



Sunday 19th July 2020

Welcome to our Sunday Service

Prepared by Mervyn Bedford

To be a pilgrim!

Psalm 84 A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of Hosts!

2My soul longs, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

3Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she places her young near Your altars, O LORD of Hosts, my King and my God.



4How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!

They are ever praising You. **5**Blessed are those whose strength is in You, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

6As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; even the autumn rain covers it with pools. **7**They go from strength to strength, until each appears before God in Zion.

8O LORD God of Hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob. **9**Take notice of our shield, O God, and look with favour on the face of Your anointed.

10For better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

11For the LORD God is a sun and a shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; He withholds no good thing from those whose walk is blameless. **12**O LORD of Hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!



**Happy Birthday this week
to Sheila and Becky,
God bless you both!**

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for all your wonderful promises and that you work all things together for good for those who love you.

We ask that you would strengthen those who are struggling at this time and give them fresh hope in your goodness and perfect timing.

May we, as your people reflect the beauty of your character and may the joy of knowing you overflow from our lives, that other people may meet you through us.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Please Pray for Holiday Club at Home!

Thank God for all the children across the UK that will hear about God's love for them this week; that the message of Jesus would take root in their lives and that they would start a relationship with him. Also pray for all the practicalities and that the technology will work well. Thank you

Lets take a closer look at Psalm 84. There is so much that could be unpacked in this Psalm, but I just want to share are a few things that have jumped out at me recently.

Firstly, I notice it's written by The Sons of Korah. Who were the sons of Korah?

This is a fascinating story in itself, and is a journey from devastation to delight! Korah, an Israelite from the tribe of Levi takes the limelight when he leads a rebellion against Moses. You can read the story in *Numbers 16*. As a result of this rebellion Korah and the majority of his family are destroyed, but his family line did just survive, and from that line we get the great prophet Samuel, who led Israel for many years. Later, King David appointed members of Korah's family as worship leaders, and they wrote some of the most intimate Psalms of yearning for God's presence, for example, **"As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you"** Psalm 42. This ancient boy band wrote other beautiful lyrics such as, **"By day the Lord directs his love; at night his song is with me"** and **"God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble"**

It's wonderful to see how God can redeem a devastating situation, and cause us to delight in experiencing his presence. The name of Korah is associated with a prideful rebellion, but a future generate would delight in God, and pen these humble, intimate Psalms.

Perhaps you feel labelled by a negative association? God is able to develop something lovely and bring beauty out of the devastation in our lives. We serve a God who loves to forgive and restore!

Psalm 84 starts in true 'Sons of Korah' fashion by delighting and longing for Gods presence.

"How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns even faints for the courts of the Lord, my heart and flesh cry out for the living God."

These words tap into the deep ache in the human heart to be truly at home in God presence. Back in the Garden of Eden our ancestors had unhindered access to the presence and glory of God, the only thing that can truly satisfy the human heart. Since the fall we've been trying every-which-way to find that missing ingredient and satisfy that constant, low ache.



Interestingly, it says that even my flesh cries out for God. The flesh is normally associated with our sinful nature that pulls us away from God. This is acknowledging that no carnal pleasure can ultimately satisfy the flesh and that the things the flesh runs after can sometimes unknowingly be a quest to find God!

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs."

I am struck by the phrase, **"set their hearts on pilgrimage"**, and the key word **"set"**.

This word “set” is a definite decision and action! Not, I want to go God’s way, or I’d like to go God’s way, or I may go God’s way, but **I’m going to go God’s way!** And it’s when we speak that out, and act on it that God releases his power and strength over us. The Psalm says **“they go from strength to strength.”**

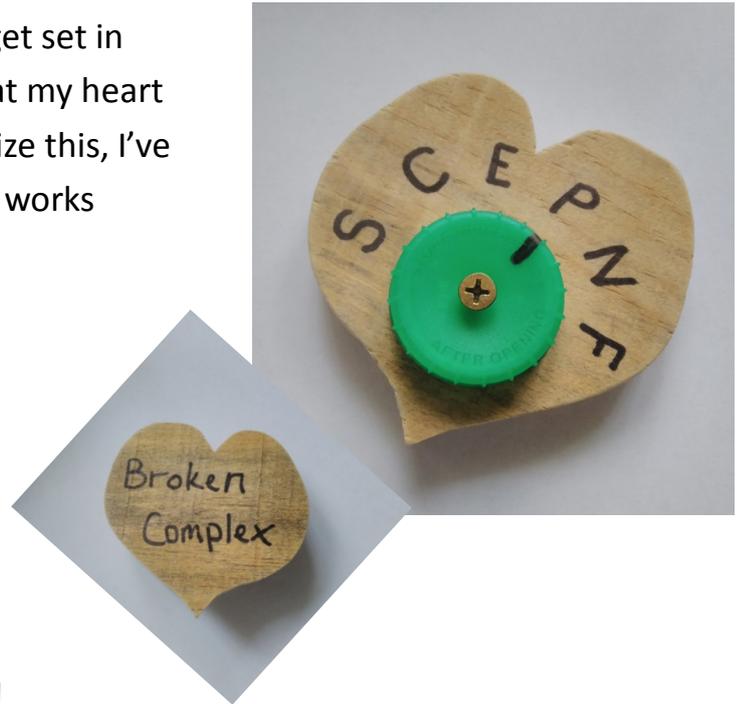
I’ve been thinking about how our hearts can get set in different places, and here are a few places that my heart has got stuck over the years. To help us visualize this, I’ve made my own heart compass! (This visual aid works better in the video version of the service!!)

The first thing to acknowledge is that our hearts are often broken and very complex! Not like my compass here!!

So let’s look at some of the settings I’ve identified in my heart.

I’ve got **SCEPNF..**

You may have some of these, you may others!



F - Frozen. For various reasons we can find ourselves locked away and emotionally switched off, frozen, and imprisoned by fear, abuse, hurt and shame. A real and valid setting but we miss out on so much, and neglect those around us.

E - Easy Life. Just fit in, keep your head down and don’t rock the boat. Avoid the deep issues and skim along the top. This is not a good place to spend your whole life and can prevent us from reaching our potential and destiny.

N - Numb out. Sometimes we can’t cope with the pain and confusion in our hearts, so we learn to anesthetize the pain with alcohol, food, drugs, internet, entertainment but these things can quickly become addictive and lead us on a path of self destruction. This setting indicates that you need help and healing!

C - Comparisons. Never before have human beings been bombarded by images of, and information about other people. We can find ourselves comparing ourselves with others and trying to find our worth, value and place in the world. This can lead us to feel intimidated by some, and idolising and worshipping others. Idol worship can captivate our hearts leading us in a downward spiral. This is a very unhealthy setting!

S - Selfish. Basically my needs, my pleasure, my feelings, my agenda, my way! Really unhealthy, get off this setting ASAP!!

P - Pilgrimage. Journeying with and moving toward God!

This is just a selection of places our hearts can go. You may be able to relate to some of them, or there may be others that pertain to you. However, if we set our hearts to “Pilgrimage”, the unmet needs, painful issues, destructive habits and places of addiction will be addressed step by step. You will be validated, healed and restored, because he binds up the broken hearted!

Jesus said, **“Seek first God’s Kingdom and everything else will be added to you”**. Jesus also called himself **“The Way”**, our pathway *and* companion on the journey. As we choose to follow him, we set our hearts on pilgrimage; as we journey with him, over time there is the hope that...

Frozen hearts can become Free - Free to love and feel.

Numb hearts can be made New - He gives us a new, healed heart!

Selfish hearts can live in Selflessness - Increased compassion and connection to others.

‘Easy Life’ values can go the Extra Mile! - Engaging to make a difference.

Comparison with others can change to Contentment - God wanted someone just like me!

The very next part of the verse following **‘setting their hearts on pilgrimage’**, says that,

“As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs”

Baca is translated as weeping. This assures us that as we set our hearts on pilgrimage we will have valleys of weeping, times of pain and sadness, and seasons where we have to face up to the deep hurts in our lives, or the pain we may have caused the people around us.

Be encouraged by these two points.

- ◆ **“Pass through”**. As we journey with God, times of deep sadness are temporary as he leads us through.
- ◆ **“Place of springs”**. The valleys of pain and struggle become a source and a resource. Springs represent the bubbling up of life giving water which bring blessing.



With God, our struggles are not meaningless, but become useful tools from our personal experiences that can help others.

Perhaps you're experiencing a valley at the moment. The Corona virus pandemic has been a metaphorical valley for many people, and many of us are struggling with the ongoing uncertainty. We can be assured that God is at work and achieving his purposes, opening up unexpected blessings.

Here are some of the words to a song called 'Valleys' by Lou Lewis that summarises some of what I have just been saying.



**You've been walking in a valley of despair,
wondering if I care that you're living in confusion,
But don't you know the breaking of your heart,
will open up the part that can shine with my reflection.**

**And love will never let you down, always be around to catch you when you fall.
And light will never fail to come, bringing you the son, and saying when you call
"I am the way"**

The Sons of Korah go on to say that, **"Better is one day in God's presence than a thousand else where, and that no good thing does God withhold from those whose walk is blameless"**

There have been a few times in my life when I have experienced a tiny taste of the presence of God, and there truly is nothing to compare with the experience of being touched by the purest, kindest, gentlest love. We can be assured that if **'we set our hearts to pilgrimage'** we won't miss out on any of the good things God has in store for us.

He who would valiant be
'gainst all disaster,
let him in constancy
follow the Master.

There's no discouragement
shall make him once relent
his first avowed intent
to be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him round
with dismal stories
do but themselves confound
his strength the more is.

No foes shall stay his might;
though he with giants fight,
he will make good his right
to be a pilgrim.

Since, Lord, thou dost defend
us with thy Spirit,
We know we at the end,
shall life inherit.

Then fancies flee away!
I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labor night and day
to be a pilgrim.