

Pondering God's Steadfast Love

February 10 • Lesson 11

Bible Background • PSALM 48:1–3, 9–14

Printed Text • PSALM 48:1–3, 9–14 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 93

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **DISCOVER** the value of worshiping God in the Temple; **CONSIDER** how God’s steadfast love is present in our lives; and **DISCUSS** ways to celebrate God’s love in worship individually and collectively.

In Focus

The congregation had just completed a revival last month at their church. Now the pastor was asking the church to accompany him as he did a revival at another church. The previous month had been extremely busy with the “Back to School Rally,” the revival, the community parade, and the neighborhood witnessing.

When the pastor mentioned to the congregation he would preach the annual revival at a friend’s church, there were cheers! A visitor asked why all the excitement when they had just finished doing all the extra activities the month before.

The member sitting next to him responded, “We have learned coming together to worship is a blessing and a privilege. We know it is important to worship privately but we also recognize the importance of worshipping together as a family. We see in the news people who are killed for exercising their right to worship when and where they want. In our country, we don’t have to worry about that. So whenever we get an opportunity to gather and worship, we take it!”

The visitor seemed enlightened and appreciative of the reflection. When the pastor asked if he could see a show of hands of those who would join him at the revival church, the visitor raised his hand—and he wasn’t even a member yet.

In today’s lesson, believers testify to the many ways God’s steadfast love has touched their lives. Do you celebrate God’s love through both private and corporate worship?

Keep in Mind

“For that is what God is like. He is our God forever and ever, and he will guide us until we die” (Psalm 48:14, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Bulwarks chelah (Heb.) — Fortified walls.

B. Righteousness tsedeq (Heb.) — Justice or right judgment.

Say It Correctly

none

KJV

Psalm 48:1 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.
2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.
3 God is known in her palaces for a refuge.
9 We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.
10 According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness.
11 Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments.
12 Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof.
13 Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.
14 For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

NLT

Psalm 48:1 How great is the Lord, how deserving of praise, in the city of our God, which sits on his holy mountain!
2 It is high and magnificent; the whole earth rejoices to see it! Mount Zion, the holy mountain, is the city of the great King!
3 God himself is in Jerusalem's towers, revealing himself as its defender.
9 O God, we meditate on your unfailing love as we worship in your Temple.
10 As your name deserves, O God, you will be praised to the ends of the earth. Your strong right hand is filled with victory.
11 Let the people on Mount Zion rejoice. Let all the towns of Judah be glad because of your justice.
12 Go, inspect the city of Jerusalem. Walk around and count the many towers.
13 Take note of the fortified walls, and tour all the citadels, that you may describe them to future generations.
14 For that is what God is like. He is our God forever and ever, and he will guide us until we die.

The People, Places, and Times

Sons of Korah. Korah, a Levite, was a jealous cousin of Moses and Aaron and led an uprising against them (Numbers 16:1–33). Consequently, Korah and his congregation were destroyed, but future generations survived and became ministers of music during the time of King David and after as royal musicians (1 Chronicles 6:31–37), penning this timeless anthem to the Lord.

Do you know of any families that seem to have a heritage of music or worship?

Background

This song to the Lord is one of adoration and praise to our great King who is strong, loving, and everlasting. He is the only one deserving of such accolades. The tone of Psalm 48 is one of celebration, highlighting God's power and security that is a by-product of trusting in Him. It is similar to Psalms 46 and 47, which emphasize God's triumph over His enemies. Judah is the recipient of this victory. Psalm 48 is attributed to the Sons of Korah, who wrote ten other psalms. Some examples of other places in Scripture this psalm's sentiment is evident (46–48) were the miraculous victory the Lord granted King Jehoshaphat and Judah from the hands of their enemies (2 Chronicles 20) through praise, and King Hezekiah's miraculous protection from Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 19:35–36).

Have you ever been excited to praise God after God protected or kept you from trouble?

At-A-Glance

1. Our Great God (Psalm 48:1–3)
2. Our Righteous God (vv. 8–11)
3. Our Eternal God (vv. 12–14)

In Depth

1. Our Great God (Psalm 48:1–3)

In some Roman Jewish circles, “great” is a noble title denoting a prominent leader or one whose teaching is worth following. These verses also display where God is to be honored and praised: in His city with His people, on Mount Zion. His city is made up of those who have acknowledged His authority over creation, His immutable characteristics like His mercy, grace, love, and His judgment. Here, the city is likened to a lady, a frequent way to personalize cities in the Old Testament. Zaphon was the revered mountain of the Canaanites. Zion was an ancient fortress or mountain of Jebusite origins, but later conquered by David so that it was called “the city of David” (1 Chronicles 11:5). God is indwelling this space, a safe place for His people to worship, praise, and find comfort in Him from the outside world of temptation, defeat, and powerlessness. Verses 4–8 give more details of how God protects Israel in battle.

What is your definition of great as it relates to God? Is He great in every area of your life? Can you recall a time when you felt the safety of God’s presence?

2. Our Righteous God (vv. 9–11)

God’s power is evident in His actions toward His people. While worship and praise can be expressed anywhere in creation, the Temple is the place where God said that His name would dwell perpetually (2 Chronicles 7:16, 1 Kings 9:3). Here the writer compares God’s praise to His name—it knows no bounds and is limitless. God is qualified to be the recipient of our praise because He is flawless, perfect, and without sin. The Bible refers to God’s right hand on several occasions, in this case stating it holds righteousness or victory (Isaiah 41:10). The right hand is the hand of blessing in ancient Jewish thought, and the author notes here that God has extended the blessing of victory and safety. God exudes purity and worthiness beyond all human comprehension. God’s people understand that His corrective decrees are indicative of His love.

How has God spoken to you? What have you witnessed as evidence of God’s power?

3. Our Eternal God (vv. 12–14)

The writers stress the importance of looking for and focusing on what God has done, where He is working, and the coming victory so that future generations may be in awe of God’s greatness and magnitude. The writers state a final declaration in this passage noting that our God’s name is eternal and that He will be with us forevermore, similar to Jesus’ Great Commission promise (Matthew 28:20).

What have your grandparents or elders shared about the glory of God? What will you tell your children?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did God keep Israel from physical harm (Psalm 48:3, 12–14)?
2. What characteristics of God are magnified in this psalm (vv. 1, 9–11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Are there any special places or memories that remind you of God’s provision and protection in your life?
2. Why is it important to worship God in private and in public? Is there a difference in how we worship in either setting?

Liberating Lesson

There is a clear distinction between Godcentered worship and self-centered worship. What differences are most telling? How might we accidentally fall into self-centered worship?

Our culture now has the option of staying at home to worship online or watching a service on TV. There is a consensus among some that church membership and attendance are not needed, and social media spiritual quotes and theology have become “Scripture” for many. What are the weaknesses of this kind of worship?

With the knowledge that God has taken great care in creating the world, we have the mission to convey to the lost that same love. This same love is a force to challenge the violence in our streets and the hopelessness in many of our youth. In this crucial time the church has the honorable privilege of changing the world’s view of it. What is our witness in the world as it relates to today’s text? What is the church’s role in ensuring that the collective voice of worship stays strong?

Application for Activation

- In order to fully appreciate all that God desires for us, we must recognize His power and trust His promises. This can best take place through a daily quiet time of worship, confession, supplication, and obedience. When this happens, we can share testimonies of God’s faithfulness with a hungry and thirsty world. When we become contagious Christians, our communities will change and God will be pleased. Authentic corporate worship comes from a heart of private worship as we begin to cultivate a heart and space for worship in our daily schedule (Psalm132:3–5).
- Challenge yourself to match every insecurity or doubt with the truth of God’s Word that specifically speaks to His love for you.
- Pray for safety for your family, church family, city, and world. Organize a town hall meeting at your church to pray about violence and open a dialogue on the relationships between your community, the church, and the police force.
- Plan a church clean-up day; take your family along with some cleaning supplies and spend the day preparing the sanctuary for Sunday worship. Then ask your children to reflect on what they learned and why it is important to reverence God’s house.
- Write your own love song to God. Include examples of His greatness, grace, and love in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Psalm 48:1–3, 9–14

Jehoshaphat is one example of a king in Judah who organized his people and set up a choir of musicians with loud praise in front. The Lord set an ambush and confusion in the enemies' camp; they slaughtered one another, but granted Jerusalem victory without fighting at all. Only praise! How effectual corporate praise can be! These three psalms (46-48) focus on exalting the Lord, however, the emphasis of Psalm 48 is praise of Jerusalem, which is protected by God. The psalm begins with the praise of the Lord's greatness (v. 1); it concludes with praises of God and His goodness and assurance of His guidance for His people forever (v. 14).

1 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

The psalm begins with an emphatic and indisputable affirmation of the greatness of the Lord. His greatness is inconceivable, but it is demonstrable in His various acts and dealings with His people, like the deliverances of His people. His greatness is apparent in the minds of those delivered as they praise the Lord. The word "great" is the Hebrew *gadol* (gaw-DOLE); it speaks of being "large" in magnitude, size or scale; standing out in magnitude, or degree or effectiveness. Unlike the idols other nations worship, the God of Israel is able to fight and defend His people. In the historical context of this psalm, the Lord displayed His great power in overthrowing the mighty forces that gathered to besiege His holy city, Jerusalem, where His name dwells (2 Chronicle 20; see 2 Kings 18 and 19).

African Americans reflected God's greatness during slavery in the 1800s through their spirituals. They looked to God for hope, strength and comfort, trusting that God would one day liberate them. "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" is a song of hope, liberation, and action. Because the Lord is great, He then is to be praised greatly. That means He is most worthy of praise. "Praise" is the Hebrew *halal* (haw-LAL) from which we have "hallelujah." The word appears more than 165 times in its different forms and uses in the Bible, mostly in praise of the Lord. Just as it was in the time of this psalm, so it is today: When we look and consider all the attributes of God, we marvel and are compelled to praise Him greatly.

This great praise is exceptional and unique for the psalmist because of its location: "in the city of our God." This refers to Jerusalem where God chose to establish His name; it is also where the Temple was located. Also known as Mount Zion, it is the dwelling place for God's name and worship center for the God of the universe. Consequently, both the city and Temple are referred to as the "mountain of his holiness," a sacred place of worship. The city is pictured as the place where all believers would gather in the last day in worship (Isaiah 2:2–5).

2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. 3 God is known in her palaces for a refuge.

The psalmist explains the aesthetic and positional components of the city and the effect it has on the people. Apart from the fact that this city is spiritually the city of God—where God dwells—it is a beautiful and elevated city. The word "situation" is the Hebrew *noph* (NOFE), meaning elevation or height. Therefore, the phrase "beautiful for situation" refers to the geographically elevated position of the city upon which the architecturally magnificent Temple was built. Jerusalem was built on an elevation of about 2,500 feet above sea level, hence writers talk of "going up" to Jerusalem or the mountain (Psalm 122:4; Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). Josephus, the Jewish historian, writes about Jerusalem as built on two hills. Mount Zion, the Temple location is the northern part; the psalmist refers to it here as "on the sides of the north."

Opinions differ on what sense Mount Zion or the Temple could be “the joy of the whole earth.” It all depends on if the Hebrew ’erets (EH-rets), is rendered the “earth” or the “land.” There is no evidence indicating that either the city or the Temple ever was the joy of the world globally. In reality, both were the envy of the nations, thus they endeavored to destroy them. Therefore ’erets cannot be “earth” as in the world. But if ’erets means “land” as in a country, territory district, or region, then it makes sense for the Temple to be the crown jewel of Judea.

Jerusalem with its Temple was a joy to the people, not only because of its geographical location and beauty, but because it was also “the city of the great King”—God’s chosen city. Yahweh chose it for His residence and His worship. Therefore, worshiping God was limited to Jews in Jerusalem until Jesus came and effected a change. Jerusalem (a geographical city) is no longer the only place for the most intimate worship. The church (not a building, but a body) is now where true worship of God takes place. God is Spirit and He is everywhere; He is not physically restricted to a location. His worship takes place anywhere and in any setting (Matthew 18:20).

This great King is now identified as God. He is known in Jerusalem, His fortified city of refuge, where He reigns as King. “Palace” refers to a fortress, castle, or a fortified and an elevated place, a royal residence for a king. Not the walls, but God Himself was Zion’s defense and refuge (cf. Psalm 46:1, 7, 11). For believers, God is our refuge and protection; He dwells among us and in us.

9 We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.

After the brief review of God’s victorious act on behalf of the people and the city (vv. 4–8), the psalmist now reflects on God’s love. The word translated “thought” here is the Hebrew *damah* (daw-MAW), and means “to compare, to liken, resemble or to think.” It is used often in the sense of reflecting on or meditating on something. The author proclaims that they had heard of Jerusalem’s glory, but now they had seen it themselves (v. 8). That means they had compared in their minds what they had just experienced with what others—perhaps their predecessors—had told them about God. As they contemplate on the present act of God’s love toward them, it reminds and confirms to them the Lord’s past love to their fathers (Psalm 44:1–2). The phrase “in the midst of thy temple” indicates that this was a corporate reflective act of celebration among God’s people. We honor God when we individually or corporately contemplate and appreciate His love. We praise God not because of what we can benefit from Him, rather we must honor and worship Him regardless. He deserves all our praises simply for who He is.

10 According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness.

God has established and made known His name throughout the whole world, therefore His praise also reaches to the ends of the earth. The Hebrew translated “name” here is *shem* (SHAME); it can also refer to someone’s reputation or fame. Throughout the Scriptures and in history, God’s name is universally made known through His acts: in creation, deliverance, and protection of His people. We know many other nations had heard of the power of God (cf. Joshua 2:8–11; 1 Samuel 4:8). God’s right hand, metaphorically speaking, is the instrument with which the Lord has wrought His work. God’s right hand is filled with *tsedeq* (TSEH-dek) “justice” or “righteousness.” Righteousness here refers to God’s execution of justice or right judgment on those who want to attack Judah. The Lord is a righteous and just God (Exodus 9:27; Job 37:23). His name is Jehovah *Tsidkenu* (SED-kay-new), “The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16), and He “is righteous in all his ways” (Psalm 145:17).

11 Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments.

Using a parallelism (Mount Zion paired with daughters of Judah), the whole nation with its inhabitants is summoned to rejoice for the Lord’s righteous act and justice on their behalf over their enemies. Here “Mount Zion” refers to or stands for all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, probably including the priests, the Levites, and

those that attend the Temple; all are called upon to rejoice. “The daughters of Judah” probably refers to the other towns and cities of Judah that surround Jerusalem. Cities are often referred to as daughters in Scripture (Isaiah 1:8), but another interpretation of the phrase refers to women themselves rejoicing in the victory of God. This was God’s righteous judgment and it called for a celebration of joy and gladness.

12 Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. 13 Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.

This call for celebration is continued in verses 12 and 13. Instead of being limited within the Temple (v. 9), the celebrative praise and worship should be extended within and around the citadel—around the fortified walls that surround Jerusalem. “Walk about Zion, and go round about her” is another parallelism, the second reinforcing and emphasizing the first phrase. The entire nation of Judah is to gladly and joyfully march around the holy city praising God. They should inspect the city and take note of their findings. As they go round they have to “tell” (Heb. saphar, saw-FAR) its towers; that is they have to “count, number or take account” of the towers. Towers or observation posts are usually erected on fortified walls surrounding the cities, from where the approaching forces can be detected (see 2 Chronicles 26:9–10; Isaiah 2:12–15). Such towers, though usually stronger than other parts of the castle, are the first to be attacked. The idea here is that as the people march around they must count the towers and palaces and bulwarks or structures to realize that they are still standing and intact. None of them is damaged.

As they observe and take note of these edifices and fortresses, they should imagine the disaster and the extent of damage had God not acted on their behalf. Taking notes and keeping record of these happenings is for posterity and preservation purposes, so that they “may tell it to the generation following.” They pass it on to their children so they know how prosperous their God made them. The poetry of the verses supports the understanding of the passage. The Hebrew root for “tell” in verses 12 and 13 is the same, but in different verbal forms so that they have a slightly different meaning. The word saphar in verse 12 means “to tell, count,” but the word saphar in verse 13 means “to retell.”

14 For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

The reason for preserving the record and passing it on to the next generation is to remind and assure them that “this God” who performed such acts “is our God ever and ever.” Our God is unchangeable and consistent in His love. His love remains forever. He is, and will ever be, the covenant-keeping God of Israel and the church forever. He is not only the God of the past; He is also the God of the present. What He did in the past, He will do today and for eternity. Because He “is our God forever, He will be our guide even unto death,” the psalmist concluded. As pilgrims on earth, it is consoling to know and be assured that the God who lived in the midst of His people, led the Children of Israel through the wilderness and won their battles, is the same God who is with us “even unto death” today. That’s how great and awesome our God is, and He deserves to be greatly praised by His people forever.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Son of the Living God
(Matthew 16:13–20)

TUESDAY

I Am the Lord
(Ezekiel 39:7–10)

WEDNESDAY

Grow into a Precious Spiritual House
(1 Peter 2:1–8)

THURSDAY

Majesty of God's Rule
(Psalm 93)

FRIDAY

Rulers Astounded with City of God
(Psalm 48:4–8)

SATURDAY

Build Up Each Other in Worship
(1 Corinthians 14:26–33)

SUNDAY

Praise God's Steadfast Love in Worship
(Psalm 48:1–3, 9–14)