

Loving God  
Text: Psalm 84:1-12  
Series: The Psalms [#5]  
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Theme: **The Delight Of Loving God Flows Through Discipline.**

## Introduction

One of the central, grand themes of the Bible is love—God’s pure, perfect love for us. Moses told Israel,

“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers...”

(Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

God said through the prophet Jeremiah, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (31:3). And we know well that Jesus said,

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

A second central, grand truth of the Bible is our love for God. God told Israel through Moses, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). In Psalm 31 King David wrote, “O love the LORD, all you His godly ones!” (23a). Jesus restated the command through Moses when He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

Psalm 84 that we are looking at this morning pictures and teaches this second truth. The writer clearly loved God, and that love saturates the Psalm. God gave us this psalm not only because it is a worthy testimony, but also to instruct us on loving Him.

At the start, let’s touch on a few terms. The introduction to the Psalm begins, “For the choir director; on the gittih.” You may ask, “What is the gittih”? Good question. Answer is: we don’t really know. Suggestions range from a type of stringed instrument to a tune or a particular celebration. The introduction goes on to tell us this Psalm was written by the sons of Korah. Part of this clan of the Levites had responsibilities around the tabernacle, and later the temple, including being gate keepers, being in charge of the utensils, furniture and elements used in the Holy Place.<sup>1</sup> Others served in music for worship.<sup>2</sup> This is the group referred to in the introduction. Then you will notice the word *Selah* after verses 4 and 8. This term occurs over 70 times in the Psalms but, once again, we can’t be certain of its meaning. Suggestions include that it indicates an interlude, rest, or repeat; or means to stand up as you are singing or raise your voice.

Turning back to the message of this Psalm, *loving God* can be a fuzzy concept. Sometimes it is pictured in terms of romantic love. At other times it is pictured in special experiences with God, special knowledge of Him or works for Him. The Biblical record makes it clear that it involves all of our being in all of our time and circumstances. When experienced, it is a delight! The underlying truth about *Loving God* in this Psalm is that the experience, *the delight of loving God flows through discipline*. We will begin with the experience or picture, and then move on to the discipline or process of *Loving God*.

### **What Loving God Looks Like.**

What does loving God look like? What are some of the signs or evidences of being one who truly loves God? First, one who loves God has a deep desire to be in His presence. This is clear in the opening lines of the Psalm.

“How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.” (1-2)

While the writer speaks about the temple being so *lovely* that he desperately wants to be there, the rest of the Psalm makes it clear he is seeking God, not just the building which God blessed with His presence in a special way.

The word translated *lovely* means the one loved, and is translated as *beloved* or *well-beloved* in every other occurrence in the Old Testament. So the Psalmist’s deep longing is to be with God. The temple, and we could add, any other place, is *lovely* or *beloved* because God, the One he loves is there. This is what King David had in mind when he wrote in Psalm 27:4,

“One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple.”

The writer of Psalm 84 and King David shared the supreme purpose and passion of being in the presence of God. To read and think about God’s Word as He guides and speaks, to pray and to listen, to give praise and thanks. These men knew, just as we do, that they could be in God’s presence anywhere. As David wrote in Psalm 139:7, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” But they also knew God was present in a special way in the tabernacle and then the temple, and there they could be with Him along with others who were seeking God.

This purpose and passion for being with God is personal, but also corporate. We see this time after time in the Psalms. In Psalm 122:1 for example, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’” In the New Testament God directs personal and corporate worship. Hebrews 10:25 instructs us to not neglect or abandon coming together to be with God, to worship Him.

We face many distractions to seeking to be and actually being in God's presence. One pastor, concerned about people in his church not attending as regularly as he thought they should, began to make the point that it was important to be in church. After a few weeks of this one attender sent the pastor an e-mail stating he could count on him to be in church. He and his family would be there as often as they could. *But*, there were times when they could not be there.

- The long weekends, such as Family Day, Victoria Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving.
- Then there were the weekends around the major holidays such as Christmas, New Year's and Easter— certainly he could not be expected to be there then.
- Of course there are the 3-4 weeks of holidays each year, as well as the times when it would be too cold, too stormy or too hot.
- And the Grey Cup, Super Bowl and Stanley Cup weekends were out.
- So were the weekends of change to and from Daylight Savings Time. After all, one needs a bit of time to adjust.
- Then there are times when someone in the family is not feeling well, when family or friends are visiting, or when there are special sports, music and other activities someone in the family has going on.

Apart from these, he concluded, "You can count on me and my family to be in church, unless something comes up."

A deep desire to be in God's presence, first of all, personally and then also with other believers demonstrates a true love for Him.

A second evidence is an overflowing, joyful praise to God. Look at how the Psalmist describes this in verse 2, "...My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God." Drop down to verse 4. "How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You."

Why was he so joyful? In large part because he was spending time with God. In Psalm 16:11 King David reminds us, "In Your [God's] presence is fullness of joy..." Remember too what Jesus promised and prayed for us. In John 15:11 He told the disciples "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." Later He prayed to the Father for them "that they may have [His] joy made full in themselves" (John 17:13).

Do you want to have more joy? Spend time with God, not out of duty or obligation, but because you love Him, because you are devoted and committed to Him who loved you first, even when you were spiritually dead in your sin; devoted to Him who poured out His love to the core of your being when you came to Him by faith in Jesus Christ, and who loves you with an everlasting love.<sup>3</sup>

And so the psalm writers direct us to joyfully praise God first for who He is, and then also for all that He does. The writer of Psalm 71 looked back over his life and also to the future. Then he told God

“I will also praise You with a harp, even Your truth, O my God; to You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; and my soul, which You have redeemed.” (22-23)

And yes, praise Him even when times are tough. Another son of Korah wrote Psalm 42. “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.” (5)

The Psalmist’s experience, and ours, is that being in God’s presence brings joy which overflows into praise. When we have a committed, thankful love for God, there will be the evidence of joyful praise overflowing to Him.

There is one more evidence of loving God in this Psalm, true happiness. Three times the Psalmist exclaims “How blessed,” or “How happy” he and everyone is who loves God.

- Verse 4. “How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!”
- Verse 5. “How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion!”
- The last verse, verse 12. “O LORD of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

I hope you are beginning to see the connection between these three marks of loving God. First there is the foundation of spending time with God. And flowing from that is joyful praise to God. Then, finally, being truly happy.

Some people are miserable in both the best and worst of times while others are happy all the time. We know that many people, perhaps including ourselves at times, think of happiness as living on top of the world, as a feeling that comes when things are as we think they should be, a feeling that comes when the sun is shining on us. One part of the meaning of our word happy that reflects true, Biblical happiness is “enjoying well-being and contentment.”<sup>4</sup>

The word *blessed* is used frequently in the Psalms in different ways. One use describes something of what it means to be happy because we are loved by God and we truly love Him. In addition to what we see here in verses 4, 5 and 12, these other references tell us, for example, that a truly happy person is one whose God is the one and only true God and who reveres Him.<sup>5</sup> A truly happy person does not follow the counsel and directions of the wicked.<sup>6</sup> A truly happy person trusts in God and lives rightly before Him as he follows the truth of God’s Word.<sup>7</sup>

What does loving God look like? What are some of the signs, evidences of being one who truly loves God? A deep desire to be in God’s presence. Joyful praise to God. True happiness.

At the start I said that *the delight of loving God flows through discipline*. We have surveyed the delightful experience or picture of loving God. Now let's turn to the discipline or process of loving God.

## **How To Grow In Loving God.**

I say with no fear of contradiction that I, and all of us, can grow in loving God. I can also say without fear of contradiction that this growth will not take place someday in some unknown, mysterious, magical way. We grow in loving God through a process, through a disciplined life. I know some people don't like the idea that spiritual life involves discipline. But like it or not doesn't change anything. This is the way God made us.

Christie Gordon is one of the best hurdlers in Canada. As Holly alluded to earlier this morning, she is in her final year and track season at the University of Idaho. Last weekend she finished second in the Conference Championships in Louisiana. Next week she will be in the NCAA West Region Championships in Texas. God has blessed her. But she also has invested years of disciplined work to get where she is today. Even if I were the most disciplined person in the world I could never have been a good hurdler. But I, and every Christian can grow and even excel in loving God, and the delight of loving God. We see three parts of the disciplined life of growing in loving God in this Psalm.

First, we need the discipline to settle down, to be at home in God's presence. It is one thing to desire to be in God's presence and another to actually enter into His presence. Look at verse 4 again. "How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You." This word *dwell* pictures settling down or staying somewhere. And so this line speaks of those who stay or remain in God's presence, those who keep regular, ongoing contact with Him.

There is a picture of this in the last part of verse 5. "In whose heart are the highways to Zion!" If you are looking at the NIV, it renders it "[those] who have set their hearts on pilgrimage." Literally it reads "highways in their hearts." Or, supplying the implied verb, "highways [are] in their hearts."

On one level this might picture people on their way to Jerusalem to worship, and so the interpretation of "pilgrimage" in the NIV and the addition of the phrase "to Zion" in the NASB. The pilgrimage idea seems to be more read into this psalm than out of it. The entire verse is "How happy is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways!" You see, the one who relies on God for strength is the one who has the paths to the presence of God at the core of his being. They are established, well-traveled roads. He or she has settled down, is staying and continuing to learn to stay in God's presence, and so is truly happy.

There is another picture in verse 3. "The bird also has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God." The birds are an illustration of how open and gracious God is. These common little birds build their nests or homes, they found security and rest in the courtyards of the

temple. So much more can we find our true home, our rest and security in God as we settle down and are at home in His presence.

How are you doing in this? Have you made, are you making God the real center of your life, your real home, your real rest and security? King David closed Psalm 23 by proclaiming “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”—for all of life here on earth and then for eternity. There are a host of distractions and also excuses for this not being the case. And we will fail in this if we are not, as verse 11 puts it, “living uprightly.” Psalm 15 describes it this way, “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart” (1-2).

The benefits are beyond description. Look at verse 10.

“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

The Psalmist knew that a single day standing at the outer doorways to the temple, at the edge of God’s holy presence, was better than to make his home comfortably within the tents, hospitality and provision of those who do not know or follow God.

Again, *how are you doing?* This is a life-long process of starting, developing, maintaining being at home, settled down in the presence of God. There is no better time than today to evaluate and take a step forward. In fact, the longer a person procrastinates, the harder it is to start this discipline.

The second discipline is to rely on God’s strength. Verses 5-7 picture a person relying on God’s strength. It reads,

“How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion! Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; the early rain also covers it with blessings. They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion.”

You see, when we rely on God and His strength in the valley, the experiences of Baca or tears, becomes a blessing as God renews us from strength to strength so we will be with Him safely regardless of what happens around us or to us. Verse 11 picks up the theme of God being our strength. “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

Each of us can identify with King David’s words in Psalm 73, “My flesh and my heart may fail” (26a). We’ve been there. The good news is that this is just the first part of the verse, which uses a poetic parallelism that builds on a contrast. Here’s the whole verse. “My flesh and my heart may fail, *but* God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (26).

So David could enthusiastically open Psalm 18,

“I love You, O LORD my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”  
(1-2)

In His strength God leads us in the path to Himself which, verse 30 of Psalm 18 says, “is blameless.” Then two verses later David says that God “guides [him] with strength and makes [his] way blameless” (32). Fast forward to the New Testament. The apostle Paul recognized his weaknesses. And so he wrote to the believers at Philippi, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (4:13).

The disciplines leading to the delight of truly loving God include settling down, being at home in God’s presence, not being just an occasional visitor; relying on God’s strength; *and* then, broader stroke again, trusting in God. The closing verse is so appropriate, “O LORD of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!” (12).

King David had learned, he knew about trusting God. He tells us,

“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?” (Psalm 56:3-4)

Based on his experience he counsels in Psalm 37,

“Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday.”  
(3-6)

We also read similarly in Proverbs 3,

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones.” (5-8)

How are you doing in trusting God? Are there things you are not ready to let go of that you should because you are afraid of what might or might not happen if you do? Are there things you are not ready to do because you are afraid of what might or might not happen if you do? *The delight of loving God flows through discipline*, and that includes the discipline of trusting God.

## Conclusion.

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). God loves you and wants you to love Him. God delights in His redeemed people as we live rightly by faith, and He wants us to delight in Him. God’s point in this Psalm is not another list of things to do. This Psalm is a personal testimony of an unknown man who knew the delight of loving God. It also is God’s personal, loving invitation to each of us to a delightful relationship of loving Him.

In your quiet time with God now, examine your heart, take a look at your love for God. Have you been wandering around here and there, in and out, instead of settling down in His presence? Are you close to Him, or are you actually distant from Him? When you look at all the people and things of this world, is Jesus really the one who means everything to You, the One in whom you truly delight? Are you committed to living under His Lordship and by His strength so you can grow in, delight in your love for Him? Do that now.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. 1 Chronicles 9:17-32.

<sup>2</sup> cf.. 1 Chronicles 6: 31-48; 9:33-34; 15:16-28

<sup>3</sup> cf. Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:10, 19.

<sup>4</sup> “Happy.” Def. 3. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. New York: Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1974, page 324. Print.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Psalm 32:1; 144:15.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Psalm 1:1.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Psalm 2:12; 40:4; 119:1, 2.

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