SESSION 6

THE SHELTER OF GOD’S PROTECTION
The Point
God is my ultimate protection.

The Passage
Psalm 91:1-4,9-11,14-16

The Bible Meets Life
We do all we can to protect ourselves and our loved ones from danger. We try to protect our children from harm. We hope to protect our finances from a volatile market. We protect ourselves against disease. Yet nothing we do guarantees protection. As a result, we can live in constant fear, or we can adopt an attitude of c'est la vie—“that’s life.” The Bible offers us a different choice: trust God’s loving protection.

The Setting
The psalmist celebrated the protection of the Lord throughout Psalm 91. The psalm has no inscription and can be associated with no particular time. Thus, its scope and timelessness are highlighted—any and every follower of “the Most High” can rely on “the Almighty” for protection. The psalm moves from first person testimony to second person exhortation to God Himself declaring the shelter He will provide.
Psalm 91:1-4,9-11,14-16 (HCSB)

1 The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

3 He Himself will deliver you from the hunter’s net, from the destructive plague.

4 He will cover you with His feathers; you will take refuge under His wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield.

9 Because you have made the LORD—my refuge, the Most High—your dwelling place,

10 no harm will come to you; no plague will come near your tent.

11 For He will give His angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways.

14 Because he is lovingly devoted to Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows My name.

15 When he calls out to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and give him honor.

16 I will satisfy him with a long life and show him My salvation.

Key Words

Most High (v. 1)—The Most High (Elyon) is a divine title for God. It emphasizes the exalted character, supremacy, and omnipotence of the Lord.

The Almighty (v. 1)—The Almighty (Shaddai) is a divine title for the God of Israel who revealed Himself to the Patriarchs (Ex. 6:3). It refers to God’s all-powerful nature.
GET INTO THE STUDY

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 71 of the PSG: “What causes fear in some people but not in you?”

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 72 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of God’s protection by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** To continue with the theme of God’s protection being greater than self-protection, bring several magazines and/or newspapers to the group meeting—one per group member would be ideal. As you distribute the periodicals, instruct group members to search for advertisements and other content that promote or proclaim our ability to protect ourselves. These can include medical protection, financial protection, emotional protection, and so on. Allow 3-5 minutes for group members to search, then ask for volunteers to share what they found.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 72 of the PSG: “God is my ultimate protection.”

**PRAY:** Transition into the Scripture discussion by confessing that you and your group members have at times bought into the lie that you can protect yourselves from the difficult circumstances of life. Ask that God would help each of you understand the reality of His protection as you explore His Word.

**TIP:** Keep a record of your group’s prayer requests, and check in regularly to see how God has answered.
Psalm 91:1-4

1 The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” 3 He Himself will deliver you from the hunter’s net, from the destructive plague. 4 He will cover you with His feathers; you will take refuge under His wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield.

GUIDE: Use the first paragraph on page 89 of this Leader Guide to introduce the structure and primary focus of Psalm 91.

READ: Psalm 91:1-4 on page 73 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask for a volunteer to do so.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 74 of the PSG: “What do the names and images in this passage reveal about God’s character?”

Note: If helpful, use the second paragraph on page 89 of this Leader Guide to provide some additional information on God’s names.

RECAP: Highlight the second-to-last paragraph from page 74 of the PSG:

Also notice God’s hospitality in these verses. We’re under His protection, in His shadow, in His fortress, and under His wing. The great God of the universe—who doesn’t need me, you, or anyone else—does something completely unnecessary and perhaps unexpected: He welcomes us into His protective presence.

TRANSITION: As we move to verses 9-11, we’ll gain a deeper look at the benefits we receive when we trust in God as our ultimate source of protection.
Psalm 91:1-4 Commentary

[VERSE 1] Psalm 91 is a song of confidence or trust. Its purpose is to build up the faith of those who trust in the Lord.—any and every follower of the Most High can rely on the Almighty for protection. There are three main sections in Psalm 91: verses 1-8, 9-13, and 14-16. The first two follow a similar structure. They begin with a confession (vv. 1-2) or the report of a confession of trust in the Lord as a refuge (v. 9). Then each section describes protective actions of the Lord (vv. 3-4 and 10-12) and promises for the believer’s security (vv. 5-8 and 13). The last section (vv. 14-16) contains a prophetic oracle where God Himself declares the kind of shelter He will provide.

The protection being considered in verse 1 is the protection discovered in God. The poet employed two names for God: Most High (Elyon) and Almighty (Shaddai). Both describe divine attributes. Most High refers to the exaltedness, and overwhelming majesty of God, a source of protection and shelter (Ps. 9:2; 91:9). The Almighty is found 48 times in the Old Testament as one of the names of the God of Israel; it refers to God’s all-powerful character. The one who lives within the perimeters of God’s shelter dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. The verb parallels the earlier lives. It literally means to stay overnight or lodge.

[VERSE 2] The affirmation of verse 1 then elicits the personal testimony and emotional confession of the believer in verse 2. The text shifts to the first person declaration: I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress.” Both concepts are common in the protective imagery of the Psalms (18:2; 31:4; 46:1; 71:7). Finally, a heart-felt my God is followed by the confession in whom I trust. It is hard not to imagine here a humble believer on knees, earnestly confessing trust in the Almighty.

[VERSE 3] In verses 3-4, the psalm transitions back to the poet, who begins to list protective actions offered by the Lord. The Lord Himself will deliver the believer from the hunter’s net and from the destructive plague. The image of fowlers trapping birds in nets and snares is common in the Old Testament (Josh. 23:13; Ps. 69:22; Isa. 8:14) and the ancient Near East. Destructive plague refers to a serious pestilence or epidemic sent by God, generally resulting in death (1 Kings 8:37; Jer. 24:10).

[VERSE 4] God brings about such deliverance in two ways. First, He will cover the believer with His feathers and offer refuge (v. 2) under His wings. Second, God’s faithfulness will be a protective shield for the believer. The phrase is made up of two Hebrew words. One refers to a large standing shield covering the whole body, and the other a protective wall or rampart. The imagery expresses complete protection and shelter. Faithfulness communicates God’s trustworthiness and reliability (Ps. 100:5) God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises means we can count on His protection.
Psalm 91:9-11

9 Because you have made the LORD—my refuge, the Most High—your dwelling place, 10 no harm will come to you; no plague will come near your tent. 11 For He will give His angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways.

RECAP: Read the second and third paragraphs on page 75 of the PSG in order to highlight the theme of suffering running throughout the psalm:

In verses 3-13, the psalmist painted his own picture of the dangers that lurk in the shadowy places of our lives: the hunter’s net, the destructive plague, the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the plague that stalks in darkness, the pestilence that ravages at noon, the lion, the cobra, and so on.

If that weren’t enough, we often rehearse our own secret fears—both the real problems we face and the perceived dangers we fear may be lurking in the shadows. Physical pain. Mental stress. Emotional struggle. Financial worry.

READ: Psalm 91:9-11 on page 73 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 75 of the PSG: “How can we reconcile the reality of suffering with the truths in these verses?”

Note: The so-called “problem of evil” has been a topic of discussion and debate for centuries. Therefore, don’t feel like your group needs to arrive at a definite conclusion in a matter of minutes. Encourage group members to wrestle with the tension between the reality of suffering and the goodness of God—and then conclude by reinforcing “The Point” of this session: God is our ultimate source of protection whether we experience suffering or not.

TRANSITION: The first 13 verses of Psalm 91 were written from the perspective of a follower of God. The final verses, however, come from God Himself.
Psalm 91:9-11 Commentary

[VERSE 9] The second section of Psalm 91 begins with a repeat of the confession made in verse 2. Because the believer made the LORD his refuge and the Most High his dwelling place, the poet began to list the protective actions extended by God for the believer’s care and protection (vv. 10-11). Again the threats encountered by the believer would be vanquished by God’s protective care. God’s sovereignty over all things makes such victory possible.

The idea of God as a refuge has been identified as the second most important theological theme in the Psalms behind the affirmation that the Lord is King. Because the believer confessed the LORD to be his refuge (v. 2), the psalmist continued (from vv. 3 ff.) to list the ways the Lord would protect him. The list includes images of common threats that might befall the faithful servant of the Lord. The point is assurance. God will prove to be the believer’s protection against the destructive forces surrounding him.

[VERSE 10] The psalmist continued to address the believer in the second person: no harm will come to you. The Hebrew word behind harm is traditionally translated evil, but here the meaning reflects physical or moral misery or disaster (Ps. 28:3; Prov. 12:21). In addition, the believer is informed that no plague will come near his tent. The Hebrew term rendered plague appears to be a synonym for the plague noted in verses 3 and 6. Such malady will not come near to the believer’s person or family.

[VERSE 11] Here is another example of how the sovereign God will provide protection for those who trust in Him. The psalmist assured the believer that the Lord will give His angels orders concerning him. The angels were to protect the believer in all his ways. Three significant points can be made here. First, God is able to command the angels. The idea of giving orders carries the sense of commissioning or entrusting someone with a task. The angels are “entrusted” with the task of protecting the believer. Second, the angels were charged to protect those who trusted in the Lord in all their ways. The angels are to protect or exercise great care over the believer’s ways. This refers to all their goings and comings of life. Finally, it’s significant that this is the only place in the Old Testament that refers to angels operating as guardians.

The Hebrew rendered angels in verse 11 can be translated messengers when it refers to human individuals (1 Sam. 6:21; Hag. 1:13). God’s messengers or angels functioned sometimes in the same way as human messengers. However, they were often tasked with the supernatural protection of God’s people (Gen. 24:40; Ex. 23:20). Nevertheless, they were not deities themselves. They were God’s messengers and they were sent by a sovereign God to protect us in all things.
Psalm 91:14-16

14 Because he is lovingly devoted to Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows My name. 15 When he calls out to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and give him honor. 16 I will satisfy him with a long life and show him My salvation.

READ: Psalm 91:14-16 on page 73 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 76 of the PSG: “How does our culture influence the way we view God’s protection?”

Note: The goal here is to help group members consider how modern culture has influenced their beliefs on what it means to be protected—superheroes, police officers, vigilantes, and more—and how those beliefs influence our understanding of God’s promises to protect us.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 76 of the PSG: “What responsibility do we have in being sheltered by God’s protection?”

DO: Encourage group members to complete the activity “God Hears” on page 77 of the PSG.

The psalmists included confident prayers in their songs because they had confidence God heard them. God hears our prayers, as well. Therefore, use the space provided to write out a brief prayer—a quick cry to God about an issue that weighs heavily on your heart.

As you hear from God in the days to come, use the space below to record His answers to your prayer.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” of this session: “God is my ultimate protection.” As time permits, encourage group members to share any final thoughts or questions.
Psalm 91:14-16 Commentary

[VERSE 14] The focus of Psalm 91 shifts noticeably in this final part. Here God Himself declares in a prophetic oracle the kind of protection He will provide. Verse 14 contains a “chiastic” structure. That is, the verse begins and ends with two explanatory parallel phrases beginning with because. The two verbs of promise I will deliver him and I will protect him fit snugly in the middle. Hence, God states that because the believer is lovingly devoted to Him and because the believer knows My name, God will deliver and protect him. All this speaks of a relationship of interaction. In this way, God makes it clear that an ongoing loving relationship with Him keeps us under His protection.

[VERSE 15] God declared four more pledges of protection in verse 15. This is accomplished with three verbs and the noun phrase. Because of the believer’s commitment to a loving relationship, God opens the door to a two-way communication. When the believer calls out to God, God declares, I will answer him. God’s pledge of presence in times of trouble is the only promise that does not come in a verbal form. Instead, God spoke emphatically in a noun phrase: “with him I (am) in trouble.” In this way the theological truth is emphasized, both in position and importance, at the center of verses 14-16. God’s presence is with the believer in difficult times.

The last two pledges in verse 15 come in two concise verbal forms. These may be considered as standing alone or directly related to God’s presence in times of trouble (cf. Ps. 50:15). God said simply, I will rescue him and will give him honor. God declared that He would rescue or deliver the believer (Pss. 18:19; 116:8). In Psalm 50:15 the honor after the rescue is directed to the Lord, but here the Lord will give honor to the believer. In times of trouble, the Lord will not only deliver the believer, He will also lift him up and hold him in high regard in the presence of others.

[VERSE 16] Verse 16 holds the last two of God’s eight pledges of security and protection. The first concerns fullness of life. The Lord stated, I will satisfy him with a long life. This promise of long life is highlighted in other psalms (21:4; 23:6) and is based on keeping a covenant relationship with God (Deut. 4:40; cf. Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). The final pledge promises salvation. God said, I will show him My salvation. The Lord employed a causative verb to indicate what the believer will see or experience. God said, “I will cause him to see.” The salvation mentioned here might have two points of reference, one present and one future. God could be referring to the hope of a future eternal salvation. The Lord might also be referring to the reality of a present salvation—an act of deliverance in the current moment and time. In either case, this pledge and the other seven are offered to those who trust in God. God will keep us under His protection when we walk in a loving relationship with Him.
GUIDE: Direct group members to page 78 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for expressing trust in God’s protection:

- **Accept God’s protection.** As you speak with God this week, actively accept His offer of protection.

- **Keep a journal.** Start a journal to record God’s comforting work in your life. Take special note of the ways He protects you during difficult situations and cares for you over time.

- **Share the news.** Read Psalm 91 to a friend experiencing troubles. Share from your experience about the meaning of the psalm and how to trust God when the days get dark.

**Wrap It Up**

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the conclusion from page 78 of the PSG: “The lure of fearful self-preservation calls us to live helicopter lives, hovering over each day with a long list of ‘don’ts’ and risks to avoid. God invites us instead to do something—to be lovingly devoted to Him and to trust Him completely.”

**PRAY:** Conclude the discussion by echoing the words of Psalm 91:2, “I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”
My group's prayer requests

Additional suggestions for specific groups (women, men, boomers, and singles) are available at BibleStudiesForLife.com/blog.

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife.

Your Resurrection Year

Merryn had been expecting Emily's call. It was a routine call with the results of the latest blood test. She pressed the phone to her ear. “I’m afraid,” Emily said quietly, “things have changed.”

“What do you mean?” Merryn asked.

“Your pregnancy hormone levels have dropped significantly. I’m so sorry.”

To continue reading “Your Resurrection Year” from HomeLife magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.
Storm Shelter: Psalms of God’s Embrace

It is wonderful to know that when we place ourselves in God’s loving embrace, we can experience shelter in the midst of any downpour.

Christ

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of each of these psalms. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, indwells us through His Holy Spirit, the One who is called the Comforter. Our salvation and relationship with God are secure and complete through Jesus. We know and experience the forgiveness of God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross.
Helping you move from where you are to where God wants you to be. This is your passion for your class or group. Yet helping different individuals each take their next step to grow as disciples is challenging. The Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA) is a quick and easy tool to help you discover how you and the members of your group are doing in eight essential areas of discipleship. The TDA provides next steps to help your group move from where you are to where God wants you to be. The assessment is online which allows each group participant to take it in the comfort and privacy of their home, office, or even on their mobile device. Discover more at: TDA.LifeWay.com.

Everyone looks for shelter from life’s problems and downturns, but only what we’re given through our relationship with God truly shelters us. As we experience difficulties, our trust in the presence and shelter of God gives testimony to the power and grace of God in our lives. As we see others in difficulty, we can point them to the shelter and protection only God can provide.

God embraces us through our relationship with Him. As He indwells each of us, we experience God’s presence, comfort, encouragement, and so forth through each other. We are the body of Christ, and we minister God’s presence and help to one another.