



Well if you have your Bibles turn to Psalm 95. One of my favorite parts of learning is being surprised when I think I know how something works and it turns out to be totally opposite. Every time you land on a surprise, you get a special sort of insight into your misconceptions about how the world works.

For example, a few years ago encountered this little surprise in physics. I was driving in the car and of course we are very familiar with what happens when you go around a corner. Everything kind of sloshes to the outside. That's the expected behavior. But turns out if you have a helium balloon in the car with you and you round the corner, everything will slosh to the outside except the balloon. It will slosh to the inside. If you brake, you get pushed the front of the car, well the balloon goes to the back of the car. The balloon goes the opposite direction.

Now I pretty much have to explain why it is otherwise nobody will listen to anything else I have to say (bubble level analogy).

Now here's the point. That experience of driving with a balloon surprised me. What that surprise told me was that I thought I knew how the world worked. I thought I understood reality and had a model of reality, but the surprise jolted me. It forced me to reconsider how the world actually is. It sharpened my understanding.

Well there are theological surprises that have this same effect.

- We think we know who God is.
- We think we know what worship ought to be.
- We think we know the point of suffering.
- We think we know what we need.
- We think we know what would be best for us.

And then along comes this surprise, this theological helium balloon and it doesn't fit with our model of who God is and who we are. And that is so good for us. It forces us to reconsider, to remake our mental model of how God works in the world and what is important to him. This is all very good for us!

Well today we come to a Psalm that does exactly this. Psalm 95 is surprising to our modern minds. And I guarantee you that I won't have to point out the surprise. It universally jolts 21st century Americans. So I'm just going to read and briefly explain the text and you will hear when the surprise drops. Try not to read ahead.

So the Psalm begins with an invitation:

Psalm 95:1-4, Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

So the Psalmist, whoever he is, is rejoicing greatly and he's inviting others to do that with him. Four times he says, "Let US." Come! He's beckoning. He's lifting up his voice.

So there's invitation to join him in praise. But he adds incentive. I'm going to tell you why you should join me in praise. He is leading us in worship.

When you come to worship on Sunday, the job of the worship leader is to do exactly this. You might be able to tell that the worship leader is really excited to praise God and enjoys praising God and you might even agree that it would be right to praise God. But you don't feel it.

And so the words of the worship leader are intended to give you reason, the words of the songs we sing, the call to worship portion of our service is all designed to give you reason, incentive to praise God.

Because you can't praise without a reason. Not until we grasp who the Lord is are we moved to praise him.

And that is what the Psalmist is doing. He's giving us reasons why praise is fitting. Why should we praise him? Two reasons: Reason #1, because he is a great God! Look at verse 3

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

What's the incentive to praise him? Because he is a great God!

God is to be praised because he's in control of everything. If it's deep or high, he's in control of it. Every dimension is included to show that he is in control of it all. He owns it all. He made it all. It is all in his hands because he made it. If it's in your hands you control it and the Psalmist is saying the entire universe is like ingredients in the hands of a master chef. He does what he wants with them.

Why do we we praise him? Because he's a great God. But there's a second reason. He is our God. He's also our good God!

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel  
before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we  
are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his  
hand.

Yes God is great but he is also good! He has condescended and acted as our shepherd and he calls us his sheep. What a blessing to be led by such a good shepherd. So praise him! We are the people of his pasture. Praise him.

So that's the structure so far. And all of that is totally expected. So far we are in the realm of a perfectly normal praise song.

We are invited to sing and given incentive to sing. God is a great God and he is our God.

But what comes next is a total surprise. You could imagine his tone changing and suddenly he gets deadly serious (Look at the second part of verse 7):

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

Whoa. That is shocking. I was not expecting that! I thought we were in a mood of praise and exaltation and blessing and happiness. Why in the world do you feel the need to spoil the mood with that sort of warning? How is that even related to what we are talking about? Isn't the person who is able to sing those kinds of words of praise, immune from the danger that is expressed in that warning?

Well apparently not. Maybe we are in danger just like Israel. So, in order to appreciate what the Psalmist is saying, we need to back up to Meribah and Massah. Clearly the original recipients of this Psalm are people who are familiar with what happened at this desert location. And for our benefit we need to reacquaint ourselves with it. So what we need to do now is turn in our Bible's to Exodus 17.

Now Meribah and Massah are two names that refer to the same place. This the story of Moses bringing forth water from the rock. What a lot of people including myself forget is that there actually two water from rock stories. You have the first one in Exodus 17 that takes place a couple months after that Exodus. Here Moses was

commanded to strike the rock. He does and the water comes out. Then there's a second story in Numbers 20 that takes place years later in a different place. Here Moses is commanded to speak to the rock and instead he strikes it twice in anger and frustration and God rebukes him for not treating him holy in the sight of the people and because of that he is prevented from entering into the promise land.

Now I think when we recall the water from the rock story we almost universally think of that second encounter. And I think the reason it sticks out to us is because of how God dealt with Moses. It's the number one thing most of us familiar with the story remember.

But that is not the point of Psalm 95; in fact, it's not even the event that's being referenced. Psalm 95 references that first water from the rock narrative in Exodus 17. And the point of what God was teaching is crystal clear in the text and it's this sharp point that we first need to recall that to mind.

So really quick setup. Israel has experienced the ten plagues of Egypt. They have just crossed through the red sea. They've experienced the cloud of fire. They've already experienced God's provision of manna and quail. And after a couple of months of provision at a spring they set out into the desert once again and immediately they run out of water.

Exodus 17:1-4, All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

So Moses is being pushed against the ropes here. The people are angry at him. They need a person to blame. And so Moses responds.

And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Now before you get too judgmental, when is the last time you've



gone one day without water. How about two days with only a cup of water? You've got a nursing child and he's crying but you are just parched. Your tongue is dry. Your animals are so weak. They are lying down in the dust with pathetic little cries. There's no way they can make it another day. And there is not a drop of water in sight. Even if water just materialized out of nothing, how are we going to water down all these people and livestock?

And the people of course need to take their anger out on someone, and Moses is the closest and most obvious target.

So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink."

Now listen here for the point of the story.

And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.  
And he called the name of the place Massah and  
Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of  
Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is  
the LORD among us or not?"

So what was the sin of Israel according to Exodus 17? Israel was in a tough situation, they were in real need. They had a physical thirst that was gnawing at them. And the sin was rather than trust the God they knew existed, they put him to the test.

God are you among us or not? The way you will prove that you are among us, is to do what I want you to do, which is provide water for me. If you are not among us, then you will continue to let us thirst. So, are you among us or not?

And the reason this was so painful to God, was because he had so faithfully proved that he was among them. Had he not already proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he loved them and cared for them? Could not his previous faithfulness be counted on?

So Moses named that place Massah which means testing and Meribah means quarreling.

Now here's what is important for our purposes today:

Clearly this text is a warning against hardening your heart in the context of suffering. You see, normally we think that Christian growth comes from suffering and that the real danger is comfort and luxury and ease. We need to speak out against the rich and the comfortable and those who are popular and beautiful. Because after all, that's where the hardening danger lies.

And that's true. The Bible has much to say about that. But that does not mean that you are safe in suffering. You can harden your heart in suffering just as easy.

What this Psalm is going to teach us is that, there is a way to improperly respond to suffering that results in hearts that are hard toward God and his purposes.

You see, presumably the recipients of this Psalm are in a similar situation to the children of Israel. They too are tempted to complain and put God to the test- they are suffering in some sort of way. They don't like their situation. They don't like their pain. And they have real needs that are not being immediately met. And so they are tempted to harden their hearts against God by saying what Israel said, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

- Is God here or not?
- Is God even real?
- I don't see him bailing me out of this mess?
- Why would he allow this to happen?
- I won't believe in you until you take me out of this situation.

There is a type of hardening that is specific to suffering that the Psalmist is focusing on: It's a type of hardening that puts God to the test when WE are in fact the ones being tested.

And maybe you are in a similar situation that is very difficult. A difficult marriage, a difficult health struggle, a death in the family, a difficult financial situation and you don't see God doing anything about it.

And there is a temptation in that moment to harden your heart. To say like Israel, "Is the Lord among us or not?" This Psalm is a warning to NOT be like Israel. So that's going to be the structure today. We will look at three ways that Israel hardened her heart in suffering and the application of the three points of course will be to do the opposite.

## **THREE WAYS TO HARDEN YOUR HEART IN SUFFERING:**

1. Insist That You Be Comfortable Before Praising God.

### **Insist that You Must be Comfortable to Praise God.**

The warning begins, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart." What is his voice saying?

Based on the context, I think we can answer that pretty precisely.

When Israel was in the desert, we are specifically told in Psalm 81 that God was testing them.

Psalm 81:7, In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

So what was the voice of God to Israel during this time of testing? Remember, they were all thirsty. Their kids were crying. They were totally parched. And what was the voice of God saying, "Trust me. I will take care of you. Have I not taken care of you already? Have I not shown my power to you already? Have I not taken you through dry land and provided manna for you in the desert when you were starving. I know your need and you must trust me." But they hardened their hearts against that voice. And instead they grumbled and complained and put God to the test.

They said, "I am in no mood to praise your goodness when I am uncomfortable. In fact, I won't praise you until you've changed my situation and until I'm finally comfortable." That is direct hardening.

So the application of course to us is quite strong, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts against it." To complain that

your situation is difficult and to make situational change a prerequisite for praise is in fact hardening your heart.

Can you now see the song in a new light. The Psalmist is inviting the exact opposite response! Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Let us shout joyfully! To the ROCK of our salvation. He's the rock. The storm is all around, and he's the rock. The situation comes and goes but he's the rock.

If you read just the first portion of the song, you would think this song is coming from the lips of someone who just experienced extreme blessing, but the context tells us otherwise. This Psalm is written for the person who just lost their job, whose family is upset with them, who just experienced a death in the family, who got rocked by a sickness.

The Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods. I am trusting you and even praising you in this hard situation. I don't need to be comfortable to praise you. My situation doesn't define me.

## **THREE WAYS TO HARDEN YOUR HEART IN SUFFERING:**

1. Insist That You Be Comfortable Before Praising God.
2. Demand More Evidence Before You Believe.

# **Demand More Evidence to Believe.**

Now, perhaps you are in a position where you think, "Well, I'm just not sure God is to be trusted. After all, Israel had the whole red sea experience, they had the manna from heaven. They witnessed the ten plagues of Egypt. I mean, they've had a lot of evidence that God was powerful and good. But I've never seen those things. Has God really made himself known to me in such a way that I can trust him?"

What I really need is more evidence so that I can then believe. Give me evidence and I will believe.

That line of reasoning is as old as the sun. Every person who refuses to believe in God uses that same line of reasoning. Now that is not to diminish or make insignificant people's real questions about the existence of God or some confusing passage in the Bible or how Bible and science align. There are true dilemmas that cause people to really stumble in their faith.

And so if you have one of those TRUE dilemmas, don't hear what I am about to say as directed to you. But I would ask you to evaluate your dilemma in light of what I'm about to say.

This passage is talking to people who have all the evidence they need to believe in God, but because God is not doing for them what they want, they demand more. So the demand for evidence is really a guise for unbelieving rebellious heart.

You see this all through the Bible. Pharaoh did not need more evidence that God existed. He ultimately died by chasing a miracle working God into the mouth of a sea he was opening. Did you think that was going to turn out well for you? Did you not think that he

could just as easily close the ocean as he could open it?

Do remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? A rich man dies and he enters into a place of incredibly suffering where he wants just a drop of water for the tip of his tongue. He's burning up in torment and he sees Lazarus across the way enjoying perfect happiness. And he cries out and says, "Lazarus, please, go back and tell my brothers." And he says, "Well they have Moses and the prophets."

And he says, "Yeah, but they don't believe Moses and the prophets. I know how these guys think. What they need is more proof. If someone would come back from the dead, then they would be believe."

But then Jesus ends the parable with these chilling words. If they won't believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if someone comes back from the dead.

Was that not the case with Jesus himself? Jesus lived a life healing hundreds of people. There was irrefutable evidence that he was the son of God and yet men, out of hate and jealousy, nailed him to a tree. Do you not think that some of the very people who were involved in the crucifixion, who masterminded it, saw him alive. They certainly heard of it. And do you think they believed?

You see the evil heart always demands more evidence when the real issue is not evidence, it's submission. The evil heart latches on to the unproveable as a place to hide. Here's what I mean by that. Take for example, a spouse who says, "You are always so distracted when we are together. All you do is look at your phone. I don't think you even care about me." Now let's just say for the sake of the



illustration that she's 100% correct. This is exhibit 1034 in a string of 10,000. Let's just say that any onlooker would agree 100% and that accusation is patently obvious.

What is the husband going to say? He's going to immediately defend himself. He's going to say, "That's ridiculous. Prove it! You can't prove that I don't care." The heart instantly goes to the areas where it knows it can't be proven. He'll start defending his phone usage. I was checking my email. The mouth tries to defend itself by pointing out some legitimate usage of the phone. Prove to me that I don't care. And of course you could never absolutely prove that someone doesn't care. See, you can't prove it absolutely, so therefore I can continue in my behavior. Until you can prove with absolute iron clad certainty that my heart is evil, I will not concede. And since I know you can never do that, I am safe!

This is what so many people do with God. Prove to me that you are there. How? What is the test you create? The test is so often doing something for them. Until you do this thing for me I will never believe.

And because God will not conform to their self-made test, they feel justified in their unbelief. Don't you see, God can't be real because there is suffering in the world. Remove the suffering and I will believe. Why is that the test? God said that there would be suffering in the world. Suffering is the result of man's free will. Without free will you have no choice and you have no sin and you have not suffering. Of course there is suffering in the world. Why do you make this the ultimate test of God's existence?

This is what Israel was doing. God we are suffering. Why can't you save us from our suffering? I won't believe you even exist, I won't

praise you until you relieve my suffering. Israel doesn't need more information to believe. They have everything they need. They just don't want to believe. They hardened their hearts against him.

Well there is a third way to harden your heart in suffering.

## **THREE WAYS TO HARDEN YOUR HEART IN SUFFERING:**

1. Insist That You Be Comfortable Before Praising God.
2. Demand More Evidence Before You Believe.
3. Convince Your Soul You Know What is Best

### **Convince Your Soul that You Know What's Best.**

Think for a moment a little more intentionally about the fact that God put Israel to the test. We know that was the reason he brought them out into the desert. The Bible says that many times explicitly. For some, this rubs them the wrong way.

Isn't that kind of mean, to just test someone. Maybe someone has this picture in their mind of a God who drags Israel out into the desert, makes them really thirsty and grumpy, and then punishes them for reacting incorrectly. That seems kind of cruel.

Well that is not the case at all. A test is not cruel. We give tests all the time in our schools. Why? Because we want to introduce our children to situations that challenge their understanding of a concept. Normal life doesn't have information about quadratic equations or the molecular structure of atoms or require you to know when Abraham Lincoln was born. But tests do. So we force a situation to see what's in the mind. And the goal is not to crush but to reveal and learn. Do you know what you think you know? What if I mix up the information in a way you've never seen it before, can you still get the right answer? That's what tests do. They tease out of a person what is really inside.

Well we are all familiar with knowledge tests but there are also character tests. God allows you to go through a season of life or situation to test what is really in the heart. Normally you wouldn't be required to make this decision. Normally you wouldn't be forced to choose this day who you would serve. But God tests us to help us see for ourselves what is really in there. He wants us to deal with the implications of what comes out in tests.

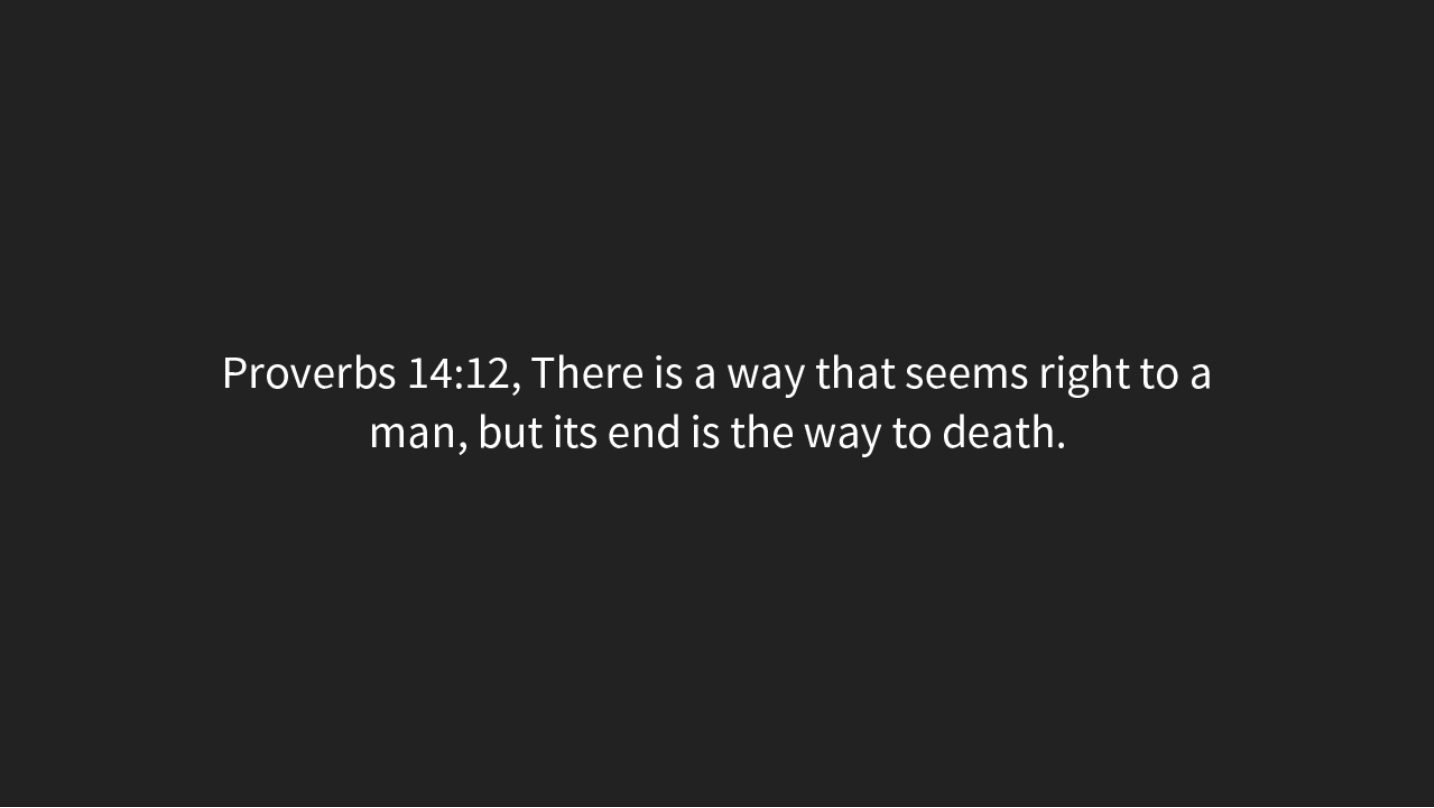
- You have kids and you get angry. What does that say about what you love? What did that test reveal? What are you going to do about it?
- You might lose your job and get depressed. What does that say about your heart?
- You have conflict and you get bitter or resentful or unforgiving. What does that say about your ability to love unconditionally?

All of life is the same test given in different forms with a single question. Who do you ultimately trust? Do you trust yourself or do you trust God?

The problem with Israel is that they did not want to be tested, they in

turn tested the Lord. You are not in the position to test me. I am in the position to test you. Prove to me that you are a worthy teacher. Prove to me that you know the best way. I think I know the best way.

This was the critical mistake of Israel. They assumed they knew the way, that they didn't need testing, that they knew what they needed to know.



Proverbs 14:12, There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

We are not in the position of teacher. We are in the position of being taught. If God is testing you, if God is allowing you to experiencing difficulty, there is something you need to learn. That is what you **MUST** believe.

The goal is **NOT** to remove the test. Removal of the test only hides the problem. The problem is still there and God loves you too much to allow it stay shrouded in darkness. The test brings it to light. And the goal is to learn what God wants you to learn. So do not harden your heart. Embrace the lesson you know he wants you to learn.

# Communion

So we started with praise, we transitioned to warning and we want to finish with communion which I think is an excellent mixture of these two ideas.

There is no place I know better where these two concepts mix together in mysterious harmony.

The cross is a place where we celebrate with roars of praise and then in the next breath we are terrified at the implications. There is warning and worship all mixed together. And 1 Corinthians 10 is the absolute perfect text to set us up for communion. You have warning and worship all mixed together here. And even better, Just like Psalm 95, God uses Israel's failure directed to us as NT believers to drive this point home.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4, For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

When we come to the table we say, "Lord, I trust you. You evidenced your love for me in sending your Son to the cross. There can be no greater expression. You, the creator-God, died for me, the sinner man. How can it be? There is no greater expression.

Far be it from me that I would put you to the test. That I would sin against you and say, "You haven't given me what I need and want and therefore I will sin to get it."

## **Bread**

Lord we want to trust you. If our situations is difficult we trust you. If we are experiencing temptation, we trust you. You have given us everything we need and we trust you!

## **Cup**

The appropriate time to obey the Lord is always now.