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## PSALM 91

Psalms – Book IV – Series

[PRAYER] Each one of us in our hearts, Lord, need this psalm, Psalm 91, because of the truth that it reveals about your character and who you are and what you've done for us. So we ask that you would be working in each of our souls now, each of our hearts. As we open our hearts now, Lord, we ask in anticipation for you to touch us. Minister to us from your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

One of the reasons I love the psalms is because it often touches us emotionally in an honest way. We lay our hearts bare before the Lord and some of the psalms demonstrate anger, some of the psalms demonstrate discouragement, some of them are joyful. There are psalms throughout that are a challenge and we're trying to understand what they look like and apply them to our lives.

Today we're going to talk about fear and anxiety. That's because that's what Psalm 91 is addressing in our lives.

Let me give you some statistics I found on the internet from *Psychology Today* magazine. It is said that in any given year about 17% of us will have an anxiety disorder. Twenty-eight percent of people will experience some form of anxiety disorder in their life. This is a fascinating one for me. The average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950s. We are getting more anxious every decade.

*Psychology Today* isn't a magazine I read all the time, I just happened to find this and found it fascinating because this is what the world says. Here's why we're experiencing this tremendous surge in anxiety in our world.

One is decrease in social connectedness.

Number two, unrealistic lifestyle expectations. I have to have the latest, the newest, or the best.

The continual reporting of bad news. Disaster is always on the horizon when you turn on the news.

A fast-paced society. Movie camera clips. If you're watching a movie, the scene shifts, the clip shifts every second. It's moving. Everything's moving so quickly.

And fifthly, they say a decreased connectedness to religion. I found that fascinating.

I want to say today that as we come to this subject we have to come to this subject with a tremendous amount of compassion and grace because I know that many of you are experiencing anxiety in one form or another. Some of you may be getting some treatment for that in one way or another. For some of you it's a very personal battle, a difficult one that you face regularly.

I want to be very careful that we're not just throwing a spiritual solution at a problem that's complex as if to imply that it's easy to deal with anxiety. It is not. "Just do this and you won't feel anxious anymore" would be a challenge that I think we need to be careful about. It's much more complicated than that. I'm convinced that there are spiritual solutions to any problem we have in life.

If an anxiety problem that a person has is caused by a biological problem, that is they have a hereditary factor that play into this or there is a side effect to a medication or there's stress hormones that are out of balance, those are biological issues.

There's also reactive issues where people have experienced trauma or they experience a lot of it continually. So there's patterns developed over time of reactions to that. That's really hard.

There are some people who experience spiritual causes of anxiety and that they're living in sin. The person who's living in sin is anxious because they're wondering what's going to happen. Is somebody going to catch me? That anxiety is created.

Those are three causes of problems in anyone's life. But the neat thing about God and His word is that there are spiritual solutions that help us no matter what the cause. So even if a person is experiencing some kind of a biological problem in life, God has spiritual solutions that can come alongside that person and equip them to deal with the challenges that they're facing.

So it's my challenge to all of us as we do every week is to take Jesus home. That we take Jesus home into every area of our life including our emotions and we say, "God, I want you to reign in this area of my life. If there's some way I need to be more committed to you or I need to change my lifestyle or do something so that I can focus in on who you are, I want to do that."

As we consider those thoughts, let's look at Psalm 91:1. It's interesting if you take those numbers Psalm 91:1 it's the 9-1-1 psalm of the Bible. So if you need some 9-1-1 help, you might want to look at this psalm.

Verse 1 says, *Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

I would suggest we all want a place to go when we're stressed or sad or tired or lonely or fearful or tempted or disappointed or discouraged. We all like to have that place. If you watch in a home what happens when stress starts to build in a family or in the family situation in that moment, where do people go? They often go to a place for them is the most safe place that they can in that particular home.

The word *shelter* there (*whoever dwells in the shelter*) is the word ‘hiding place.’ It means to cover, to hide covertly or secretly. The King James Version translates the word *a secret place*. There’s something about the word *secret* that perks our attention, gets our ear, and we’re interested to know what that secret is. It’s that same word translated *hiding place* in Psalm 32:7. Let me read it to you. *You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. You are my hiding place.*

About three weeks ago I was in California visiting my father and with my family visiting my grandchildren. While I was there, I asked my granddaughter Hanale (all the other kids were at school; she’s four), “What would you like to do, Hanale?”  
“Let’s play hide-and-seek.”

We played hide-and-seek for three hours. This girl just wouldn’t stop. We’d take a break for a little bit and then we’d go back to hide-and-seek. We’d always be hiding in the same places. It doesn’t make any difference with a four year old. When I go to look for her, I imagine she’s in all these places, but she’s always in the same place. She just loved the game and finding me. Oh it was great.

It’s that hiding place that we all need in our lives. That we go to this hiding place. That’s what the verse is talking about.

*Whoever dwells in the hiding place (or the shelter) of the Most High will rest.* That word *rest*, the word we need when we start to feel anxious and upset. We need the word rest. *We will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

I learned this week about DEET. Do you know what DEET is? DEET is the chemical ingredient in liquid mosquito repellants or insect repellants. I was attracted to it because they say in the advertising that it doesn’t repel mosquitoes, it hides you from them. I found that to be really interesting.

What happens when you put on this mosquito repellant that has DEET in it is that it evaporates into the air and the mosquitoes’ antenna sense the carbon dioxide that you’re breathing or they pick up other kind of chemical fragrances from your body and then they go after you. But what happens when DEET goes into the area, it gets onto those antennas so they aren’t working, so you’re hidden from the mosquitoes. That’s why people use mosquito repellants like that.

The beautiful thing is that we make the application to our lives. The fact that we have problems all around is you’ve got to understand there are problems that are there. They are flying around and they’re irritating. They make noises, they buzz around. They’re irritating. But God has given us a hiding place so that we’re hidden from the problems. That’s what He’s saying. I’m hiding you. I’m going to put your heart in this special place where you can enjoy this hiding place.

He says  *dwell in the shadow* or *abide in the shadow of the Almighty*. The shadow is always next to its whatever you call the thing that’s creating the shadow. So the point here is you’re close to the Lord here. You’re finding the shelter, this hiding place in God Most High, El Elyon. And then we find ourselves abiding in the shadow of the Almighty. El Shaddai, the power of God.

Now you need that name, the power of God, El Shaddai, because when you feel anxious it's because you lack control of the situation and you want someone who can be in control. So the emphasis here is on the power of God. That's verse 1.

Verse 2: *I will say of the Lord* (now we come to the term Yahweh, His personal name), *“He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

God is called our *refuge* in verses 2 and 9. The Hebrew word literally means a place of refuge, a shelter. It means to trust. It's a place where you can rely on. A fortress reminds me of a huge castle built out of stone. Thick walls positioned high on a hill.

Last month I went to visit my son in Romania. He is stationed there as a marine. I took his wife and daughter and we went to visit him just before Christmas for the holidays. While we were there he left the base and went on vacation with us for a few days.

We traveled around in the land of Romania and we went to this castle. I put the scripture over the top of it, but this is a picture of the castle called the Bran Castle. It's also known as Dracula's Castle. It is located in the province of Transylvania. And all of the hotels and things around it have vampire names. It's kind of an interesting experience.

But we went through portions of this castle. It is amazing the fortress that it is. Up high on a hill on a rock and it was positioned well. It had places where you could station the guards. All of that is an amazing fortress. So when I think of the term fortress it just reminds me of this huge castle that's a defensive place where the enemy cannot enter, cannot touch us, cannot reach us. It's guarded and protected day and night. It has watchmen on the walls and on the towers.

God is my fortress. He's more than just a place to find shelter and get out of the storm to find rest, He is my defender, He is my protector. He surrounds me with His presence like the high walls of a castle. He sets His watchmen or His angels around me. The enemy cannot touch me when I am in the fortress of God's presence.

The idea of fortress helps us understand the toughness of God. We need to recognize the strength that He has, the power that He has. We also have those words, and we'll see some more words throughout this whole picturesque psalm. Some of the words are describing the strength of God and some of them are describing His tenderness. We need both of those as we are moving forward because God is warm and tender and He is also strong as steel. So He can empathize or care for our emotions at the same time protecting us and giving us what we need in order to experience His greatness.

In these first two verses we have four of the names for God or words to describe God. El Elyon, the first one used in the first line of verse 1 means the High One, Most High describing His greatness. El Shaddai describes His power. It comes from the word mountain. To just be this firm mountain. Yahweh, which you can recognize in your Bible with all the letters capitalized in the word Lord. It's His personal name. And Elohim is not that He is a mortal, He's God. He's powerful. All of those things describe Him.

The implication I think in the psalm here in verses 1 and 2 is that we need to get to know God. If we don't know Him it's hard to trust Him. It's hard to trust anyone that you don't know, so our assignment here, I think, in the psalm is to get to know God in all of these different names for God or get to know all of the facets of His personality and character. When we do, we'll be able to do the last thing that it says in the verse, I will place my trust in Him.

When you can understand God's greatness and you understand who He is, then it's easier to relinquish control over your life, release the anxiety, and allow God to control the situation because you know Him, you can trust Him. We need to find that place of safety. It is in God, and when we understand that then we realize what's going on.

See, it says *He is my refuge and my fortress*. It doesn't say He will provide a refuge and a fortress. It is *He is a refuge and fortress* for us.

There are benefits to going there and there's a way to get there. Both we want to talk about this morning, so let's continue on in the passage.

Some of the benefits. *Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence*. In other words, from surprises that might take place. That's what a snare is. It surprises you. So He will protect you from those surprises. Sometimes the things that we fear or we're anxious about are the things we don't know about. The things we wonder that could hurt us or could damage us. It's the surprises that we're concerned about, so he addresses those here.

Verse 4 is a very tender picture of God as it talks about a very tender relationship there. Verse 4 says, *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge*.

It's like having a bird with those wings opened up covering up the little birds so that they are protected and cared for. God does that for us so it's not just getting into the refuge, it's He's caring for us and He is helping us experience what is happening in that situation.

The next phrase says *his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart*. I know I've heard that term *rampart* before, but I didn't know what it was. There's another song that uses the word *rampart*. Do you know what that song is? *Stars-Spangled Banner*. "Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light."

Francis Scott Key wrote this during the War of 1812 when Fort McHenry was being bombarded by the British. He was out having to be out on a boat doing part of a mission and there was a small flag, the war flag was up. As everything of the night was settled, what would happen? Would Fort McHenry fail? Would it be lost to the British troops? So then in the morning when he was able to see what was going on, the big flag that had fifteen stars at that time was shone and that's what motivated him to pen the poem of the *Stars-Spangled Banner*.

*Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?* (last night we saw the little flag, but now we got the big one)

*Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts (those are walls) we watched were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

But you've got to get the fourth verse, the last verse which we don't usually sing. It says this:

*Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!  
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

We don't trust in America to keep us safe. We trust in God to protect us in our heart. But the beautiful picture there is a picture of a flag that's flying that's demonstrating the victory that's taken place.

I want to suggest that if we in our own lives are trusting in the Lord, we're doing the things mentioned in this psalm, then we will have a flag flying over our castle. That flag is a flag of joy, a flag of peace, a flag of love that others don't have. Because we have those other emotions contained inside the wall. We're trusting in a God who is tenderly caring for us as a bird takes care of the chicks. He's protecting us with the shelter around of a big refuge. That beautiful picture that's unfolding for us in different forms helps us to be able to fly a flag over our hearts that other people can see that's a testimony of God's grace inside of our hearts.

Ramparts. Notice verse 4 what the ramparts are when we come to the illustration that it's being developed in Psalm 91. *His faithfulness will be your shield and your rampart.* It's God's faithfulness, not your works. It's God's faithfulness that protects you. It's not determined by your behavior.

Verse 5 talks about different times of the day. I don't know where you might be tempted to be anxious than another time, but it's listed here and you want to be able to trust the Lord in each part of those times. Notice the different things that we tend to be afraid of.

*You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day.* The word *terror* is there, which forms the basis for the word terrorism. *You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day* from the enemies that are coming in to shoot you, *nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague (or the Ebola) that destroys at midday.*

Just notice the time frames. Night, midday, during the day. God is faithful. You can write down in your margin there 24/7/365 we can rely on the Lord, we can find rest in Him.

Verse 7: *A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.*

Does that mean that bad things won't happen to people who trust the Lord? That's not what it's saying here. Even though we experience trouble in our lives, even though we have problems that exist, God takes our heart and protects us. The safest place to be is right in the center of God's will. There's something in the midst of the struggles and bad times, the scriptures talk to us about suffering and persecution that comes into our lives. Christians pass away. Christians suffer persecution. Christians get sick. But there's a place that our heart can be in the midst of that that gives us the joy. God protecting us in the middle of that. It's a beautiful thing that He does for us.

Verse 11: *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways (that's His special forces); they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

*"Because he loves me," says the Lord (we'll come back to that in a minute, but do you see what it's saying we're doing here), "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name."*

God is actively engaged in our protection. What's so special about making God your dwelling? Let me read verses 15 and 16 and then I'm going to go back and articulate the seven different *I wills* in this passage. So you will see all the benefits of allowing God to control your life and run your life when it comes to this issue of personal security.

Verse 15 and 16 says, *He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."*

There are seven *I wills* there. Let's go back through them and look at them starting in verse 14. *I will deliver him*. All people have times when they need God's help. Sometimes we recognize it more than others, but we must come to God and we must in our own hearts know how to do that and come to the secret place.

*I will set him on high*. In other words He's going to help us rise above the problems that we experience.

Verse 15: *He shall call on me, and I will answer him*. This is the privilege of prayer that we have. We can come into God's presence and there's this ability to call on Him. It says, *I will answer him*.

Verse 15 it says *I will be with him in trouble*. You don't have to look for trouble. By the way, this is a verse that indicates that we don't escape from trouble. We often experience it. But it says *I will be with him in trouble*. If you're in trouble today, you want to do the things mentioned in

this passage so that you can enter into that secret place and experience the shelter of God in your life.

Number five – *I will deliver him and honor him* in verse 15.

Verse 16: *With long life I will satisfy him.* Often the heart needs that satisfaction. I just need the rest that comes from being connected to Him, and I will *show him my salvation.* Long life now and heaven later. Notice if we go back to verse 9 it says if we *make the Most High our dwelling.*

There are some responsibilities that we as people must do in order to experience the benefits of this passage. They are kind of thrown throughout the whole passage. I want to tie them altogether so you can see what our responsibility is as we come before the challenges that we face in life. If you want to experience all those blessings, this is what you need to do.

In verse 1 it says  *dwell* or *abide*. Get into the secret place.

Verse 2 – *trust*. We need to trust Him.

Verse 9 – *If you say, “The Lord is my refuge.”* So you need to make that claim. I’m going to go to the Lord. He’s going to be my refuge as opposed to whatever other things you might gravitate to for comfort. We all have things that try to comfort us. Embedding yourself in video games or eating more food out of the refrigerator is probably not the best way to be comforted. In this case we say, “God is my refuge. I’m going to go to Him.”

Verse 14 – we need to love Him. Do you see that? That’s our part. In verse 14 we need to acknowledge Him. He is my God.

Verse 15 – Those who call on me. Those who come to me in prayer *I will answer him.* That’s what He’s saying. Prayer in this context is more than just a problem-solving tool. It’s a way of life. We position ourselves properly in a place that puts our heart in this refuge and God says He will protect us in the midst of that. It’s a dwelling place. It’s not where we occasionally visit; it’s where we live.

This idea of call on me and I will answer you is the same truth brought to us in the New Testament in Philippians that also helps us deal with the subject of anxiety. So I want to read the verse to you from Philippians 4.

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. We need to recognize that the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

If you have a tendency to think about bad things that are going to happen, then anxiety starts to build inside of you. Because here's how anxiety works – "Oh man if that happened that would be bad. And if that happened, oh it would be terrible. And if that happened, it would be disastrous!" So in our mind we start going down the path and it starts getting worse and worse.

What we have to do is stop that path, not try to argue ourselves back out of it. Stop going down that path and choose a different one described in verse 8 of Philippians 4 where it says think about these things, these admirable things.

There's a secret place that we all need to find in our lives. We need to be centered on God every day of our lives. We need to retreat. Prayer transports us to that special retreat place. It's God's way of allowing us to come into the secret place.

We want prayer to be this actively engaged activity that we're doing so much every day that our life is like that. It's not like our life is compartmentalized where we're praying before meals and before we go to bed. There's this sense of moving into the Spirit's presence every day. We know that the Bible tells us that God is present everywhere. He's always around. It's not like sometimes we're in His presence, sometimes we're not. But there is a way in which we move our hearts into that presence that's different than Him just being around all the time.

That's what this passage is calling us to. So in the midst of the storms of life we can be at peace, as Jesus was in Mark 4:35-41, a beautiful story that's just amazing to me because they had just experienced God's miracles and His power. The disciples are learning about God's greatness in all kinds of different ways. How He's the God of feeding the five thousand. He's the God of making sick people well. He's the God of raising the dead. But in Mark 4 we get to is He the personal God for me in the midst of a storm?

*That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. That's amazing to me. He's in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" I think that's the same prayer we pray to God. "God, don't you care about my situation?"*

*He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. My guess is at that moment the disciples were even more afraid than they were a few minutes ago. Because now they had just seen the power of God, that this is so awesome.*

*He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" As if do you see the storms of life are trivial compared to the Creator who has the power to control everything that's going on, even the wind and the waves.*

Then in verse 41, after the waves had settled, after it was totally calm on the lake, it says this: *They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

When we take Jesus home, what we're saying is we're taking Him home to our personal lives. We don't leave Him here at church on Sunday. We carry Him home into every area of our lives. Today we happen to be looking at emotions, particularly those emotions that can challenge us, hinder us, distract us, and take away the energy and rob us of a lot of the vitality that God wants us to have in our lives. It's important for us to go to that secret place, because, as you know, many of the things that we worry about never come to pass and it all turns out okay. Those relationships are restored and the things turn out. That doesn't mean that everything's going to work out well, but God works through the situations and walks us through. It will be okay as He carries us through.

We take Jesus home. We've got the Holy Spirit to wash over us, take away our worries, and we enjoy the protection of God. It comes when we learn what that means to trust. Our study in the Psalms is going to help us get to know God a little bit better. The more we get to know Him, the easier it is to allow Him to carry the suitcase of the problems that we often experience in our own lives.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I ask that you would draw us so close to you in your heart that we would be willing to walk with you during the day in ways that we haven't yet. I pray for every young person here that may be experiencing anxiety, not knowing how to think about life situations and the news and the terrible things that often happen in our world. Lord, I pray that you would give your ability to trust, even though they don't understand. Give us each the ability to have peace in our hearts that you provide that transcends all understanding. We ask you to guide us and lead us, protect us each one. In Jesus' name, amen.