

Lesson 13 | August 25, 2024

The Refuge of God's Presence

Study Text: Psalm 91:1–16

Central Truth: The presence of God is a place of refuge, strength, and deliverance for the believer.

Key Verse: Psalm 91:1

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty (KJV).

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine what Psalm 91 teaches us about the presence of God, particularly how our lives are impacted by His presence.
- Students will prioritize God's presence by seeking Him and coming to know Him better through His Word.
- Students will trust God to be our refuge, protector, and deliverer amid the challenges of life.

Introducing the Study

Say: People often talk about how hectic and chaotic the world is today. Some argue that the very technology that was created to make life easier has done the opposite. So now people are taking social media breaks and personal internet blackouts. Yet the struggles of life are nothing new. They have always left people feeling overwhelmed and in need of a place of refuge.

Opening Activity—What's Your Refuge?

Ask. *Where do you go or what do you do to find refuge in your life?* Examples could include hobbies, solitary walks, or time with friends.

Say: When life gets hard, we all find our own ways of dealing with stress. For the Christian, this undoubtedly includes time with the Lord as we find our refuge in Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 91 contains one of the most familiar and comforting passages in all of Scripture for those who need a place of refuge, rest, and safety. This psalm is about the loving care provided by a sovereign God for His children. As you study, note how the security God provided the Psalmist is not beneath him, but above him. This is an important distinction. God is not just an anchor to hold us steady in a battle. He shields us, covers us, and holds us safe from the dangers of a chaotic and fallen world. This is a great

source of comfort in those moments when we feel overwhelmed and outmatched. Psalm 91 reminds us that our God will give us rest.

Part 1—God Is Our Refuge Find Rest in Him

Psalm 91:1–3

Say: In Matthew 24, Jesus answered the disciples' question about signs of His return. His response was sobering. The world will be an increasingly difficult and challenging place for God's people, filled with tribulation, temptation, and even persecution. Many fellow believers around the world have found this to be true. However, as Psalm 91 reminds us, we do not face such struggles on our own. God is our refuge in every situation. We need to find our rest in Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 91:1–3 repeatedly uses what is called “poetic parallelism,” a feature found throughout the Book of Psalms. A parallelism repeats an important point in similar terms for emphasis. When we see it, we can better interpret what the Bible is saying. Rather than try to pinpoint and decipher small distinctions between terms, we should see them as emphasizing one overall meaning of the terms.

Here, parallelism reinforces a key truth about our relationship with God. Note the pairs of terms: shelter/shadow; refuge/safety; rescue/protect. The message of the Psalmist is clear: God takes care of His people. His shelter is always over us, like a comforting shadow that protects us from a blazing heat. He is a refuge to which we can run for safety. And when the inevitable dangers of life threaten us, He can rescue us into His protective care.

We must be careful not to miss a larger point here. These verses remind us that we need God's protection. The dangers of life—whether physical or spiritual—are very real and often are more than we can handle. Therefore, we must resist the urge to take on these battles alone and submit ourselves to the care that God so loves to bestow upon His children.

The end result of His care and protection is rest (verse 1). Take a moment to ponder how this idea of rest fits into the promises of the remainder of this passage. The term rest here refers to a safe dwelling place that a traveler will enjoy for the night or for as many nights as needed. As we travel through this sometimes hostile world, may we find our protection, safety, deliverance, and rest in the Lord.

Discuss

- ? Look for more examples of poetic parallelism in the rest of Psalm 91.
- ? How would you describe what it means to find rest in the Lord?

Look to Him for Peace

Psalm 91:4–6

Say: One great beauty of Psalms is the book’s ability to describe even the harshest challenges of life in vivid, relatable terms. Psalm 91:4–6 is a fine example. The Psalmist addresses fears from within and dangers from without. Through it all, we find refuge and shelter in the Lord. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The great imagery of this psalm continues in verses 4–6. Throughout the Old Testament, and especially in Psalms, we see God described using the characteristics of a person or an animal. In verse 4 (NLT), He is depicted as having the qualities of a bird caring for its young. To “cover you with His feathers” and “shelter you with His wings” conveys a sense of warmth and security. This is confirmed in the third phrase of the verse: “His faithful promises are your armor and protection” (NLT).

Verses 5–6 remind the reader of how life “under his wings” is different from life on our own. The Lord gives us peace in this fearful world. Following the Lord does not mean that all dangers and struggles fade into the background. We will encounter reasons to be afraid. We may be opposed or even shunned and mocked for our faith. This might even mean loss or sacrifice for some.

In a similar way, the situations of life can be fearful. The word translated “disease” in verse 6 (NLT) can refer to sickness that threatens the body or pestilence that threatens one’s livelihood. Such problems certainly qualify as disaster. Yet they need not engulf us in fear—not because of our own stamina, resolve, or positive attitude, but because of the loving presence and care of our Lord. As His followers, it is our great joy to find peace and rest that only He can give.

Resource Packet Item 1: Describing the Creator

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it together. Note the significance of the Bible using human and animal terminology to describe God for the purpose of better understanding His nature.

Discuss

? What are some of your favorite Scriptures where God is described using human or animal characteristics? What can we learn from this description?

? Describe a time when God brought supernatural peace into your life.

Part 2—God Is Our Protector

Protection from the Wicked

Psalm 91:7–10

Say: Opposition to the people of God takes many forms in our world. Some believers face hostility that threatens their property, livelihood, and even their well-being. For most of us, the hostility is less apparent. The Psalmist reminds us that we need not fear those

who threaten us. Rather, we can trust God’s protection. As a result, we might even recognize opportunities to minister to those who mean us harm. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the Old Testament, the number 1,000 is often used to signify a huge amount or an amount beyond calculation. And so, the scene in Psalm 91:7 depicts an overwhelming degree of danger: “Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you . . .” (NLT).

Many believers can relate to the picture painted by these verses. As God’s people, we sometimes feel as if our enemies are beyond counting or our trials are beyond comprehension. We might find ourselves wanting to close our eyes in despair to the world around us. But God said, “Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished” (verse 8, NLT). This is an invitation to recall that God not only protects His people, but also judges evildoers and ultimately dispenses with all evil in the end—whether sickness, injustice, suffering, persecution, or countless other calamities a believer might face. In fact, Scripture reminds us of this a number of times (see Deuteronomy 32:43; Proverbs 20:22; Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 3:8–12). The willingness to leave our enemies in God’s hand is part of what it means to live by faith and trust Him.

This is the promise of Psalm 91:9–10. Note how these verses refer back to the earlier portion of the psalm, as a kind of an “if–then” statement. If God’s people will make God their shelter and refuge in the ways described before these verses, then they can enjoy the blessings of the promise of verse 10.

Verse 10 can be a difficult passage to understand: “No evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home” (NLT). At first glance, this seems to say that a believer will not experience adversity or difficulties. But we know that is not what this means simply on the basis of the previous verses, as well as many other passages of Scripture (see Psalm 40:17; Isaiah 43:19; John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:1–14). Enduring the trials of this world victoriously is a matter of perspective. We have the hope of God’s abiding presence every day. In the same way, we are assured that one day all of these troubles and evils will be judged and destroyed. Yet we will not taste the wrath of God that will fall upon evil. Instead, we will enjoy the glory of His presence.

Discuss

? Psalm 91:7–10 can be a difficult and sobering passage. Life as a follower of God will not be easy, even though some may claim that we can live above or without trouble. How would you respond to someone who claims that adversity and difficulty will not come to those who trust in the Lord?

? How do you endure the hard times that come as a result of this evil world?

Protected by His Angels

Psalm 91:11–12

Say: You may recall hearing people talk about your “guardian angel” while you were growing up. This isn’t just a fairy tale used to comfort children. The angelic realm is a reality. Psalm 91:11–12 describes how ministering angels can come to the aid of God’s people in times of need. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Angels are described and discussed throughout Scripture, literally from Genesis to Revelation. The term angel normally refers to a supernatural, heavenly being who functions either as God’s messenger or as an agent to carry out His will. Psalm 91:11–12 records one of Scripture’s most comforting and detailed descriptions of how angels are involved in the lives of human beings. Angels are sent by God to protect His people from evil and harm.

As noted earlier in the psalm, God brings protection for His people—and in verse 11, we find that this protection can take the form of angelic workers serving on our behalf. Similarly, they will “hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone” (verse 12, NLT). This again reminds us of how the trials of life can leave us feeling weary and vulnerable to dangers and obstacles (spiritual or otherwise). In times like these, God sends ministering angels to come alongside us.

We might recall that Satan used the promise of these verses in a negative way while tempting Jesus (see Luke 4:9–11). This forms a twofold explanation of and reminder about the promise of Psalm 91:11–12. First, it is not a promise to be taken lightly or trifled with. We ought not recklessly put ourselves into unnecessarily risky situations under the assumption that God will protect us. We must remember that we are accountable to Him and under His care. Second, this is a promise restricted to those who obey and follow the Lord. If we follow the way of sin, we make ourselves vulnerable to all kinds of dangers, including spiritual dangers. But as we trust Him, we find incredible comfort in knowing that there are angels among us, doing His work on our behalf.

Resource Packet Item 2: Angels among Us

Have students complete the worksheet as a class, discussing the questions and Scriptures together.

Discuss

? What is the boundary between trusting God for protection and taking His protection for granted, thereby acting recklessly?

? Describe a time when you sensed that God may have sent angels to help you or someone close to you.

Part 3—God Is Our Deliverer We Are Active Participants in His Deliverance

Psalm 91:13

Say: Too often, God’s love is viewed as an exclusively New Testament truth. However, God has always expressed His love for His people, exhorting us that our relationship with Him is built upon both love and trust. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 91:13 stands out as unique in this psalm. The preceding verses largely focus on God’s protection and preservation. In this verse, however, God’s people were put on the offensive. This was made possible by the elevated position of safety created by the ministering angels. Yet it is, in fact, the believer who will “trample” and “crush” (verse 13, NLT; note the parallelism in this verse). Lions and serpents represent the threat of mortal danger and the power to end life. They also attack suddenly from hidden places, adding to the threat (see Jeremiah 25:38; Ecclesiastes 10:8). Yet they can be put down by the person of faith.

It is also noteworthy that Satan is compared to both of these creatures in the New Testament (see 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9). Psalm 91:13, then, paints a picture of great victory over evil for the believer. He or she has endured the trials noted in the previous verses and can also share victory over the enemy by God’s grace and power.

As believers, we are privileged to be active participants in God’s preserving and empowering acts done on our behalf. Note the strong parallels between Psalm 91 and Romans 8:35–39. Nothing can separate us from Christ’s love—“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love” (verse 38, NLT). Why? Because “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (verse 37, KJV).

Discuss

? In what ways are sin and evil like the threat of lions and snakes?

? What are some ways we live out the promise that we are “more than conquerors” through Christ?

God Is Attuned to His People

Psalm 91:14–16

Say: Have you ever been frustrated because you were explaining something important and those around you were distracted and not listening? Thankfully, God has promised to always listen to us in those important times—and in the less important times too. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Up to this point in Psalm 91, the Psalmist has encouraged God’s people. But beginning in verse 14, God himself speaks. His words are those of a loving, caring Father who takes great pleasure in rescuing and protecting His children—those who love Him and trust in His name.

In verse 15, God restates the great promises of this psalm with a key addition: “When they call on me, I will answer” (NLT). This is followed by a fourfold assurance: to be with

them in trouble, to rescue and honor them, to reward them with long life, and to give them salvation.

The first sentence in verse 15 is key, and it has a twofold meaning: God expects us to call on Him, and God expects us to listen and respond to Him. To call on Him means more than prayer; it involves trust and surrender in difficult times. Yet this also points to a great privilege. God is attuned to us. He hears our prayers and our cries. When we talk to Him, we can know that He will listen and that He cares about what we have to say. As a result, God “will reward [us] with a long life and give [us His] salvation” (verse 16, NLT).

Resource Packet Item 3: God, Your Deliverer

Distribute the worksheet, and discuss it in class. Invite students to share their own testimonies.

Discuss

? Why is it important to remember that God offers His promises specifically to “those who trust in my name” (Psalm 91:14, NLT).

? Why might we choose not to call out to God with certain needs?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Take time to examine your relationship with God. Are you calling out to Him during the difficult times? Or are you trying to take matters into your own hands as you walk with Him? Ask God to help you renew your trust in Him and to prepare you for challenges to your faith in the future.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- One way God provides refuge to us is through the care and ministry of fellow believers. This week, identify a brother or sister you can help during a difficult time.
- Spend time together as a class praying for each other, asking for God’s grace to endure whatever difficulties may come.
- Pray that God will open doors for you to proclaim Christ as a source of refuge to unbelievers. Think about how you might interject your own testimony of God’s care into your words.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Song of Victory.

Exodus 15:1–3

Tuesday:

God Our Strength and Refuge.

2 Samuel 22:31–34

Wednesday:

Confidence in God Results in Victory.

2 Chronicles 20:5–15

Thursday:

Jesus Promises His Abiding Presence.

Matthew 28:18–20

Friday:

Christ Provides Peace and Access.

Romans 5:1–5

Saturday:

Reason to Rejoice in the Lord.

Philippians 4:4–7