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Psalm 84

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## Longing to be Near God

Hi, everyone. My name is Larry Adams, and I wanted to take just a moment to thank you for downloading the podcast of this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's word all over the world.

We want you to know too that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow, and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We realize also that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we're hoping that these messages you're using, as you gather with your family or other believers or people from the community, that it will be a great encouragement to you as you hear God speak into your life and help you to become disciples who are true reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

If you have your Bibles, I'd like you to turn with me if you would to Psalm 84. Today, we're gonna be looking at a Psalm a little bit convicting. It's a Psalm that was sung in Israel. Every time they sank it in the temple worship it was reminding the people whether or not they really loved God and longed for Him more than anyone else. It is written by the sons of Korah, the worship leaders in that temple worship, and it begins like this:

### **For the director of music. According to *gittith*.**

A musical term, maybe an instrumental term

### **Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.**

- <sup>1</sup> How lovely is your dwelling place,  
Lord Almighty!
- <sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.
- <sup>3</sup> 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,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.
- <sup>5</sup> Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
- <sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baka,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.

<sup>8</sup> Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty;  
listen to me, God of Jacob.

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

<sup>10</sup> Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Let's pray together.

*God, how true that is. Those who trust in the Lord will never be disappointed. Your way is truth. Your way is eternal, and I thank you for being our God. Today, Lord, as we open up this word, I pray you'll speak to us to show us whether or not in our hearts there is really a longing to be near you. It's not enough just to say we're a Christian. It's not enough just to say we go to church. It's not enough even to say that we love God, but are we living our lives each day with a demonstration that our highest joy is to be near you? God, show us this today. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.*

Yesterday I was out washing my car. Before you get alarmed, it was a low flow nozzle. It was shut off when it was supposed to, and our water usage is way under what it was required by the city, so I'm not breaking any rules that I know of. I'm out washing the car with my three-year-old grandson Owen. He says to me, "Where's Gaga?" (Where's Karla?) "Where's Gaga?"

I said, "Oh, she went to a wedding shower."

He said, "Is Gaga getting married?"

I said, "No, she already married me."

He looked up from his little bucket and he said to me, "Why would she do that?"

I have no idea actually. In fact, I said to him, "Oh, it's one of the mysteries of life. No one's exactly figured that out yet."

Many of you may know I met my wife Karla at a men's retreat. Her dad was speaking. She was leading worship. It's the best 25 bucks I ever spent. There were 400 men and one woman. I definitely won the lottery that weekend. She lived in San Jose; I lived in Redmond, Washington, some 800+ miles away. Somewhere in that long-distance relationship we fell in love.

It's really hard to be apart from people you love. You want to be around them all the time, so we wrote every day. If you knew me, that is a miracle. I mean every day; we didn't miss. We talked once a week. That was back before cell phones. It was cheaper to call on Saturday night after 11:00 you got cheaper rates. You remember that? I tell you the whole cell phone thing has

changed our culture for the good. We'd try to get together whenever we could. I remember still I used to be envious of people who got to be near her every day, to work with her every day, to be around her every day.

It's natural to want to be near those you love. So why would anyone be surprised to hear somebody say, "I want to be near God." Do you love God today? If you do then you want to be near Him. I hear people say, "I'm a Christian" or "I believe in Jesus" or even "I love the Lord," but do you really want to be near Him? Do you orchestrate the events of your life to capitalize on every opportunity you can be to grow closer to Him?

That's what Psalm 84 is about. Psalm 84 has been called "the pearl of the scriptures" because it reflects the heart of those who longed to be near God. The sons of Korah use language that is very strange to us today. We don't think of coming to church or getting alone with God and using these kinds of words, but that's the way they expressed it.

- <sup>1</sup> How lovely is your dwelling place,  
Lord Almighty!
- <sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.
- <sup>3</sup> 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,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.

The sons of Korah were descendants of Levi, the Levitical priesthood line of Israel. They had the distinct privilege of being the worship leaders at the temple, so through their songwriting, their skill on instruments, and through their voices, they were at the temple leading the corporate worship when it was time for the people to come and praise God. What's impressive is they view this apparently as a job. It wasn't even a ministry. They loved doing this because for them to be near God was to be near the temple. To be near the temple was to be near God, and they loved to be near Him.

You see, for them, God's presence resided in a room, a holy of holies inside the temple. They knew they would never have access to that room. That was for the high priest, and only once a year when he would take the blood on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, and go in behind the veil into God's very presence and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat to make atonement for another year. They knew they would never have that kind of presence, but being near the temple when they led worship was being near God for them. They loved it.

You know, when I read Psalm 84, I couldn't help but ask myself, Do I love God like that? I say I love Him and I do, but do I love God like that with a true longing of my heart is to be near Him more than any other longing? Do I daily live my life to be as close to God as I can? Because, as the sons of Korah remind us, those who truly love God long to be near God. So where can we experience that kind of closeness to God? Well, there's lots of places, but the sons of Korah highlighted two that were particularly special to them: in their worship, and in their hearts. People who love God long to experience his presence in their worship. That's why they said in verse 1:

- <sup>1</sup> How lovely is your dwelling place,  
Lord Almighty!

They weren't talking about a building.

<sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.

They were longing to be with God wherever He was, in the temple or elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> 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,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.  
<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.

Or in verse 10:

Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

When I first became a Christian, I wanted to be at church all the time, which is an interesting change for me because prior to becoming a Christian I didn't want be at church at all. I didn't fully understand the depth of that change. All I knew is I felt God's presence when I was there, so I came Sunday morning. I came back again Sunday night. I went to the men's breakfast on Saturday. I went to Bible studies during the week. I know you're not going to believe this, but even tried to go to the ladies Bible studies till they told me I wasn't welcome there.

I was so hungry to be near God, and I felt closer to Him at church than I did anywhere else. I didn't quite understand why. Over time I learned that it was the worship of God going on in the lives of God's people at church that brought me into a special sense of his presence, and I longed for that. Eventually I came to see that I could experience God's presence anywhere, but there's still something very special about coming together with God's people.

The sons of Korah wrote this song describing the joy of God's presence that they experienced in their corporate worship at the temple. They said in verse 1:

How lovely is your dwelling place,  
Lord Almighty!  
<sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.  
<sup>3</sup> 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,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.  
<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.

You see, for the Jews God's presence was always associated with a place, a certain place. That's why sometimes in Israel they would build altars all over the country, why they would have

high places to worship, why they would meet under certain designated special trees much against God's will. But they had always associated God's presence with a place. Remember when they were first brought out of Egypt as a nation? God met with Moses on a mountain in Sinai. The people trembled when they saw God's presence on the mountain. When God revealed His glory to Israel as they traveled through the wilderness, they saw His glory hovering over the tabernacle. They would see the glory of God meet with Moses at the Tent of Meeting and Moses' face would be aglow with the glory of God when he came out. He was meeting Him in a place.

So in Jerusalem it was natural for them to know that the Spirit of God, the glory of God, the presence of God was in that building in that holy of holies. God's presence was in a place, and He was powerfully in that place during the days of Korah. When the sons of Korah led worship there, they loved it because in their worship they could feel the closeness of God's presence so much so they interestingly said in verse 3, "You know what? Even the birds, the sparrow and the swallows, they build their nest up in the eves of the temple. They're blessed because they get to be near you. The people that work in the temple, the priests, the temple guards, the doorkeepers, the court attendants, they live and work near you every day," which is why they said in verse 4:

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

By the way, after verse 4 comes a Hebrew word called Selah. It's not in the text of a lot of Scripture today. It's a statement that no one is sure of its meaning, but it most likely could mean something like "pause" or "reflect" or "think about this before moving on," that kind of idea. So when he's writing he's saying, "Think about this: Even the birds and the people who work there are blessed because they get to be near God." It's almost asking, "Do you long to be near God like that? Think about that."

So much did they benefit from and long for God's presence in their worship that they declared that one day in God's house was better than a thousand elsewhere. Verse 10:

Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

"I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God. I'd rather be living on the stone temple steps and be a servant to all the people than to live in the lap of luxury without God."

"I long to be near God so much," they sang, "that I would choose God over everything else." These guys weren't weird, and they weren't strange. They meant it. They loved God, and they loved to be in His presence. You see, this is a little more than convicting, a little revealing of our own relationship with God and desire to be near Him because God doesn't live in buildings made by human hands anymore. God lives in the lives of people who believe and receive Him. If you're a Christian today, if you are born again, if you're a follower of this Jesus, He has come to live in you in the person of His Holy Spirit. He is living in you now. That's where He resides. You're a walking Holy of Holies.

Today as we gather like this in church, whether we thought about it or not before we came in, the hard reality is this room is filled with little temples where God's Spirit resides. Together we make up the church where God dwells. Each of us individually is the temple of God, but when we come together we make up God's temple where His glory dwells in a different way. Paul was writing in I Corinthians 3 verse 16:

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

You see, that's one of the reasons I don't ever wanna miss worship on a Sunday. I have a lot of responsibilities besides just preaching sometimes. I want to make sure that at least one of our four services I have time to be in here just to be a worshiper along with everybody else because I don't want to miss out on the joy of experiencing God's presence in the midst of all of His temples coming together in which His Spirit is gonna dwell. His presence is gonna dwell there in a different way than I experience all on my own. That's why so often when we come together for worship there can be an overwhelming sense of God's presence. There can be, and there should be.

Now, to be honest, I hear people say sometimes, "You know what? I didn't really like the music last week. I didn't really like the message last week. I didn't really like where I sat last week. It was too hot. It was too cold." I get there are times there are creature comfort issues, and we're not expecting that we're hitting everybody's hot button with the music. I'm not out to hit everybody's hot button with a message. I get all that.

But when people come and they say they were disappointed, I have to ask the question, "Why were you there? Why would you there?" If you're coming for the music, I got to tell you, some weeks you're gonna be disappointed. Even though I think our guys do a great job, we may not hit the style you like. If you're coming for the message, you're gonna be disappointed at times because I may not communicate that well or even say what you want hear.

But if every single week you say, "Lord, I'm coming to meet with God." It's pretty hard to go away disappointed.

Yesterday, I met with a group of guys down at City Park. We pray over the city. We've been doing it for years. We come from different churches, different ethnic makeups and cultures. It's an interesting thing. Anyway, yesterday in the midst of our prayer down there, one of the guys broke into a spontaneous song so the rest of us were trying to join in. All of us didn't know the words to it. We didn't know the tune to it, and to be honest none of us sing that well. If I were summarizing from a music quality standpoint yesterday in the park, what we were doing was horrible actually. It was horrible.

Now, I don't know if God sometimes listens to music like that with an eye closed and His ear partly turned saying, "**Okay, I know you love me. Thank you. That was enough.**" I don't know if God does it like that. But if He does, yesterday would have been one of those days. Anyway, as horrible as the music quality was, and it was bad, God's presence was right in that circle. He was right in that circle, and you could not come away from that disappointed.

We can worship God and experience His presence when we're all alone, for God lives in the hearts of all who believe. But there is a different experience of God's presence when we gather together to lift up God and make His praise glorious.

Worship is the declaration of God's worth. In fact, that's where the word came from "worship." It is the expression of God's worth. So, how we live every day, the decisions we make, the priorities we establish, and certainly when come together to worship in a corporate setting, we are declaring together what God is worth to us. So if God is worth everything to you, in fact more than anything else as the sons of Korah were expressing, it's pretty hard to come away from that experience and be disappointed because God's in the midst of that. In fact, in Psalm 22, verse 3, a song from which Jesus quotes some of it at the cross, it says:

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;  
you are the one Israel praises.

Now, I never claimed to be a Hebrew expert, but I have discovered that those verses could read like this: "You are enthroned in Israel's praises" or "You inhabit or dwell in Israel's praises." In other words, what the writer is describing is that when people come together to praise God like that and to lift up His name and to worship Him and to be near Him and to exalt Him, God actually inhabits that praise. He dwells in it, and His presence is manifest there. That's why sometimes you feel it. It's what Jesus was talking about I think when He said in Matthew 18 verse 20, "**For when two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.**" It's not that He's not there when you're alone, He is. But He's there in a different way when we gather together in His name. That's what marked the early church. You remember in Acts Chapter 2 verse 42, "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." They devoted themselves to this. Look at this:

<sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Look at verse 46, "Every day they met there praising God every day." Now usually when we read these verses we talk about, "Wow, they sold everything. They came together. They distributed as everyone had need. Wow, it's kind of like Christian communism. We sell everything, we bring it together, and we divide as we have need." The point of the passage is not that. Yes, if you follow Christ in the first century, as in many places today in the world, you may lose everything. No one will hire you. You're cut off from your family. You can't shop at the stores, so if you were gonna survive where are you gonna go? To the other Christians. That's what they were doing.

But they were showing up every day. The word was out. "If you're a follower of Jesus, meet us at the temple courts every day. We're gonna praise God." Why were they doing this? Because they learned that every day they showed up at the temple courts God showed up.

People, when you are giving up everything to follow a God you cannot see, what you need to know more than anything else is that He's real; He's there. Other people know Him too. It encourages you and gives you assurance when you know that this God is real and you know it because His presence is in your worship. It can be that powerful for us today if we long to be near God, to see His face, to hear His voice, and expect to encounter Him when we come together to worship Him.

Not only experiencing the blessing of His presence and worship, but people who love God long to experience His presence in their hearts. The sons of Korah said in verse 5:

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

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

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.

<sup>8</sup> Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty;  
listen to me, God of Jacob.

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

<sup>10</sup> Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup>Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Satan is always trying to find ways to get you to stop trusting God, to try to convince us He isn't real, He isn't really there, or isn't really good. He's got an arsenal to use, and it's effective. It almost always comes in the form of circumstances and distractions to pull away our devotion from God because if he can pull it away we stopped seeing God, we don't know His presence, and we are easily confused and we stop trusting Him.

Chuck Swindoll in his book *Quest for Character* tells how any of us can be unexpectedly hit and overwhelmed by circumstances. I was reminded this week of a story I read in that book years ago about a guy named Jay Rathman who was from San Jose. Jay was hunting deer in the Tehama wildlife area near Red Bluff up in Northern California. Here's how he tells the story:

Climbed to a ledge on the slope of a rocky gorge. As he raised his head to look over the ledge above, he sensed movement to the right of his face. A coiled rattlesnake struck with lightning speed just missing Rathman's right ear.

If you love snakes, you'll love this story.

The four foot snake's fangs got snagged in the neck of Rathman's wool turtleneck sweater. The force of the strike caused it to land on his left shoulder and then the snake coiled around his neck. He grabbed it behind the head with his left hand and could feel the warm venom running down the skin of his neck, the rattles making a furious racket.

He fell backward and slid headfirst down the steep slope through brush and lava rocks, his rifle and binoculars bouncing beside him. "As luck would have it," he said in describing the incident to a Department of Fish and Game Official, "I ended up wedged between some rocks with my feet caught uphill from my head. I could barely move."

He got his right hand on his rifle and used it to disengage the fangs from his sweater, but the snake had enough leverage to strike again. He made about eight attempts and managed to hit me with his nose just below my eye about four times. I kept face turned so he couldn't get a good angle with his fangs, but it was very close.

This chap and I were eyeball to eyeball, and I found this out: snakes don't blink. He had fangs like darning needles. I had to choke him to death. It was the only way out. I was afraid that with all the blood rushing to my head I might pass out.

When Rathman tried to toss the dead snake aside, he couldn't let go. "I had to pry my fingers from its neck." Rathman, who was then 45, worked for the Defense Department in San Jose, estimated his encounter with the snake lasted 20 minutes.

Warden Dave Smith says of meeting Rathman, "He walked toward me holding this string of rattles and said with a sort a grin on his face, "I'd like to register a complaint about your wildlife here."

Swindoll said:

When I first read that hair-raising account, I thought about how closely Rathman's struggle resembles life on a daily basis. At the most unsuspecting moment we are pounced upon. With treacherous strength, these snakelike assaults have a way of knocking us off balance as they wrap themselves around us. Exposed and vulnerable,

we can easily succumb to the attacks. They are frequent and varied: physical pain, emotional trauma, relational stress, spiritual doubts, marital conflicts, carnal temptations, financial reversals demonic assaults, occupational disappointments, and on and on it goes. Relentlessly we struggle for survival knowing that any one of those strikes can hit the target and spread poison. They can immobilize and paralyze us, rendering us ineffective.

What exactly is the target? Our heart. That's what the Bible calls it. It's our inner person, that down deep place where hope is born, where decisions are made, where commitment is strengthened, where truth is stored, where character is formed, where faith resides. The heart. It's the core of our being. It's the place where faith becomes an anchor for our soul when God comes to live in us and live His life out through us. Our heart becomes so enmeshed with God's presence and the reality of who He is that we gain a strength to face whatever comes our way.

Do you remember Asaph last week in Psalm 73? "God, here I am living for you. My life's falling apart. Where's the fairness in this? I see all these people around you that don't know God and they seem to be healthy and have all they need and having a great time. Where's the fairness in this?" He said, "Then I went into the house of God and I saw their fate. I saw the end of the story." God confronted them in that time in the worship and basically asked them, "**Do you guys really think that the wicked are better off without God? Do you really think that?**"

Asaph wrote in Psalm 73, verse 25, "Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you." Really? "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." The presence of God so real in your life and not even trials and hard circumstances or distractions can steal the joy of God's presence.

The sons of Korah rejoiced as they remembered that God's presence wasn't limited to the temple but was with them always wherever they went. That's why they said in verse 5:

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,

Not in a building, not in a presence, in you itself, not in our circumstance.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.

Their hearts are set on pilgrimage. Wherever they go they are seeking God, and they know God is there. Wherever a road takes them they know they're not alone. God is with them even if they walked through the Valley of Baka.

Baka is not a real valley, at least not anything you can find in the Old Testament or in Israel's history that I can come across. It's an idiomatic expression of affliction. We might say today in our context, "Man, that guy's going through the ringer" or "That guy's in a deep pit" or "That guy's really getting hung out to dry" or whatever phrase we would use. But in the sons of Korah's day they would say, "Man, that guy's really going through the Valley of Baka," circumstances are rough. But, they said, "God is even turning those trials into blessings." You see that? Verse 6:

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

The word for “pools” is the word “blessing.” You know the refreshment of being in the desert and coming upon a pool and the blessing of being refreshed in that? That idea. Even in the midst of trials people can be blessed, and refreshed with God’s presence. They go from strength to strength. They aren’t weakened by life’s trials. They are strengthened by them. These are not the people who say, “Man, things are tough. God, where are you? I’m not in this anymore, and you’re not there for me, and you’re a big disappointment.” These are the people who discover that the trials do not move them away from God. The trials press them closer to God because they find His presence there more than they’ve ever experienced it before. They have a perspective that’s eternal for he goes on to say:

till each appears before God in Zion.

People, you and I live each day knowing we’re on a pilgrimage road with God. We aren’t at the destination yet. We don’t walk the road alone. God is with us. One day when this journey is over He’s gonna bring us to Zion, the city of God, and the joy of His presence forever is gonna make sadness and sorrow flee away.

It’s the same reality God revealed in Isaiah’s day in the midst of the trials they would endure while captive in Babylon. God gave to Isaiah a look at the future way beyond the restoration of Israel back into the Promised Land but to the ultimate Zion, the city of God. Listen to this, Isaiah 35 verse 7.

The burning sand will become a pool,

What did they have to cross to get back to home? A desert. You and I are in that desert.

The burning sand will become a pool,  
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.  
In the haunts where jackals once lay,  
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

<sup>8</sup> And a highway will be there;  
it will be called the Way of Holiness;  
it will be for those who walk on that Way.

The unclean will not journey on it;  
wicked fools will not go about on it.

<sup>9</sup> No lion will be there,  
nor any ravenous beast;  
they will not be found there.

But only the redeemed will walk there,  
<sup>10</sup> and those the Lord has rescued will return.

They will enter Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy will crown their heads.  
Gladness and joy will overtake them,  
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

People, if you’re living to find the ultimate joy in this life you are gonna be sorely disappointed. You’re not gonna find it. This life is full of disappointments and trials. They have to be there. They strengthen us. But some day, this journey on this road’s gonna be over, and we’re gonna enter the city of God, the place where God dwells, the ultimate place of his presence. You will see him face-to-face forever and ever.

God never intended for His presence to remain in a building made of stone but that he would come to live in the hearts of those who love and obey Him. Even Solomon knew that when he dedicated the temple in which God's glory would reside, 2 Chronicles 6:18. Do you remember? Solomon gets down on his knees. He raises his hands to heaven. He begins pray, "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

That's why the night before Jesus went to the cross in the upper room in John 14, Jesus said in verse 15:

**If you love me, keep my commands.** <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.

Which is why so many Christians through the ages have found their strength in God alone. These same sons of Korah wrote Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.  
<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.

"God is our refuge and strength."

Or people like Paul who in prison writing what we believe may have been the last letter of his life facing his own certain execution, 2 Timothy 4 verse 16:

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.

Look at this:

<sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.

No wonder the sons of Korah concluded this great Psalm in verse 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.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Can we really express God's presence this powerfully today? Yeah, we can. I don't want to overstate this, but I do every day. The first thing I do each morning is to grab my Bible and get alone with God. I know this may sound crazy, but I actually hear Him speaking to me, His presence is there when I'm seeking Him. It's one of the reasons I love to come to worship with you. Why every Sunday I make at least one service my service to be there to worship with no

other distractions, no other responsibilities. I try to be in the room worshiping God with you because I can sense God's presence here in a way I can't do alone. It's different.

When you long for God's presence like that, He'll give you experiences at times that will so reassure you of His presence you will never doubt again that he is alive. One of those happened for me in February of 1995.

I went to the Promise Keepers clergy conference in Atlanta, Georgia along with some guys on our staff and 50,000 other pastors who gathered in the Georgia Dome for those days. What I didn't know was that reportedly hundreds of people had been praying for days for God's presence to manifest Himself powerfully in that Dome where the Atlanta Falcons play football.

On that cold February morning, I still remember walking over to the Dome. I don't know if everybody's experience was like this, but this was mine. I walked in the lobby of that place, and I thought to myself, Man, what am I doing here? I'm nearly 3,000 miles from home. It's Valentine's Day, and I'm going in here with 50,000 ugly men. What am I doing here? I don't need to be at another pastor's conference?

The stadium was like every other. You come to a place where you walk around and you find the entrance to the tunnel that's got your seat numbers over the top. The first time I walked in that room, I just stepped out of the tunnel into the room. I was all by myself. God's presence was so powerful I could barely breathe. I started weeping right there standing in the tunnel I was so overwhelmed of how real He was in that moment.

People, God wants to be that real to us. We're not gonna be swayed by the things that happen and the counter voices of our culture. We're not gonna doubt God's goodness or His existence every time something comes down the pike that we don't like or don't understand. We are able to look people in the eye and say, "Yeah, what I'm going through is hard, and what you're going through is hard, but God is real. He's here. I don't find my joy in these things. I find my joy in Him, and I long to be near God."

That's what you can experience when you worship. That's what we can know every day in our heart, and the blessed assurance that comes from that is overwhelming:

<sup>10</sup> Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

*Thank you, God, for this reminder. I really need this today. All of us need it. No matter what's happening in our lives, no matter what happens in the world, you haven't left. You dwell in the hearts of your people. Your glory is still there. Thank you for the blessed assurance that's ours to know we have a God who never leaves us or forsakes us. No matter how loud the voices become to try to drown you out, we know in our worship and in our hearts that you're alive and you're right here an ever present help.*

*Help us increasingly to be a people that longs to be near God that we may live every day in that blessed assurance. As we sing this song, God, may this be our prayer of commitment and our joy. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*