

God's Gratitude Playlist: Psalm 84

November 14, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you*" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Reflect on this Scripture: Psalm 84 NRSV

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

*² My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.*

³ O LORD of hosts, my Ruler and my God, at your altars even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young,

*⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise.*

*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 tears
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.*

*⁷ They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*

⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!

⁹ Behold our shield, O God; look upon 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; and bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly.*

¹² O LORD of hosts, blessed are those who trust in you!

This Week: Psalm 84

The Book of Psalms is the Song book (and prayer book) of Israel and the early church. While there are many different kinds of psalms, the two dozen or so 'Songs of Thanksgiving' create a "gratitude playlist" for God's people. Today we consider Psalm 84.

Psalm 84 is perhaps the most expressive and beautiful of all the songs of Zion ('Zion' associated with Mt. Zion in Jerusalem and the Temple). Like the other songs of Zion, it may originally have been recited or sung by pilgrims as they made their way toward, arrived at, or walked about Jerusalem. Verse 1 seems to offer the psalmist's enthusiastic response upon first seeing the city or the Temple, an experience that the psalmist reflects on in v. 2. Verses 3-4 are linked by the repetition of the word "home"/"house", which may derive from the psalmist's contemplation of the happiness of the temple personnel who resided there. The word "blessed" (or happy) becomes a key word in the psalm (see vv. 4, 5, 12), and vv. 5-7 extend the experience of blessing to the pilgrims who will see God in Zion. The two initial and concluding sections (vv. 1-4, 8-12) each consist of seven poetic lines. While this may be coincidental, the effect is to focus attention on vv. 5-7 as the central unit, thus highlighting the experience of the pilgrim, "in whose *heart* are the highways to Zion." It may not be coincidental that v. 5 begins with the word "blessed," which is featured in the concluding verses of the surrounding sections. By the end of the poem, the beatitudes in vv. 4-5, 12 have constructed a compelling portrait of a faithful follower of God.

As Gen 31:30 suggests, longing is what one naturally feels for home. In other words, the psalmist is homesick for the true home: God's house. The sight of birds nesting within the temple complex (v. 3) and of the cultic officials at work leads the psalmist to reflect upon the appropriateness of literally finding a "home" in the Temple (see Pss 23:5-6; 27:4). That said, the address of God as "my King," along with the repetition of the phrase "Lord of hosts" from v. 1 (see also vv. 8, 12), suggests that the psalmist's praise is not ultimately of the place but of God. The experience of the particular place puts the worshipper in touch with God's sovereignty over all places, including their own heart.

-- Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol IV, p. 1012-13

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Psalm 84 stands out as a celebration of God's gift of the temple as a special place to encounter God. As you look back over your spiritual journey, is there a special place that helped you experience God's presence? If so, what about that place or space was inspiring?

2. For over two centuries, the early Christian community had no buildings set apart for gathered worship. Too, the word we translate 'church' from the New Testament has nothing to do with a physical building, but instead refers to the gathered community. During the pandemic-related time of limited physical gatherings, what did you miss most about being with others in worship and fellowship?
3. Review verse 5 "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*" Given that "Zion" is likely shorthand for God's presence at the Temple in Jerusalem, what do you think this "*heart highway*" refers to? Can someone have a heart highway to God's presence today? How?
4. What does verse 6 – "*As they go through the valley of tears they make it a place of springs*" mean to you? Have you ever known someone whose faith helped them navigate a valley of tears? What can we learn from them.
5. Ultimately after the resurrection, the followers of Jesus understood Christ and his community to constitute a new temple. Peter writes, "*like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...*" (1 Peter 2: 5a). How are gathered believers like a new temple today?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC and/or journal in the "*Morning by Morning*" gratitude resource.
2. Write your own brief Psalm or prayer of gratitude this week.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Psalm 84:1-2
*"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!
2 My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God."*