

Living With God's Loving Assurance

February 24 • Lesson 13

Bible Background • PSALM 91:1–16

Printed Text • PSALM 91:1–8, 11–16 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 8:31–39

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **RECOGNIZE** the many ways God protects us; **RELATE** to the psalmist in gratefulness declaring God's power of protection; and **PROCLAIM** our trust in God as our protector in the future.

In Focus

Lydia, a newlywed, had recently been scheduled to have surgery to remove an ovarian mass that was causing extreme pain and was possibly cancerous. She was concerned, but not shaken. She had witnessed God's power in the life of her mother, a four-time cancer and heart attack survivor. She began to meditate on Psalms 27 and 91, and Isaiah 26:3–5, as suggested by her mother.

A week later, Lydia was involved in a fender bender caused by two very apologetic young men whom she had the opportunity to invite to church. Also, her car was perfectly fine. She was reminded of Psalm 91:11: "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Additionally, the accident was a distraction from her current medical situation.

With prayerful tears, Lydia and her husband went through the surgery preparation while she earnestly tried her hardest to focus on the promises of the Scriptures. She fearlessly endured the surgery, recovery, and received the news that the mass was cancerous—but the cancer was not found anywhere else! Once again, the Lord's voice rang out, "With long life will I satisfy him." Lydia was grateful for God's strength and covering over her; she was honored that her life was a testimony of His promises in His Word.

How has God's Word sustained you in times of crisis?

Keep in Mind

"When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them" (Psalm 91:15, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Pestilence *deber* (Heb.) — Plague or disease.

B. Refuge *machaceh* (Heb.) — Shelter from outside elements such as rain, storm or danger.

Say It Correctly

none

KJV

KJV Psalm 91:1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

NLT

Psalm 91:1 Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

3 For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

4 He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

5 Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.

6 Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

7 Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.

8 Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished.

11 For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.

12 They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.

13 You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

14 The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name.

15 When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them.

16 I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation."

The People, Places, and Times

Poetic Imagery in Psalms. Imagery is present throughout the Bible; however, it is very prevalent in the poetic sections of Scripture. It uses a wide variety of literary devices, including three that we encounter quite frequently in Psalms: simile, metaphor, and personification. With simile, the psalmist helps us see some truth by explicitly comparing it to something else, using the words "like" or "as." An example of simile is found in the opening verse of Psalm 42. Here, the simile compares a thirsty deer looking for water with the psalmist's own search for satisfaction in the Lord. Conversely, a metaphor makes more direct comparisons. These comparisons are made without the use of the words "like" or "as." For instance, in Psalm 23:1, we read: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." Here, the comparison of the Lord to a shepherd is made directly. Personification is

the technique of ascribing human qualities to something that is nonhuman. We are seeing personification when we read, “What’s wrong, Red Sea, that made you hurry out of their way? What happened, Jordan River, that you turned away?” (Psalm 114:5, NLT).

How does poetic language help you understand or hear a message differently?

Background

Psalm 91, known as a Psalm of Protection, is a mystery in that its authorship is unknown and it is without a title. It has been given a Latin title, “Qui habitat,” derived from the first verse. In Jewish culture, it is recited before bed and seven times during a burial ceremony. For some Christians, it is recited on the first Sunday of Lent. In the Medieval Western church, the psalm is included in Good Friday readings. An additional mystery is the psalm’s date of writing. Jewish schools of thought suggest that a nameless psalm be credited to the author of the preceding psalm. If this theory holds true, Moses is the author of Psalm 91. Other times a psalm’s author can be discovered later in Scripture. For instance, early believers quote verses from Psalm 2, an unnamed psalm, attributing it to David (Acts 4:25). Other key scholars have speculated that David is the author of Psalm 91, but the events of David’s reign do not parallel the themes in this psalm. Aside from conjecture about its authorship, we can all conclude that Psalm 91 is a celebratory song about God’s faithfulness, His power, and our response as His children.

How do you remember God’s faithfulness? In what ways have you witnessed God’s protection?

At-A-Glance

1. God Our Shelter (Psalm 91:1–8)
2. God Our Protector (vv. 11–13)
3. God Our Answer (vv. 14–16)

In Depth

1. God, Our Shelter (Psalm 91:1–8)

God’s invitation goes out to anyone who seeks Him; He is non-discriminatory and inclusive. Dwell is to remain in a place for a time. Because God wants us but does not need us, His arms are always open when we come to this realization. To be in His shadow means that His presence is over us for our protection. The name Almighty in Hebrew is El-Shaddai (v. 1). The writer then expresses what the proper response is once we agree with God about who He is and how He sustains and protects us. He is ultimately the one we can wholeheartedly trust.

Furthermore, the writer showcases how God’s protection is illustrated. Any plague, spiritual attack, or perceived enemy cannot withstand the power of the Lord. His comfort is unlike any other. Here the author explains how God’s faithfulness will be our safe place and protective barrier, or rampart. He goes on to explain how our lives will inevitably change due to God’s safe keeping. We will no longer become consumed by whatever we face, whether it is darkness, wicked imaginations, armies, tragedies, or more. You will see the downfall of those who meant to harm you, but you will remain unscathed.

How confident are you in these promises of God’s protection?

2. God, Our Protector (vv. 11–13)

This passage begins with a promise that is ours if we submit to God’s shelter and presence. He will perform the miracle of dispatching His messengers to surround us with His covering in every facet of our lives. The fact that we will not dash our feet against stones speaks to the surety of the angels’ grasps on us when we fall. These guardian angels will do their job to keep us from the dangers of physical life and spiritual advances of the enemy and his demons. Verse 13 speaks of trampling upon lions and cobras as well as fierce lions and serpents. In other words the psalmist expects not only protection from but triumph over natural and spiritual enemies regardless of whether they are common or unique, weak or fierce.

Do you think that the role of angels has been misinterpreted in today’s culture?

3. God, Our Answer (vv. 14–16)

Yet another promise is given in this passage that is conditional: God rescues those who know that they need Him, and He protects those who acknowledge His unmatched power. We will not have to wonder where He is and if He will appear. He is never tardy and He will answer with joy; He will never make us feel like a burden to Him. In fact, He is waiting on us to call Him! No trouble that we face, no turmoil that we find ourselves in is too hard for Him. Even in those messes that we have caused, He is there to clean us up as a father does with a toddler who stains his clothes. Finally, He promises to grant us a long life, not merely existing but thriving in Him, and guarantees eternal security.

Are you distressed by areas in your life where you have not acknowledged God’s ability to heal and deliver?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why does the psalmist need God to be shelter for them (Psalm 91:3–6)?
2. How does the psalmist say God responds to those who acknowledge Him and seek Him in prayer (vv. 14–16)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Psalm 91 is one of the most iconic and memorable psalms in the Scriptures. Does Psalm 91 have any special significance for you or your family? Why or why not?
2. Think of a time when God allowed certain fears to overtake you or when He seemed distant in your time of trouble. How did you recover? What did you learn about God’s response?

Liberating Lesson

The most appropriate way to “dwell” in God’s shelter is prayer: listening and talking to Him. Sadly, many Christians use prayer as a last resort. Bullying at school and online is commonplace particularly with our youth. Many of us have seen the horrors of hurricanes and other natural disasters. The church can help alleviate the fears of unbelievers and new Christians in the face of medical diagnoses and wars by modeling the faith of the author of Psalm 91. The passage does not insinuate that challenge and calamity will not come, but that the Lord, our Savior is always victorious. There is power in prayer and trust in God, and when believers show faith in God for protection despite their circumstances, we testify to the hope our world so deeply needs.

Application for Activation

- The church must exhibit fearlessness and dependence on God’s faithfulness even when there are elements of risk and dangerous threats, either perceived or real.
- Organize a neighborhood watch at your church. Pray for your church neighborhood. Invite local police officers and ask them to share any helpful precautions; pray for them and thank them for their service.

- Conduct an evangelistic, free lunch with prepared prayer warriors. Invite unchurched friends to share their fears and concerns about their children, life circumstances, crime, and more. In prayer circles of two or three people, pray for them based on Psalm 91 and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Be sure to get follow up information for those interested in knowing more about Jesus.

- How are your children conquering their fears? Pray with your family every morning and encourage them to pray for bus and playground safety, work-bound parents, and sports activities. These are also valuable talking points for family dinner conversations and carpool rides. Have them recall times when God kept them safe.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Psalm 91:1–8, 11–16 1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

The Hebrew word for “dwelleth” (yashab, yaw-SHAB), means to inhabit or remain. In this text, yashab describes the importance of remaining “in the secret place.” While yashab can also be translated as merely to sit, this context makes it obvious that the subject of this psalm habitually stays in God’s secret place. The Hebrew word for “in the secret” is sether (SAY-thair), which can refer to a shelter or hiding place. The phrase “of God’s protection” conveys the idea of returning to God’s abode, staying constantly in His presence, getting completely acquainted or connected with Him, and resting permanently in Him. The “secret place” is a refuge, a place of safety, and a covering from all forms of destructive elements that seek to attack or destroy the children of God, and to prevent us from experiencing the fullness of God’s blessings and peace, and His divine providence. At least once in Scripture, God’s “secret place” is in the Tabernacle (Psalm 27:5).

The word translated “Almighty” here is in Hebrew shaddai (shad-DIE). It represents an ancient title of God’s protective character, and it was greatly feared by the enemies of God’s people. In other words, God’s children must make the Lord their refuge and habitation. In the Hebrew, the word “refuge” (machaceh, makh-as-EH) means “shelter from rain or storm, from danger.” Therefore, the Lord has delegated His angels and given us the power of the Holy Spirit to build a solid spiritual wall of defense around His people to keep them from destruction.

3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. 4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

The psalmist deliberately establishes a connection between forces of opposition and God's sovereign protection. For instance, on the one hand, words such as "snare of the fowler" in Hebrew are yaqush (yaw-KOOSH), meaning "trapper" or "bait-layer" for game or fish. This phrase seems to imply human-made threats that intend to unleash havoc in people's lives, rather than mere natural disasters. The poetry builds out different sorts of troubles and attacks that can harm the writer, and the faith in the Lord's protection of His people in light of trouble. The word "pestilence" in Hebrew is deber (DEH-ber), which means "plague" or "disease." This part of Psalm 91 conveys how natural and man-made forces of evil can work against people and their communities to bring about death and destruction.

There are two metaphors used for God's protection in verse 4, those of wings and of a shield and buckler. The picture is of God protecting His faithful servant as a mother bird protects her children, shielding them from the elements or as armor protects a soldier going into battle, images that are illuminated in other memorable Scriptures (Matthew 23:37; Ephesians 6:10–19). Feathers are ascribed to God only one other place (Deuteronomy 32:11), a verse which also happens to use the same Hebrew for "hover" that described the Spirit of God hovering over Creation in the beginning (Genesis 1:2). God's metaphorical feathers of protection are reaching far and powerfully. The word "shield" (Heb. tsinnah, tseen-NAH) refers to a large shield that covered the entire body, while the Hebrew word translated "buckler," which is used only here in all Scripture, refers to something that surrounds a person. Here God's truth protects us from whatever the enemy throws at us. His truth leads us to understand absolute right and wrong, which God's Word reveals to us. If we surround ourselves in His truth, we have a safe starting point.

5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; 6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

Fear is an enemy with the power to create torment and disruptive behavior. Fear also has the power to neutralize a person's deep faith and absolute trust in the power and wisdom of God (cf. 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18). When the children of God believe in the faithfulness of God and the unchanging power of His promise to protect, lead, and provide for them, it lays a strong foundation for exercising absolute confidence in His ability to provide for their spiritual salvation, too.

When a child of God dwells in His secret place, there is no reason to be frozen because of the "terror [that comes] by night" or "the arrow that flieth by day" (v. 5). The Hebrew word qeteb (KEH-teb) translated as "destruction" in the text refers to pestilential epidemics. There are pestilences that strike at night that are so pervasive that they do not clear up before noon. But God will protect us from these. The attacks in verses 5–6 also give us a picture of different time periods, but the Lord's faithful protection is consistent. The guardianship of the Lord is active throughout the entire day, indeed for all time for the one hiding in His presence. The Lord is ever ready, in His love and power, to defend and protect us from challenges that the enemy has designed to destroy our initiatives or efforts as we desire to make progress according to God's plan for our lives.

7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

Although plagues and problems impact the masses, they do not touch the person dwelling in the secret place of God's presence. This example of divine protection is a reminder that through plagues and warfare, the Lord's protection can preserve us. The preserved one becomes a survivor in the midst of the tragedy. Because the preserved one sees the "reward of the wicked," we can infer that what is being described is an act of divine justice against the wicked. While those who rebel against God and mistreat their neighbors are receiving

punishment that destroys many, those who remain faithful and obedient, trusting God for their protection, will be safe.

11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. 13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet.

In verses 9–10, the psalmist promises that since the one who dwells in the God’s secret place made such a habitation, no evil or plague will affect him. The concept of divine protection in this discussion is built on the premise that the people of God must be dependent and obedient to the basic conditions or principles laid down in the Word of God in order to enjoy the fullness of God’s blessings of protection, deliverance, and security.

Verses 11–12 are used by Satan when he tempts Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. Satan asks Jesus to throw Himself off the Temple, because based on these verses Jesus would not suffer harm from it. Jesus knows this is not the true meaning of these verses. The point is not that God’s followers will never suffer so much as a stubbed toe; any brief look at Scripture would discount that. The point is to trust that God is always watching over us, willing to deploy even such powerful creatures as angels to keep us from falling. When He does not, we must trust, too, that it is for the best. Since we know God does not like to let us suffer and could prevent all suffering, we must trust that all suffering serves a purpose for Him, if only to make us long for heaven. Sometimes, the image of a lion is used in the Scriptures to represent Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as a symbol of His kingship and conquering power (Revelation 5:1–5). A lion is also used to refer to the devil: destructive, seeking to attack the people of God (1 Peter 5:8–9). In this particular context the psalmist could be using “lion” to represent Israel’s predatory enemies. The psalmist also employed the image of the adder to symbolize actual and potential dangers posed by demonic and physical enemies of the people of God (Genesis 3:1–15; Mark 16:15–18).

14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16 With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

In verse 14 God responds to the prayers and poetry of the psalmist. There is a progression from the faith for God’s protection to God delivering the psalmist because of His grace. God delivers us, but He doesn’t leave us just the way He found us. He exalts us, lifts us up on high, just for knowing His name and trying to worship. God searches for the heart we have for Him and offers His deliverance from trouble for those who trust Him.

Verses 15–16 give promises from God to those who trust in Him. God will hear their prayers and answer them, which can be contrasted with those who trust in idols or in themselves. It is important to note again that even when we find ourselves in trouble, God is able to be with us in the midst of it. Often we have an impulse to rush past the “in the midst” on to the deliverance, but the psalmist reminds us that God is with us in our trouble while it is still happening. God promises here that those who put their faith in Him will receive deliverance, honor, long life, and salvation. In the midst of our difficult seasons we can hold on to God’s promise that although our suffering may not end today or even next week, God is with us. Our ultimate end is to see the salvation of God in this life in Jesus Christ and the life to come.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Sustains and Cares for Jacob
(Deuteronomy 32:10–14)

TUESDAY

Trust God, No Need to Fear
(Psalm 121)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord Will Help You
(Isaiah 41:8–13)

THURSDAY

God Overpowers Adversaries
(Nahum 1:2–8)

FRIDAY

God's Protection through Oneness
(John 17:11–15)

SATURDAY

Deliverance from Violent People
(Psalm 140:1–8)

SUNDAY

Assurance of God's Protection
(Psalm 91:1–8, 11–16)