

The Joy of Worship

Karah breathed a sigh of joy when she saw the church sign, “House of Praise.”

“Looks good, doesn’t it, baby?” said her husband, Lemond, as he pulled their car onto the church’s parking lot. “It’s been a long time since you’ve been to the House of God!”

Karah’s second pregnancy was a premature birth with complications. She and her precious, Nadia, had been in the hospital for 2 ½ weeks. Then, mother and daughter had stayed home for 2 ½ months.

“I felt like I was in quarantine, not being able to come to church. I just longed to be here again,” Karah said, as she unbuckled herself and opened the SUV door.

The couple unpacked the stroller and their children from the back seat, and Karah was off to the races! “Hey, slow down,” teased Lemond, as he gripped the hand of their three-year-old son.

The family was a little late, and as they entered the vestibule, they were met with the melodious sounds of the praise and worship team. They were singing one of Karah’s favorite worship songs.

“Every praise is to our God. Every word of worship with one accord,” sang along Karah. “Every praise, every praise is to our God!”

“Good morning, Sister Karah, so good to see you and the new baby,” said one of the greeters. “Praise God, we have been praying for you!”

“Thanks so much,” beamed Karah. “I’m so happy to be back in the house of the Lord!”

- 1. What are things you sometimes long for?**
- 2. What can you do to help these to be realized?**
- 3. What do you need to keep in mind as you do this?**

A Longing for Home

Psalm 84:1-4, KJV

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.

Psalm 84:1-4, NIV

For the director of music.
According to gittith. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!

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

³Even 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.

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

Today's psalm is a lamentation—a passionate expression over something that was lost. It also describes his longing for life to return to the way it was in the past.

Although the exact circumstances that prompted his lament are uncertain, we know the psalmist was a descendant of Korah, one of the Levitical families David appointed to minister in the temple. He was physically separated from the temple and could no longer perform the services there he had been assigned. Perhaps enemies were then threatening Jerusalem and he was forced to flee.

We see his intense desire to return to Jerusalem and the temple. Every bone in his body ached to be restored to the courts of the temple where God dwelled. Although

this could also be a desire to be in an eternal home with his Lord, it's more likely he longed for restoration to the temple where he once served.

He identified his Lord as a "living God" (vs. 2). Unlike the gods made by the hands of men, he knew he worshiped the "LORD Almighty" (vs. 3), a God fully capable of fulfilling his desire to be in the place where God dwelled.

When the psalmist noted that sparrows and swallows have nests near the altar of God, he may have been thinking about ones that built their nests under the eaves of the temple or in other places on the temple grounds. He may have been expressing a bit of envy for those in God's creation that continued to be near where God dwelled while he was being kept from it. They were indeed blessed.

4. *What seems to be the context of this psalm?*

5. *What did the psalmist long for?*

6. *What did some birds have that he didn't? How did he respond to his knowledge of this?*

A Confidence of Provision

Psalm 84:5-7, KJV

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.

Psalm 84:5-7, NIV

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

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

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

Although the psalmist longed to be restored to the temple so that he could once again be in the presence of God,

he knew that the pathway back would not be easy. To successfully complete it, he had to rely on God.

The people of Israel were expected to travel to Jerusalem three times a year in order to participate in the festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). Their journeys often took days to complete. Some passed through arid areas where they had to depend on springs found along their paths or the rain to satisfy their thirst.

Baka (vs. 6) typically means “balsam trees,” which are common in arid valleys. But *Baka* also can mean “a place of weeping.” It is circumstances where *baka* (tears) are shed. His “Valley of Baka” may describe what the psalmist expected to experience on his pilgrimage.

Going “from strength to strength” (vs. 7) could be compared to a traveler going from one well to another or from one spring to another along a path through a barren region. An apt comparison would be the Israelites’ journey from water source to water source through the Sinai as they made their way to the promised land.

The psalmist knew his journey to God’s presence was going to be difficult and accompanied by tears. But he was confident God was going to meet his needs along the way.

7. *What did the psalmist compare his journey home to?*

8. *What did he expect to experience along the way?*

9. *What did he place his trust in?*

A Prayer for the King

Psalm 84:8-12, KJV

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

Psalm 84:8-12, NIV

⁸Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;

listen to me, God of Jacob.

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

¹⁰Better is one day in your courts

better than a thousand.
I had rather be a door-
keeper 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.

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

¹¹For 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.

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

The psalmist trusted in God and His provisions on his journey, but he also knew that the success of his pilgrimage was tied to the king's actions, too. He recognized that God would use his king as a protector, so he asked God to look with favor on his king, God's "anointed one" (vs. 9).

The psalmist also recognized that it would have been easy while away from Jerusalem to seek fulfillment in the tents of the wicked and enjoy the fruits of their labors. But he knew to resist the temptation to live like the unrighteous and to remain focused on his desire to once again "be a doorkeeper in the house of my God" (vs. 10).

Ultimately, it was God who was going to end the darkness he was experiencing. God is the "sun and shield" (vs. 11) that would provide his protection. God gives good things to those whose "walk" is "blameless." Those who trust in the Lord will be "blessed" (vs. 12). He was sure if he relied on God, what he yearned for would be realized.

10. *Why did the psalmist pray for God to look with favor upon His "anointed one"?*

11. *What temptation did he resist? What helped him do so?*

12. *What did he note in the final verse of this psalm?*

What I Longed For

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, I didn't give much thought to how things were going to change as a result of being asked to stay home as much as possible, to wear a mask when not at home, and to practice social distancing when I was around others.

But I soon realized that the crisis was going to result in me missing out on a lot of things that I had taken for granted in the past. I wasn't going to be able to come and go as I pleased; I wasn't going to be able to visit friends anytime or anyplace I desired; shopping was going to be more challenging and I wasn't always going to be able to find what I wanted. I longed for the days when I didn't have to think about the danger of getting sick every time I walked out the door.

I realized early in the pandemic that I had to rely on God as I traveled the journey that would take me to the "new normal." There were many things I couldn't control. Those that I could I would, but in the end I had to trust in God to provide for my spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. He was the One who was going to bring light into the darkness of those times.

This may be similar to what the writer of Psalm 84 was experiencing when he wrote this lamentation. Something he valued had been taken from Him. He longed for it to be restored. He yearned to return to the place he cherished and to once again dwell in the presence of God. He knew that the journey back to "normal" would not be easy, but ultimately, he had to rely on God for the provisions required to make his journey successful.

13. *What are some things you long for in your relationship with God?*

14. *What can you do to help these to be realized?*

15. *What do you need to rely on God for? Why is it critical that you do this?*

God's Provisions for Your Pilgrimage

The writer of today's psalm longed to be in the presence of God. But he knew that he had to rely on God if what he yearned for was to be realized. He was confident, however, that once he completed his journey, he would be blessed.

Many of us long for the blessings that come from being in God's presence or from having a healthy relationship with Him. But though we must do our part in order for this to be realized and sometimes are compelled to accept help from others, ultimately, we have to rely on God for the provisions needed to make our journeys with Him or to Him fruitful.

► *What can you do to show that you are relying on God for the provisions needed to make your journey with Him or to Him successful?*

KEY VERSE

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. —Psalm 84:4, KJV

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

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of October 25 through October 31

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 147:1-7—A Song of Praise Is Fitting.

Tues. 1 Samuel 16:14-23—David's Music Soothes Saul.

Wed. Acts 16:23-26—Paul and Silas Sing in Prison.

Thurs. Psalm 148—Praise the Name of the Lord.

Fri. Colossians 3:12-17—Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs.

Sat. Psalm 149—Making Melody to God.

Sun. Psalm 150—Praise God with Musical Instruments.