



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Summer Playlist

Are We There Yet? - Psalm 84

Cisco Cotto | August 23, 2020



It is August and my family is just back from our August vacation. Every year we spend a week in Michigan and we love it. We look forward to it throughout the year. We spend the week mostly on the beach, hanging out with each other. We eat lots of ice cream and play games as a family. It's really something we anticipate all year long. We've been doing it about eight or nine years.

Every year, right at the beginning of the trip, we get the van all packed up, back out of the driveway, then just a few blocks away from home (it seems), a voice comes from the back of the van says, "How long until we get there?" Any parents experience this? "Are we there yet? How many more miles do we have to go?" I have to remind the kids that we're not even to I-88 yet; it's going to be several hours before we get to Michigan. They can't help themselves, though. They're so excited. They're experiencing joy because they know how wonderful the week is going to be.

Now, when we gather together as Christians to worship in God's house, is that the kind of anticipation we have? Do we have that excitement, asking, "Are we there yet? How much longer?" It's been months since we've been able to worship together in God's house because of this pandemic. In just a few weeks, on September 13th, we're again going to have in-person worship indoors. It's been months in the making. Are you excited about this? Is there anticipation? Because of health reasons, maybe you won't be here, but even if that's the case, is there a longing to be with your sisters and brothers in God's house praising the Lord? Or could you take it or leave it?

Before the pandemic, did you just go through the motions on Sunday morning? "Well, we're supposed to go to church. We're Christians, so that's what we're going to do." Was that the attitude? Was that the feeling? Or were the emotions overwhelming excitement and joy, longing to be in God's house to worship with His people?

We're going to talk about Psalm 84 which was written by someone who could not wait to worship God in His house. All he could think about day and night was worshiping the Lord, getting to His house joining sisters and brothers, praising the Lord. I think this is a model for us. As we prepare for in-person indoor worship again, what is our attitude? Are we looking forward to it? Are we craving it? Or are we just going through the motions? Can we take it or leave it?

Even though the words of this Psalm will be on the screen, please take out your Bible. This is a good habit for you to have—all of us need this. Whether you're looking at it on your phone or tablet or you have a hard copy like me, take your Bible and turn to Psalm 84.

God's people should desire to worship Him in His house.

The first encouragement we're going to see is that God's people should desire to worship Him in His house. We should crave gathering together as sisters and brothers indoors, in a worship space, to sing praises to the Lord. We should look forward to this all week long. On Saturday night, we should go to bed excited about Sunday morning. When we wake up on Sunday, we should say, "We can't wait to get there. This is the day we get to praise the Lord with other believers."

That's exactly what this psalmist does. At the beginning of Psalm 84 he is talking about God's temple. That's where he would have worshiped in his day. He's talking about the place where all ancient Jews would come together to worship the Lord, pray and offer their sacrifices. This is where they worshiped collectively as a group of people—as one people of God—and he can't wait to get there.

Here's what he says. Listen to this imagery, this poetry. Feel the emotion the writer of this Psalm is experiencing.

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

Let's pause there. This psalmist yearns to be in God's house to worship Him. I asked you to pay attention to the emotion that you can feel oozing out of this Psalm. He can't wait to get to the temple. There's nothing he can think about other than being with God's people, worshiping Him in His house. This is an encouragement for all Christians to be excited about worshiping God in a church service with other believers.

Now, you've heard a lot during the pandemic about how the church is the people—it's not the building. In many respects that's true. In many ways I would not argue with that. We are Christ's church. But that doesn't mean there isn't something special or sacred about sisters and brother in Christ gathering together in a building that is set apart for worship to God. This involves emotions from the depths of our souls, getting involved in praising God and doing it in a room with other people. There is something honorable about that. I think it brings joy to the Lord, even as it brings joy to us. Every single one of us should want this.

Again, the building is not sacred in and of itself, but there is something about a church service in which God's people say, "We are setting apart this time to worship God with one another." We could be doing all sorts of other things. We gather together to honor the Lord by offering our praises to Him together and there's something beautiful about that. This psalmist says he yearns for the courts of the Lord. There is nothing else, it seems, that he would rather do.

This is a call to each of us to have an attitude check, to look at our motives, asking, "When we gather in person on September 13— or whenever you're able to gather in person in a building again—are we doing it for the right reasons?" Are we doing it because of our love for God and each other? Because we want to worship together? Do we feel that this is sacred or are we just going through the motion?

The psalmist yearns to worship the Lord in His temple. He sees this ancient temple in Israel as something to be prized and valued, so much that he's jealous of the birds who have made their home in the temple walls. He wishes he could be them. Look at verse three. This is great.

³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise!

"Even the birds are blessed, because they get to stay in Your house all the time." He talks about the people who dwell in God's house, the temple singers who were there day and night offering praises to the Lord. It's their job to be in the temple serving the Lord and honoring Him with their praises. The psalmist wishes this could be him. He wishes he never had to leave the temple, but be there all the time.

Christians, is this our attitude about in-person worship in the house of the Lord? We need to check ourselves. Do we have this same desire, this same longing, this same craving? As we look around whichever campus we attend and see a bird's nest here or there, are we jealous of that bird because it gets to hang around God's house all the time? We should love worshiping the Lord together in His house.

2. God's blessing is on those who desire to be in His house.

All of God's people should desire this, understanding that God's blessing is on those who desire to be in His house. We actually get something from this. God is favorable to us.

The psalmist likely lived well outside of Jerusalem and would only have come to the temple a few times a year for various festivals. On these pilgrimages to the temple, and in all those weeks and months beforehand, he's still thinking about how great it is going to be when he gets there. He uses this imagery of blessing. He talks about a dry time when he desires the Lord but he can't get to the temple, then how God brings the rain and fruitfulness. That's the picture he's trying to paint here. While he's on his way to the temple, he's saying God is going to bring blessing to him. He's going to give him joy. He's going to bring happiness to him.

In verses five and six he says, *"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the Valley of Baca..."* Here he's talking about a dry place, painting the imagery not being in God's presence, not being in God's temple with His people. *"As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools."*

He's saying, "God, I feel dry when I am not in Your house. Even as I am on my way, it is as though wonderful, torrential, life-giving rains have come." He paints a picture of going from a desert place to a place where there's water pooling up all over the place. He's talking about the state of his heart as he thinks about getting to God's house. He says in verse seven, *"They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion"*

One of the things that helps us long to be in God's house—that makes us crave it throughout the week and enjoy worshiping with God's people inside in a worship space—is knowing that God uses that time. He uses it in our souls. He feeds us. As we gather together, shout our praises to Him, study His Word and pray together, enjoying being with one another to worship the Lord, God accepts that worship and praise. The Holy Spirit works in our souls to feed us, to give us what we need to be nourished in our souls, to grow us as followers of Jesus Christ.

That's the blessing the psalmist is talking about here, going from dry land to flowing streams with pools of water. This is what happens when we're in God's house worshiping together. The psalmist knows it, so this is one of many reasons he is yearning to be in God's house.

Again, he was probably there only a few times a year—not like us who get to worship together in person in a worship space on one of our campuses every single week, when there's no pandemic. For this psalmist, it was only a few times a year. He longed for it and when he arrived, there were all sorts of things going on like prayer, sacrifices and singing.

3. When in God's house, His people should pray for their leaders.

This psalmist prays for the king of Israel, and you and I should take this as a word that when we are gathered together we need to regularly pray for our leaders. Here's what he says in verses eight and nine: *"O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!"* He's saying, "Listen to me, Almighty God. Hear my prayers. This is serious stuff here." Then he says, talking about the king, *"Behold our shield, O God"* —our protector. *"Look on the face of your anointed."* He's saying, "Give Your divine favor to the king. Protect him. Give him fruitfulness. Allow him to prosper." He knows that if the king is doing well, the people are doing well.

So when we make this pilgrimage—whether it is weekly or only a few times a year, gathering together as sisters and brothers to worship the Lord—there are lots of things we're going to do and one of them should be praying for our leaders. Now, this is either really easy or really hard, usually depending on whether that leader is someone you voted for or you didn't vote for. Isn't that usually the way it works?

If you voted for the person who's in charge, you can't wait to pray for him or her. "Lord, bless these leaders. Give them Your favor. Allow them to prosper. Please allow them to do the things they promised to do on the campaign trail. Let them get it done." Those prayers are easy.

But when it's someone you did not vote for, it's a little trickier. The prayers are often different. "Lord, I don't even know if this person is saved. If not, will You do something." That's not the way we're supposed to pray. There's nothing in here—in fact, there's nothing in God's Word—that says, "Pray for your leaders if you voted for them. Pray for your leaders if they share your policy views. Pray for your leaders if you like them." There's nothing in there at all. There are no passages talking about praying for leaders with an asterisk. There are no caveats. It is, "Pray." Every single one of us should pray. So I—and I hope you're doing this too—pray for President Trump regularly. But I also prayed for President Obama regularly and President Bush and President Clinton...it goes way back. Some of you go farther back than I do.

Pray for your leaders. God calls us to do this. He encourages it. He even commands us to do this. My prayers for leaders are usually the same: "Lord, bless him. Lead him to turn to You and seek Your wisdom. Surround him with godly counselors." Regardless of who the President is, one of the big prayers I have is, "Allow him to continue leading in a way that gives us the freedom and peace to share the

good news of Jesus Christ with other people. Don't allow whoever is in charge—whether it's in Washington or Springfield or in one of our neighborhoods here—to shut things down or clamp down too tightly, so that we as Christians are unable to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

That is what really matters—inviting people into a relationship with Jesus. Telling them this good news that yes, we're sinners. Absolutely. But even though we need a Savior, we don't have to look far to find one. We have one in Jesus Christ. All we have to do is acknowledge to Him that we're sinners who need a Savior and He is that Savior. The Bible calls it repenting of our sins. That's all we have to do and we are transformed. We are forgiven. We are part of God's family and will be with Him forever and ever.

That's the message that needs to be spread far and wide. So my regular prayer is that our country, state and cities are places where the gospel can continue to go forth. When we are gathered together as Christians, regardless of who the leaders are, regardless of whether we voted for them or like them, we need to be praying for them, just like this psalmist.

4. There is nowhere better than being in the presence of the Lord.

Now, he wraps up this Psalm by again emoting here. It's sort of overwhelming. He's so joyous about being in God's house, he can't help but talk about it. I would guess that he's shouting here. He loves being in God's house. So he wraps up this Psalm by saying, “There is nowhere better than being in God's presence. Nowhere. No experience on earth that's better than being in the presence of the Lord.” There's no place he would rather be than in God's temple, worshipping Him.

Can we say about ourselves that there's nowhere we would rather be than in God's house worshipping with His people? Are we really looking forward to September 13th? Here is how he says it, beginning in verse ten. This is beautiful.

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

¹² O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

“A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” One day. There's nowhere he'd rather be. He says, *“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”* He would rather do any sort of service, any job in God's temple, than to be in other places, even doing things that may be a little easier or a little better for him. He wants to be worshipping in person with others.

One day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere—is that how we think? Do we as Christians crave that blessing and joy that come from being together in God's house worshipping Him? Over these many months, I think a lot of us have been missing it. A lot of us have been looking forward to in-person worship in one of our campuses again. But once we get there, a few weeks into it, will it become routine? Or is there something special about this? Does the fact that we lost it for a while change things so that week in and week out, we'll say, “I can't wait to be there”?

For many years I lived in Oak Park and went to a church called Calvary Memorial Church. I started going there when I was just dating my wife. We went with my mother-in-law and every week we sat in the same pew together and worshiped the Lord. We enjoyed the fellowship and just hanging out with other people. We enjoyed the prayer and the study of Scripture. It was great.

I was baptized in that building, I got married and we had our wedding reception in that building. My first child was dedicated to the Lord in that building. We also had the funeral for my mother-in-law in that building. So many memories in that building. So many things happened and every single one of them was focused on Christ. Every single one of them was all about honoring the Lord in everything we were doing. It was all really about worship and the sacredness of being in God's house with His people.

From that church I moved on to a church called Village Church of Oak Park. I was part of the team that started it. I was there for several years and it was the exact same thing. Christians gathered together for worship on Sunday mornings, for weddings and funerals, for baby

dedications and baptisms, for meals together. These were wonderful sacred times. I use that word a lot because I think it's really fitting. It is a sacred opportunity for us to be together as followers of Jesus.

Here at Village Bible Church we have several campuses. I'm not sure which one you attend. If you haven't attended one yet, obviously we invite you if you're able to come out and worship with us. There is the Aurora campus and the El Camino campus, a wonderful place where I actually worshiped in many years ago when I was growing up in Aurora. It's a beautiful place where people love each other and grow in their walk with Jesus. A lot of memories have been made in that building over many years.

There's our Indian Creek campus. I've had the pleasure of preaching out there and seeing people who deeply love Jesus, gathering together regularly to encourage each other and help each other grow. In our Plano campus, which is growing like gangbusters, there are many wonderful things going on. It's the exact same thing—people gathered together to worship the Lord. At the same time, they help each other. They encourage each other. They want to see each other grow in their maturity in Jesus Christ.

Our Sugar Grove campus was the one that got the whole thing started many decades ago. Think about that. Decades of faithfulness, of men, women and children gathering weekly to honor the Lord by worshiping Him together. They're not staying apart, not thinking they can do it on their own, but staying together week after week, praying and worshiping the Lord.

Regardless of which campus is you attend, when you get back to in-person worship, one of the things I think you're going to be reflecting on is all the memories that have been made in these buildings, all the times you have worshiped the Lord in these places with sisters and brothers in Christ. That's God at work in our lives and collectively as a body through all of us. The Lord is changing us, molding us, growing us. And the more that happens, the more I think we long to be in His house, just like this psalmist. That's why I think we've been missing it so much during the pandemic. I have loved the times of Sunday evening worship at our campuses. They're wonderful. I love the praise events in the parking lots.

I'm getting a glimpse in each of these events of the fact that that you're missing this, that you understand there's something beautiful about God's people getting together. It feeds us. It honors Him. We should long for this. We should crave it. Like the psalmist, we should yearn for the courts of the Lord.

That's my prayer, as we get back to in-person indoor worship. There are challenges. There are risks. This is a really uncertain time. Some of us are not going to be able to do this for a while because of health challenges or risks. We totally understand. That's one of the reasons why we're working so hard to continue this on-line worship service for you, so you can still be connected to Village Bible Church and still worship, even remotely, with other believers.

For those who are able to gather, my hope that the excitement is not just for the first few weeks, but then it just goes back into sort of the drab, same-old same-old. Rather, like the psalmist, I hope we see and feel what we missed over these many months and that our attitude will now be one in which we savor worshiping together in God's house. I hope we start to see it as a gift each and every week. Maybe we'll go to bed Saturday night a little earlier, just so we're well rested in order to worship together, in order to stay alert on Sunday when we're worshiping. Maybe we'll wake up on Sunday morning jazzed about the fact that we get to worship the Lord, and we get to do so in freedom with other people who love Jesus. Like the psalmist, my prayer is that our attitude is one in which we say, "It is glorious to be able to worship the Lord in His house with His people. I can't wait to do that." Maybe we'll even start thinking about that throughout the week.

I'm going to close us in prayer in just a moment, returning to a phrase I just love and have repeated. It's emotional and impactful. My prayer is that each of us will have this attitude in our heart: *"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere."*

Ah, Lord God, would that be the truth that comes from each and every one of us. May we mean that. Not just say it, not just read it, but may we mean that. Lord, it is beautiful to be able to worship with Your people.