idea here could mean being in the presence of the Lord wherever He is worshiped. God does not live in man-made structures (Acts 7:47-50), but He is worshiped anytime and everywhere. Nonetheless, we still have special places dedicated for His worship. Continuing his excitement about this tabernacle, the psalmist expresses his heartfelt yearning even to the point of exhaustion. His "soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD"

and his “heart” and “flesh” cry out loud for the living God. We notice here that his whole being—soul, heart, and flesh—is desirous for the court of the Lord for worship. The word “crieth” comes from the Hebrew *ranan* (raw-NON); it means “to shout aloud for joy, to sing for joy.” This yearning to worship God does not raise a plaintive cry, but a joyful shout. This is a picture of one who once worshiped the Lord in His sanctuary and now is excited to go again. This is significant because only “the living God” alone can satisfy the desires of the soul (Psalm 42:2).

3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. 4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

After expressing his sincere longing to worship in the Lord’s house, the psalmist recalls the freedom even birds have to live and have their young in the very house of God. Here he envies the small birds that have unrestricted access to the Tabernacle and even to the altar. There they are able to build their nests and lay their young ones. By this, the psalmist seems to imply that if the little birds could have such freedom and access to the Tabernacle, how much more should he, a child of God. The words “sparrow” and “swallow” seem to represent little birds such as pigeons that often perch and build their nests on house rafters. It is common to see small birds in houses or churches. In verse 4, the psalmist, still addressing the Lord, tends to move from the envy of the birds that are allowed to nest in the Temple, to the blessedness of those who dwell in the Lord’s house, “they will be still praising thee.” The word “blessed” comes from the Hebrew *‘esher* (EH-sheer); which means happy or happiness. It is best rendered as an interjection, “how happy!” “They that dwell in thy house” would refer to the priests and Levites, who had their permanent dwelling in or near the Tabernacle or Temple and who wholly devoted themselves to serving the Lord continually (see Psalm 65:4).

As Christians, we can meet and praise the Lord anywhere, but going to the house of God—a church building or a cathedral—helps us to step aside from our busy life to focus on, meditate, and worship the Lord with other people. There is an aura of praise, blissfulness, and joy when a Christian enters a sacred place of worship to praise and pray to the Lord, especially with fellow believers (Psalm 133). That is how heaven will be (Revelation 3:12), a perpetual place of worship and praise.

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. 6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

The psalmist continues to express how blessed or happy are those who have a relationship with the Lord. Not only are they blessed, but their strength is dependent in the Lord. The poetic structure of verse 5 is difficult to interpret. The NLT renders the second part of verse 5 as, “who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.” The “ways of them” *mesillah* (meh-seel-LAH) means “a thoroughfare, causeway, course, highway.” It appears then that what the psalmist has in mind is the Law of Moses, which requires all observant Jews to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate three certain holidays each year. Making this journey is not an easy task as we can see in the next two verses (6, 7), but the one who relies, not on his or her own strength, but on the Lord’s and whose heart is focused on the trip (i.e., set their mind on the pilgrimage) is blessed. What we

encounter here is a sense of resolute determination and reliance on God's strength to make the journey because of the expected outcome.

Verse 6 describes the difficulties of this journey and how the pilgrims can overcome them and finally achieve their goal—appearing before God. The word “Baca” or Baka’ (Heb. baw-KAW) is from the word for “weeping,” and might refer to an actual valley commonly traveled on the approach to Jerusalem. It is also possible that this name was figuratively used to describe the difficulties people encounter, and how God was with them and provided for them (cf. “the valley of the shadow of death,” Psalm 23:4). Finding water in the desert wilderness is a common example and image of how God provides (Exodus 17:1–7; Isaiah 43:19). As believers pass through the wildernesses of life in this world, God promises to open for them fountains in the deserts, and springs in the dry places.

7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

Here we notice a change from singular (“blessed is the man,” v. 5) to plural (“they go,” v. 7)—which indicates unity and working together to draw strength from one another. The pilgrimage of life is better and best attained in a community. Therefore the more the pilgrims march together, the more their strength grows; they bear their trials better and overcome difficulties more easily. The result is that they succeed in their quest—they will all appear before God in Zion. What a day it will be when all believers are united in love, praise, and worship before the Almighty God. Life here would be more bearable, and in heaven He will be glorified.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. 9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.

Continuing the praise, the psalmist calls on the Lord to hear his prayer. Here again, he appeals to God's attributes of authority and power: “O LORD God of hosts.” The psalmist also appeals to God's faithfulness as a covenantkeeping God, calling Him the “God of Jacob.” As humans, we habitually pay attention (i.e., give our ears) to only what we want to hear—something that is important or interesting to us.

However, we turn away our ears from what we do not want to hear. Thankfully, God is not like us and always hears the prayers of His children. The psalmist is desperate to be in the house of God; therefore he calls on the Lord to pay attention to his request. The petition continues as he again appeals to God's protective nature—as the “shield.” “Shield” translates the Hebrew, *magen* (maw-GANE), figuratively used here is a protector or defense. God is our defense; He protects us from all evil.

The author appeals on behalf of God's anointed—that God should “look upon the face of (His) anointed.” It is suggested that the psalmist is referring to King David or one of the kings of Israel. The word “anointed” is *mashiach* (maw-SHEE-akh), which means a consecrated person set apart for service as king, prophet, or priest. *Mashiach* also means “the Messiah” or in Greek, “Christ.” Although Christians refer to Jesus as the “Messiah” or the Christ, the allusion here does not seem to refer to Christ.

10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

The author's craving for worship in God's house and its splendor reaches its climax as he concludes the psalm. He says that it is better (or more profitable) to spend a day in the Lord's courts than to spend a thousand elsewhere. He continues that he would rather be a "doorkeeper" in the house of God than to live with the wicked. That is how awesome and splendid it is to be part of the Lord's household. The word used here for doorkeeper is not an actual job, but simply denotes someone who stands on the threshold. However, the psalmist and indeed everyone who has relationship with the Lord would prefer to occupy this position in the house of God than to try to dwell comfortably "in the tents of wickedness," where the glory of the Lord is absent.

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Verse 11 gives further reasons the house of the Lord is preferable to anywhere else. Firstly, the Lord is sun and shield; He is all that we need to survive on earth. As the sun is the source of life and light to the world, so is the Lord to His people—those who love and adore Him. He is the source of life (Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 10:17, 60:19-20; Malachi 4:2). Without the sun, nothing will survive on earth, life will be extinct. He provides us with divine protection as a shield (vv. 8-9).

Secondly, the Lord is the giving God—He gives grace and glory. Christians, our walk of faith begins with grace and ultimately will end with glory or honor. Thirdly, the Lord is generous. The Lord may not give us everything we want, but He gives us everything that is good for us, all that we need. The Lord will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. Remember the implication of this: if God is withholding something from you, it might be because it is not a good thing. Jesus reinforces this truth of God's generosity and care in the Sermon on the Mount when He says, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11). Christ's sacrifice of Himself further shows God's character and inspires Paul to write, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). Here Paul establishes the unimaginable length and breadth of God's magnanimity to those who put their trust in Him.

12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

This whole psalm describes the God we serve and worship, the God that deserves our praise and honor. The psalmist concludes this song by affirming the pleasure and joy we gain by trusting in the Lord: "O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." This also echoes the joy of the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked but puts their trust in Lord in the opening verses of the psalter (Psalm 1:1-3).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Has Done Great Things
(Psalm 126)

TUESDAY

Joy Fulfilled in Love
(John 15:9-17)

WEDNESDAY

God's Joy is Your Strength
(Nehemiah 8:9-12)

THURSDAY

Joy Fulfilled in Christ's Sacrifice
(Philippians 2:1-11)

FRIDAY

Rejoice in the Lord Always
(Philippians 4:4-9)

SATURDAY

Fullness of Joy
(Psalm 16)

SUNDAY

How Lovely is God's Dwelling Place
(Psalm 84)