

“Time Well Spent”

August 22nd, 2021
Psalm 84

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Wall Street United Church

Good Morning!

In keeping with Cathie’s scripture from the Psalms last week, I too decided to look at a Psalm. This week, Psalm 84 is what I’d like to focus on. Cathie also said last week that she begins to feel God’s presence as she enters into an extended time of musical worship. So, I hope you are okay with an extended sermon today. There is something to be said for focusing on one bit of scripture.

Earlier this summer I participated in a book club, led by Donna Greenhorn. It was about the study of the book “Embers” by Richard Wagamese. In it there was a dialogue between Richard and an old Woman. It goes like this:

Me: You always repeat things three times.

Old Woman: Just the important things

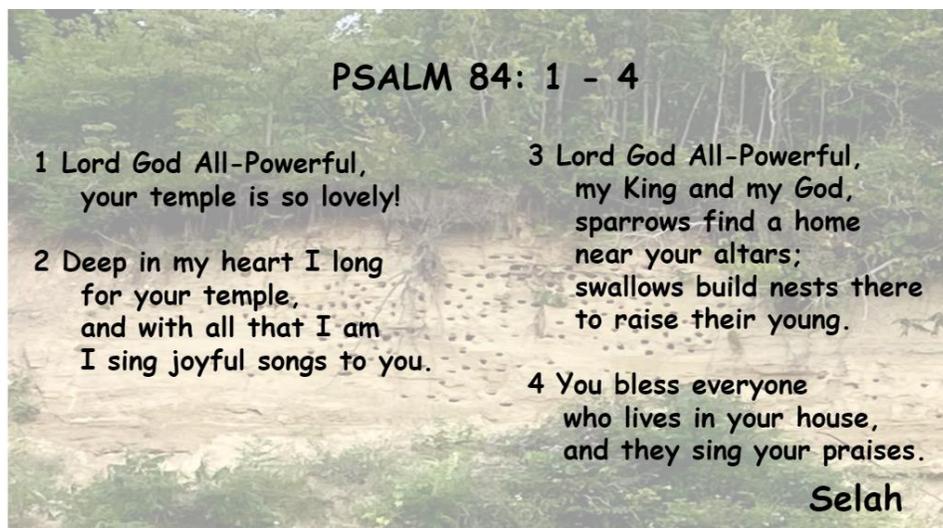
Me: Why? I hear you the first time.

Old Woman: No, you listen the first time. You hear the second. And you feel the third time.

Me: I don’t get it.

Old Woman: When you listen, you become aware. That’s for your head. When you hear, you awaken. That’s for your heart. When you feel, it becomes part of you. That’s for your spirit. Three times so you learn to listen with your whole being.

And so today, rather than just racing through this scripture I want to highlight a couple things, it might feel like I am repeating myself, but I want us to just rest in this Psalm. Let’s look at it together.



Verse one opens with acknowledging who God is! *“Lord God all-powerful, your temple is so lovely”*. My friends, I don’t know about you, but it is good to be back here at Wall Street church and to see many of you. Historically, the church is sometimes referred to as the temple, or the house of the Lord. But we know God is not limited to these walls. In this old testament scripture, the writer of the song could identify that the temple of God was lovely. There was a power in the temple of God, people longed to draw near to where God was. The writer was seeking to be in the presence of God.

In the Old Testament the ark of the covenant contained the 10 Commandments and was thought to be the dwelling place of God, it served as the only physical manifestation of God on earth. People wanted to be near to feel the presence of God.

A little bit later on in the old testament the ark of the covenant was placed into the temple that Solomon built. It was in the holy of holy’s place; the place where God dwelt. People went on pilgrimages from all over to come to the temple, to seek the presence of God.

Today however, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus it says in 1 Corinthians; *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in you.”* We know that God is not limited inside the walls of a church. When you think of the temple being so lovely, what do you think of? Where is it that you long to dwell? Where is it good for you to spend time? Verse two says: *“deep in my heart I long for your temple and with all that I am, I sing joyful songs to you.”*

The writer of this song was longing for something else, perhaps he was in a dark place, perhaps he was tired, perhaps he was discouraged, or perhaps he had just worked a long day. Wherever the author was, they were longing to be somewhere else.

We don’t often long to be somewhere else when things are going smoothly. And yet the author here says that he was longing for the temple, he was longing for God’s presence and yet he sang joyful praises to God.

Are you somewhere today longing to be somewhere else? Perhaps if that’s the place that you are, I would encourage you to simply think about turning your voice to God, singing praises to God. Be grateful for the things that you have... for the fresh air, for the beautiful moon over the last couple of nights, for clean water, for working plumbing, for at least one person who checks in on you. Time well spent is time giving praise to God.

Verse three says, *“Lord God all powerful, my king and my God, sparrows find a home in your altars, swallows build nests there to raise their young”*. What an incredibly beautiful picture of God’s protection and compassion. In a hymn we sometimes sing: *“God sees a little sparrow fall it meets his tender view, if God so loved the little things I know He loves me too”*.

My friends, it is time well spent when we come and we rest and when we put things at the altar of God that are weighing us down. Those things that are

our most treasured possessions. The birds raised their young close to God: in the protection of the altar of God. God tells us that he longs to draw near to us if we will draw near to him. God will draw near to us and just like the birds...will protect us, so we can find a home of safety and shelter in the presence of God.

And finally in this section - Verse 4: *You bless everyone who lives in your house and they sing your praises.*

Time is well spent when we spend it in the presence of God, when we acknowledge the voice of God speaking in us and when we act in accordance with the voice of God. When we're in that space of hearing God's voice, it is good to give thanks to God who loves us and protects us.

At the end of verse four in the NIV Bible and in some other translations is this little word Selah. We don't know exactly what this word means but it's often understood to mean pause or rest; and so I invite you just for a moment to reflect on these four verses as they appear on the screen

The background for the slide was taken while I paddled on the Saugeen river. My soul was yearning for God as I paddled, and then I saw these nests, a reminder that we can draw near to God and he will draw near to us! We just have to look and listen. To behold what God is doing. Time well spent looking and listening for our souls to be refreshed. I was so blessed simply by looking around and I was able to sing praises to God, there was no one around but God to judge my vocal accuracy. I sang, "It Is Well with My Soul."

What about you? Do you find it easier to sing praises when you are in the presence of God, maybe out in nature, maybe at Wall Street United Church, maybe with friends or family, just remember God's presence is not limited to a particular place. Is your heart longing for God? Take some time to look for God, they will reveal themselves to you.

As the Psalm continues we see again how Time is well spent. Time spent looking to God, relying on Jesus for strength. Those who have their heart set on pilgrimage seeking out the presence of God.

I remember two summers ago preparing and participating in the Camino Nova Scotia, a pilgrimage from Halifax to Lunenburg just over 100 km in five days. Every night I slept on the floor with 12 others. One of the purposes of the pilgrimage was to intentionally wander and ponder on the goodness of God and what he might be saying to us.

Even though this sounded like a great idea, preparing for and participating in the pilgrimage was not the easiest thing to do. My feet ached, blisters bled, chafing from walking was painful, bites from the deer flies and I was dehydrated from not always drinking enough ...

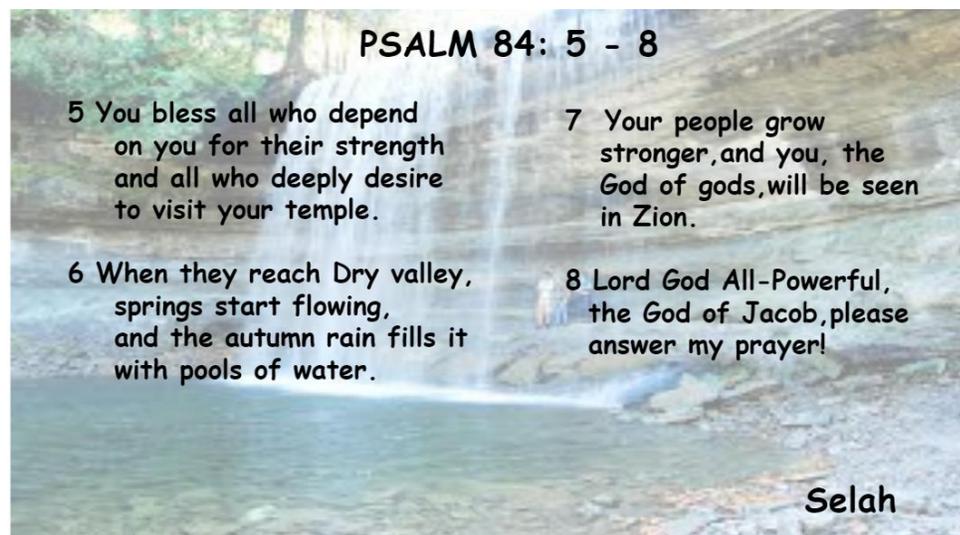
It was like passing through the valley of Baca. The Contemporary English version says the dry valley or it is also known as tough times; and yes I chose this adventure but it was still difficult.

There are other times when we don't intentionally choose to be in the valley of Baca, or a dry valley. The time when we've lost a partner, parent or a

friend way too soon; when jobs have been lost, when dreams have been shattered or when physical reality slows us down. These represent difficult times. Many of us do our most significant growing when we are stretched and when we are in those difficult times. We have two choices to press on, seeking God by being dependent on God for our strength and courage, or to become complacent or stagnant, maybe even withering up. The valley of Baca is inevitable. How we respond to those challenges is up to us, and we will have much more hope as we rely on God as he will hear and respond to our prayer.

People will notice a difference in us, not that we have to be happy all the time, that's not it; but if times get tough, we look not to ourselves or others to solve it; but we look to and trust Jesus in it with us.

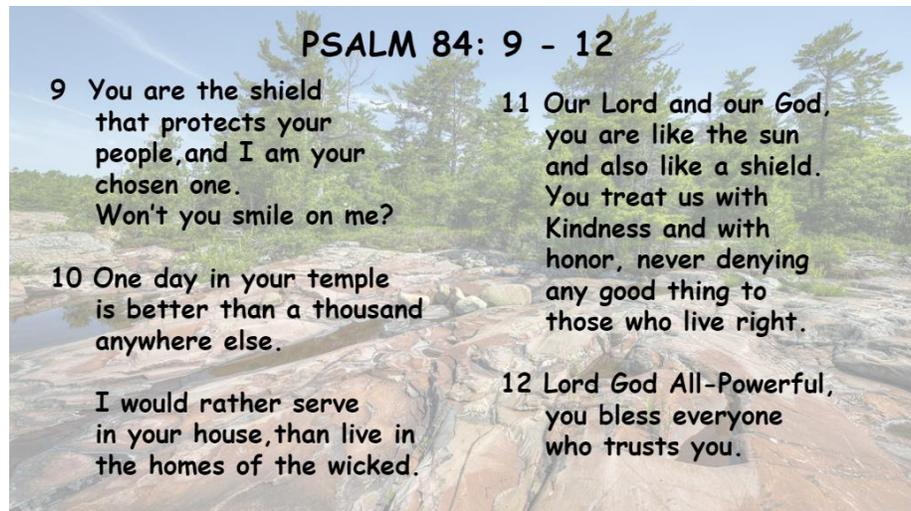
I have been deeply blessed by our friend Beth as even in her grief she has pressed on and pursued Jesus. She has held onto the hope a relationship with Jesus gives. People who walk through their personal dry valleys can still be vessels of hope, bringing springs of water into the life of others. Folks as you choose to put your strength in God and not in yourself or in your circumstances, you will be strengthened even more as you move through life with each tiny step forward. We simply have to keep talking and listening to Jesus - He will listen and respond. Time well spent!



As you pause and think about these four versus, consider the background of this slide. We came upon this place, Bridal Falls, on a walk on our holiday last week, and it reminds me that beautiful things come as water pounds on the ground below, carving smooth beautiful rocks. I saw that rivers are shaped by water beating on and by ice scraping the rocks. We are not on this journey alone, May we continue to look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith as we journey onward.

The third and final part of Psalm 84 is perhaps the most familiar to you, as a result of the wonderful Matt Redman song called "Better is One Day in your House".

In these last four verses, we are reminded that God has our back. That God is our defender and that we are his anointed children. Sometimes it might seem that we don't have God's attention, but I think we just need to look more deeply and we will see that in fact it's God's nature to be revealing themselves to us and to be watching out for us.



Friends I don't know about you, but verse 10 says it all about Time well spent. *For a day in your courts is better than 1000 elsewhere. I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.*

Time well spent? Time with Jesus spent developing a personal friendship, time serving, even to serve as the door keeper. And I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with becoming the CEO, or the owner of the penthouse, or owning expensive shiny toys. That's not it. What is needed is a contrite heart, the attitude of a heart seeking and longing for time with God, which often results in personal transformation.

Better is One Day, better is One moment connecting with or in the presence of Jesus. Better is each day we connect. Maybe that's attending church, maybe that's in your morning or evening quiet time, maybe that's having coffee with a friend, maybe that's hiking, maybe that's paddling, maybe that's going out tonight and finding a place to watch the full beautiful blue moon. The full moon, the bright reminder that God is bigger than we can think or imagine, and that she longs to give us what we need, to protect us from what we don't need, to treat us with kindness, and with honour.

Friends I need to spend time with Jesus -- I end up pretty impatient, frustrated, and discouraged when I don't. Usually the highlight of my day is time

that I set aside for quiet reflection, it doesn't happen as often as it should, but it sure makes a difference.

And you know, yesterday was a sweltering hot day, and we jumped in and out of the water. A friend, upon jumping in for our last time before we needed to leave, said something to the effect : "I forgot how good it felt" - and it had only been hours before when we jumped in last. In that moment, I was reminded of how refreshing it is to connect with God, over and over again. It is not a dull thing; it is a refreshing soul satisfying experience.

My friends, God longs to bless us! We have to keep trusting that the Spirit is working for us, in us and through us. We just have to keep using our time wisely! What is time well spent?

Blessed are those who live in your house ever singing your praise.

Blessed are those who strength is in you. Blessed is everyone who trusts in you.

Time well spent, singing praise, looking to God for strength, and finally trusting in God. How are you spending your time?

Take a moment to reflect on these last 4 verses. There were times that Samia wanted to stop and turned around to quit. The terrain was difficult in places. At one point a little girl with her dad passed us and encouraged us to keep on. And so we did. We came out at this beautiful spot the - journey was worth it. There were difficult moments along the way - but we were not alone and the view at the end was definitely worth it!

The end of the day on Lake Huron, a sunset that reminds us that as we trust God, the sun may set and there may be a little bit of darkness, but the sun will rise again the next day and a reminder that God is in control and will be with us regardless of what we are up against.

Time Well Spent? What does it look like for you?

