

Be Confident in God - Psalm 91

The thing I love most about the psalms is that they focus on life as it is

Theologians and academics dig deeply into psalms to understand them. They can tell you how different Psalms relate to each other - types of psalm, context of psalm, sung or not, situation specific, where and when - so many ways to categorise them. Whilst all this can be helpful they can sometimes take away intimacy with God and give it all an academic feel

Psalms reveal real emotions and like the rest of God's Word tell it like it is, reflecting the wrestlings of individuals like David and their relationship with God but they don't shy away from intense pain like going into exile in Babylon. They reveal every reaction to God praise, gratitude, doubt, and even anger. The main strength of the psalms is that they are so relevant to ordinary folk like you and me

The Bible is transformational - and the psalms are no exception. You can read the Bible many many times and have little or no reaction to it - perhaps even struggle with it. Yet sometimes a verse or verses jump out and seem to speak to you personally - that attention grabbing "slap round the face" moment. You feel them, they resonate with the real life situations you are in at that time. It's what turns the Bible into God's Word

Psalm 91 is somewhere to turn to when you're lost for words. It gives confidence and reassurance about your security in God's hands. A psalm to turn to when your feeling overwhelmed, when you can't put things into words. A psalm to pick you up when you feel defeated, down and out, by the pressures of every day living. A psalm to restore your confidence that God is in control - whatever life is throwing at you

Psalm 91 blasts out a new confidence in God and gets to it right from the start - unequivocally confident in God. Psalm 91 reminds us that we have a choice - we can have our heads down focused only on the problems of the world or we can have our heads up as we take confidence in God's protection, promises and ultimate security

The psalm opens in verses 1 and 2 with a declaration of confidence in God describing His overwhelming protection. Not wishful thinking but something built upon real experience ground out through those periods of disorientation that led to lament. The middle section verses 3-13, gives confidence and gratitude that God is greater than anything that life can throw at us. Bad things will continue to happen in the world and to the Christian - we are not immune - but God will be there with us. And finally the last section verses 14-16 celebrate the promises we have under God's protection.

Psalm 91 shows the breadth of God's protection with pretty far ranging imagery. Images of Personal Protection - protection that comes from another looking out for you. Someone getting involved personally - in this case God Himself. God gives a safe hiding place in His shadow (v1) or under His wings (v4) or behind His shield (v4)

His Shadow (v1): You can only be in someone's shadow if you are close to them. You can't be in their shadow if you are miles away. To be in God's shadow we need to be close to Him

His Wings (v4): If you watch series like Planet Earth or nature programmes you'll see the ultimate protection for a bird or fowl is under the wings and feathers of a parent.

A Shield (v4): A shield can be many things but they all have one thing in common - you put yourself behind it or surround yourself with it. God offers to be your shield!

Images of sanctuary - like a refuge, a fortress or a shelter. Other words for these protections might be asylum which we hear about practically every day in the news. People desperate to claim the sanctuary asylum offers, going to extreme lengths of desperation to achieve it. We have the ultimate sanctuary offered by God

His Shelter (v1) - a safe haven protecting you from external forces both natural and spiritual. A place of respite and calm from the storms of life providing a time of recovery

A Refuge (v2, 4 & 9) - safety, often linked nowadays with fleeing abuse of one kind or another or homelessness. At our annual Gift Service we support local refuges as well as Angel Tree

A Fortress (v2) - impregnable with its ramparts (v4) and moats, drawbridges, battlements. We have confidence that God is with us no matter what. God does not promise a trouble-free life but He will be with us. Those who love the Lord will not avoid trouble - bad things happen

The imagery continues in verse 3 as we are warned about personal attacks - a Fowler's snare. A fowler is a poacher who uses snares to capture birds - there are people out there who want to trap us or make us slip up - not least the devil. The poacher works in secret and often baits his snares with attractive titbits or even uses a decoy to attract - no denying the way of the world has its attractions. In psalm 91 the imagery is that we are like the birds and the fowler is someone out to trap us and cause our downfall

Then in verse 5 that protection is extended to more general attacks with imagery of Terror and arrows. God's protection is 24/7 365. We are covered during the terror of night - those dark places our minds can take us or the sharp directed attacks that come hurtling at us like arrows as we face every day life. Then there are the other literal images of terror and arrows, actual battles with gangs, violence and war. We're again not immune but we know our eternal outcome lies safely with God

More imagery in verses 3 and 6 focus us on what might seem improbable in the modern world - pestilence and plague. Our modern world prides itself on its medical advances thinking most devastating diseases are eradicated with the occasional outbreaks of ebola or dengue fever or similar diseases confined to third world spots. Then we got the surprise of Covid

The world realised its true vulnerabilities. Psalm 91 reassures us that God is in ultimate control. We can't ignore these natural problems but they are not the last word. We may suffer them like everyone else but our ultimate safety is eternal in God through Jesus

Sadly verses 7-9 remind us that confidence in God will separate us from others. Psalm 91 envisages a battlefield where those around us are overcome or fall at our side and the fear that will instil in us. Fear that the same fate will befall us but the psalm praises the personal protection we have with God as our refuge. Here and now we go through, and have to handle, many problems but our time frame is eternal. We may still suffer harm but it will not overtake us - we will win in the end. It will be like being observers of the punishment of the wicked rather than experiencing punishment ourselves.

Through it all though we are Not alone and whatever threats we face, even in our darkest times, God is with us - we never have to face threats alone and verses 11 and 12 tell us we even have the intervention of angels.

Psalm 91 gives us confidence that God faithfully keeps His promises. The speaker changes from the psalmist to God and the change brings a personal declaration - almost a contract to the

faithful. Focusing on His promises often trigger uncensored praise and gratitude. God's promises are not impersonal but personal. Verses 14-16 give us confidence in God's declaration of His personal involvement in our protection. He doesn't say "you will be" - it isn't passive. His promises are active - about His involvement in our relationship with Him - He says "I will". Some are said more than once - perhaps emphasising different aspects

In v14 God promises to be our rescuer. Sadly we regularly see in the media stories about rescuers having to give time and effort to pull people out of disastrous situations. Imagine how important you are to God if he's prepared to invest time and effort into your wellbeing. He promises to be our protector. Other words for protector flesh out what it means - champion, guard, guardian. Imagine God as your champion - on your side, promoting you or as your guardian someone who is tasked with your best welfare

In v15 He promises to answer when we call on Him. It may not seem it at the time but God always answers your prayer. The problem is that God may not agree with the solutions you present Him or perhaps the answer needs timing to be most effective or perhaps our asking is against what is best for us. Remember as a guardian God tasks Himself always to work for what is best for you.

He also promises to be with us in times of trouble. God isn't just with us when things are going well, He will be with us at the hardest times. That's not a "get out of jail free" card we will still have to work through the bad times but through His Holy Spirit God will be there with us

He also promises to deliver us - similar to rescue - pulling us out of trouble. We are not exempt but we have confidence in God that our eternal life is secure in Him. Get this too - v15 states that God will honour our faithfulness. Expanded a little more in verse 16 - a promise of long life but more important than the actual physical length of life is God's promise that it will satisfy us and that we will be shown His salvation. We know our means of salvation is God's plan and Jesus putting it into practice but God's promise is that we will experience the benefits of it

Psalm 91 reminds us our confidence in God comes from our relationship with Him. We have our responsibilities too - there are big "if"s. Relationships are two way streets. The key words being "I trust", "if you", "you make", "he loves me" and "he acknowledges" - all focusing on our responsibilities and actions

We need an active intentional relationship with God. Verses 1 and 9 point to the closeness of the relationship - living with God as if you were in a dwelling together. God loves us no matter what but that isn't a relationship - one sided effort at a relationship never works. We can't just expect God's blessings to be met by indifference from us - our indifference pains God

A true relationship needs working at by both parties. Psalm 91 shows just how much commitment and effort God puts into our relationship with Him. Our side of the relationship is seen in the choices we make and how we live our lives. The Bible becomes God's Word as we wrestle with it - it's transformational. Prayer becomes conversation with our heavenly Father - it's intimate, personal

Our side of the relationship needs commitment. If we want the relationship with God through Jesus then we have to work at it as well.

Treasure Psalm 91 - use it to build your confidence in God and model your praise and gratitude around it