



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 from harm those who depend on us. We hope to protect our finances from a volatile market. We protect ourselves against disease. Nothing we do guarantees protection. As a result, we can live in constant fear, or we can adopt a *c'est la vie*—that's life—attitude. 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.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

GUIDE: Direct the group to look at the picture (see p. 88; **Personal Study Guide [PSG], p. 86**).

DISCUSS: Question #1 (PSG, p. 86): What causes fear in some people but not in you?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 87)**. Note the reference to “helicopter parents” who “hover” over their kids to ensure they don’t skin a knee or get their feelings hurt. Seniors know full well that no matter what we do, pain is a part of life, and trouble comes to all of us in one form or another.

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point (PSG, p. 87): God is my ultimate protection**.

SAY: “In this final session in our study of being sheltered by God in the storms of life, we discover from Psalm 91 that we don’t need to live in fear of what life may throw at us, because ultimately, those who rely on God are sheltered in His all-powerful arms.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 91:1-4



10 minutes

GUIDE: Remind the group of what they have studied so far in this unit. **(OPTION:** Encourage the group to review the titles using the **Contents page on PSG page 3):**

- “The Shelter of God’s Presence” (The Point: God is with me no matter what I am facing.)
- “The Shelter of God’s Salvation” (The Point: God Himself is my salvation.)
- “The Shelter of God’s Forgiveness” (The Point: God’s forgiveness brings restoration and joy.)
- “The Shelter of God’s Encouragement” (The Point: God encourages me when I feel overwhelmed.)
- “The Shelter of God’s Peace” (The Point: God is the source of peace in the midst of turmoil.)

(ENHANCEMENT: Direct attention to these titles on **Pack Item 1: “Storm Shelter.”**)

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.

KEY WORDS: **Most High** (v. 1)—The Most High (*Elyon*) is a divine title for God. It emphasizes His exalted character, supremacy, and omnipotence.

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.

God’s faithfulness means we can count on His protection. Psalm 91 is a song of confidence or trust, meant to build up the faith of those who trust in the Lord. The traditional Hebrew text of the psalm has no title or inscription and cannot be associated with any particular author or event. Consequently, its scope and timelessness are highlighted—every follower of **the Most High** can rely on **the Almighty** for protection.

But the language and imagery of the psalm—refuge, protection, and shield—reminds the reader of David. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, classify the psalm as belonging to David, but the psalm itself remains anonymous.

The key to understanding the psalm lies in recognizing its three speakers, its three types of images, and the structure of its three sections. Three distinct individuals speak in the

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psalm. The believer, who trusts in God, offers a first person testimony in verse 2. The psalmist/worship leader exhorts the believer in the second person throughout the bulk of the psalm (vv. 1,3-13). Finally, God Himself speaks at the conclusion (vv. 14-16). This shift of speakers may indicate the psalm was used in temple worship, but the precise setting is not clear.

Three types of images also appear in Psalm 91. The dominant image of refuge (vv. 1-2,9) is a concrete symbol of trust focusing on God's presence in the temple. Protective images include a hiding place, a fortress (vv. 1-2), a bird protecting its chicks (v. 4), and angels (vv. 11-12). Lastly, threat images depict a hunter (v. 3a) disease (v. 3b), battle weapons (v. 5b) and dangerous animals (v. 13). The Lord is portrayed as protecting the believer from these and other threats.

Finally, the psalm is in three main sections (vv. 1-8,9-13, 14-16). The first two 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 describes protective actions of the Lord (vv. 3-4,10-12) 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.

Psalm 91 begins with an affirmation of the refuge found in God. It functions like a motto or kind of preacher's text for the exhortation contained in the rest of the psalm. **The one who lives** can be translated *he who sits down* or *he who takes an abode or dwelling*. **Protection** identifies the location of that dwelling. The Hebrew word used here occurs 10 times in the Psalms and appears to mean a place that shelters or protects, a hiding place (Pss. 18:11; 31:20; 61:4; 119:114). The psalmist understood that God will hide the faithful in the shelter/protection of His presence, pinpointed in the temple in Old Testament times.

The **protection** being considered here is the protection discovered in 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.

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GUIDE: Return the focus to this session by stating that a smoke alarm that only works sometimes would not give us much peace of mind when we go to bed at night.

SAY: "Thankfully, we can depend on God's faithfulness all the time, and that means we can count on His protection."

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 91:1-4.

SUMMARIZE: Acknowledge that, like the sometimes-working smoke alarm mentioned earlier, lot's of things can disappoint us. Nothing in this world compares with the strength and protection God gives us.

Explain how God works on our behalf by reviewing in verses 1-2 the names and titles He used to reveal Himself (**PSG, pp: 89-90**):

1. Most High. No one is above God. He is supreme—the One who stands in the loftiest position.

2. Almighty. God holds all of the power of creation throughout eternity.

3. LORD. God's covenant name, *Yahweh*, means "I AM." God is self-existent, self-sustaining, and eternal. He is the One who creates and holds everything together.

GUIDE: Note the deliverance and protection referenced in verses 3-4. Invite the group to imagine a mother eagle protecting her young under her powerful wings (v. 4). Stress that this gives us a hint of the powerful shield of protection we can find in God's faithfulness to His people. **(ENHANCEMENT: Pack Item 5: "Under His Wings.")**

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 90): What do the names and images in this passage reveal about God's character?

(Alternate: How has God protected you?)

TRANSITION: "God is not only powerful, He is sovereign, which means He can protect us in all things."

Therefore, he who sits down in the **protection** of God is comfortable enough to lodge in the **shadow** of Lord as well. In other psalms, **shadow** or shade refers to the protection located under the wings of God (Pss. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1). In ancient Near Eastern imagery, deities often appear covering a king with their wings.

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 heartfelt **my God** is followed by the confession **in whom I trust**. It is hard not to imagine here a humble believer kneeling, earnestly confessing trust in the Almighty.

In verses 3-4, Psalm 91 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 hunter described here is that of the fowler. The image of fowling 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, resulting in death (1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chron. 20:9; Jer. 24:10).

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** (Pss. 57:1; 63:7; cf. Ex. 19:4). The allusion here could be to God protecting His own like a mother bird protecting her young from the fowler. It could also be a reference to the wings of the cherubim over the ark of the covenant in the temple of Jerusalem. 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.

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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.

God's sovereignty means He can protect us in all things. The second section of Psalm 91 begins with a report (v. 9) 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 God's protective actions on the believer's behalf (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 psalmist repeated two of the terms referring to God in verses 1-2. The focus is on **the LORD**, the **Most High**. **The Lord** is the personal name of God and the primary designation for the God of Israel, occurring over 5,300 times in the Old Testament. The divine title **Most High** refers to the supremacy and majesty of God and is identified in the Psalms as a source of protection and shelter. In the Old Testament, **Most High** speaks of God's ultimate sovereignty (Gen. 14:19,22; Ps. 83:18).

The psalmist declared **the LORD** was also his **refuge** (v. 9a). In the Old Testament, the term translated **refuge** has the meaning of a haven or shelter. The psalmist then added that the believer had also effectively made **the Most High—your dwelling place** (v. 9b). The Hebrew word for **dwelling place** is used for the first time in this psalm and can also be translated habitation or fortress. It is considered a synonym for **refuge**, used in this verse and earlier (v. 2). God will deliver and protect His people.

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

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STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 91:9-11



5 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read verses 9-11.

SUMMARIZE: Note that this second section of Psalm 91 begins with a report (v. 9) of the confession made in verse 2. Because the believer **made the LORD his refuge and the Most High his dwelling place**, the psalmist began to list God's protective actions on the believer's behalf (vv. 10-11). The threats encountered by the believer would be vanquished by God's protective care. God's sovereignty over all things makes such victory possible.

Emphasize that we should not interpret this passage to mean that God will protect us from all problems. The greatest saints in the Bible had problems. God has not promised to spare us from difficulty. But we are not left on our own. We only need look to God, and He will be right by our side.

GUIDE: Direct attention to verse 11. Stress that God has commanded the army of heaven to watch over those who place their trust in Him.

SAY: "Our Heavenly Father is absolutely, positively sure we never will be in any circumstance over which He is not watching us, guarding us, and guiding us. We will run into problems, but we are not alone. God's kind control means His eye is on us."

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 92): **How can we reconcile the reality of suffering with the truths in these verses?**

(Alternate: What does it mean to make God your dwelling place?)

TRANSITION: Emphasize that the key to remaining under God's protection is maintaining a loving relationship with Him.

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.

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; Jer. 1:14; 2:3; Amos 3:6). The phrase **will come** renders a rare Hebrew verb meaning to meet or encounter.

In addition, the believer is informed that **no plague will come near his tent**. The Hebrew rendered **plague** has the basic meaning of a blow, stroke, or plague (Pss. 39:10; 89:32; 144:5). It 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. It will not draw near to his **tent**. This word is used in the Psalms figuratively for the home or dwelling place of the faithful believer (Pss. 78:55; 118:15).

Verses 11-12 offer another example of how the sovereign God will provide protection for those who trust in Him. Satan quoted these verses to tempt Jesus (Matt. 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). The focus of our lesson is primarily on verse 11. Here the psalmist assured the believer the Lord **will give His angels orders concerning him**.

Three significant points can be made here. First, God is able to command the angels. The idea of giving orders carries the sense of entrusting someone with a task (Num. 27:19,23; Deut. 31:14,23). 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 Hebrew verb has a variety of meanings, including to guard, keep, or watch over (Ps. 121:3-5,7). The angels are **to protect** or exercise great care over believers' **ways**. This refers to all our goings and comings of life.

Finally, it is significant that this is the only place in the Old Testament that refers to **angels** operating as guardians. In ancient Near East religions, personal or family deities were believed to serve as guardians to protect the health and well being of the individual against demonic powers, regarded as the source of sickness and various difficulties. Magic and

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incantations were often employed to ward off the demons. Such was not to be the case in Israel's faith.

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** sometimes functioned 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, 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.

A loving relationship with God keeps us under His protection. The focus of Psalm 91 shifts noticeably in this final part. God Himself declares in a prophetic oracle the kind of protection He will provide. Similar divine oracles are found in Psalms 50; 60; 81; and 95. Psalm 62, also a psalm of trust, contains a closing report of God's speech, which becomes the basis for the personal confessions uttered by the psalmist. In Psalm 91 the actual speech functions the same way. As a result it highlights the confession of the believer in the first section and the promise of shelter and protection in the second.

Here God pledged eight expressions of security using seven verbs and one noun phrase in a quick and terse fashion. The Lord is the subject of each verb and the believer is the object or recipient of the promise of protection. Each verbal form contains both the subject and object in one word. Sometimes God elaborates on the promise, but on the whole the oracle

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STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 91:14-16



15 minutes

TIP: Be sensitive to those with questions about why all believers do not experience long life, deliverance from evil, and so forth. For reasons we may never understand in this life, God does not always deliver His children from the evils, trials, and tribulations of this world. Part of the answer is that the hope of Christians lies primarily not in this life, but in the fulfillment of God's sure hope and promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ in the world to come (Heb. 11).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read verses 14-16.

GUIDE: God is fully able to protect us. But He places a decision in our laps—the decision to be devoted to Him. Call attention to the bulleted statements on **PSG page 93:**

- **Some people love the idea of God's power and protection, but they never entrust themselves to Him.**

- Other people slavishly devote themselves to God's work, but they have no heartfelt love for Him.

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 93): How does our culture influence the way we view God's protection?

SUMMARIZE: Remind the group that God's protection does not equate with an easy life. When we choose to lovingly surrender to His grace and mercy through faith in Christ, then dangers, turmoil, and the chaos of life are just opportunities for God to show off how much He loves us.

DISCUSS: Question #5
(PSG, p. 95):
What responsibility do we have in being sheltered by God's protection?

(Alternate: How will we support one another in our devotion to God?)

is short and to the point. Each pledge can be understood individually, but a certain progress also can be traced through the development of these eight promises.

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. **Protect** here has the idea of being lifted to safety. **Lovingly devoted** here describes the worshiper's relationship to God, but in Deuteronomy it expresses God's loving commitment to Israel (Deut. 7:7; 10:15). The Lord will not abandon the one who **knows My name** (Ps. 9:10). This too speaks of a relationship of interaction. God thus makes it clear that an ongoing loving relationship with Him keeps us under His protection.

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**. Such prayerful interaction was to be a highlight of temple worship (2 Chron. 7:15; Isa. 56:7; cf. Matt. 21:13).

God's pledge of presence in times of **trouble** is the only promise that God spoke emphatically in a noun phrase: "with him I (am) in trouble." God's presence is with the believer in difficult times. The specific kinds of **trouble** are not identified, but God will not abandon those who trust in Him.

The last two concise pledges in verse 15 may be considered as standing alone or directly related to God's presence in times of trouble, as in Psalm 50:15. God said simply, **I will rescue him** and I will **give him honor**. God declared He would **rescue** or deliver the believer (Pss. 18:19; 116:8). In Psalm 50:15 the Lord receives the honor after the rescue; here God will give **honor** to the believer. In times of trouble, the Lord will not only deliver the believer, He will also lift him up.

Verse 16 holds the last two of God's eight pledges of security and protection. First the Lord stated, **I will satisfy**

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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; Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Finally, God said, I will **show him My salvation.** The psalmist used a causative verb to indicate God was saying, “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, or 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 protects us when we walk in a loving relationship with Him.

DO: Ask volunteers to share their responses to the activity, **“The Ultimate Protection Plan” (PSG, p. 95).**

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

God’s protection is more secure than simple shelter from circumstances. This security of life with God begins when we accept Jesus Christ as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR



Sarcophagus with combat scene of Etruscan soldiers.

The following excerpt is from the article, “The Heavenly Host” (Fall 1999), which relates to this session and can be purchased at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.

“The ‘heavenly host’ or ‘host of heaven’ is the entourage, the army, of angelic beings that serves God and does His bidding (Isa. 40:26; Rev. 7:11). The words translated ‘angel’ in both Old and

New Testaments basically mean ‘messenger.’ Radiant and real, the angels are usually unseen by the naked eye unless God ‘opens’ human eyes to see them (Num. 22:31; 2 Kings 6:15-17). Angels appear and speak for God (Luke 1–2). Angels can communicate through dreams. Serving as God’s messengers, angels sometimes take physical form. Angels are warriors. Angels minister to people. Angels worship the Lord constantly before His throne.”

Read “Under His Wings” in the Fall 2014 issue. Other articles, “Ancient Shields” (Sum. 1982) and “The Most High” (Spr. 2003), can be purchased at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.

Subscribe to *Biblical Illustrator* at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator, or call 1-800-458-2772.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

DO: Emphasize **The Point:** **God is my ultimate protection.**

GUIDE: Review **Live It Out** (PSG, p. 96; see text to the right). Review the application options, and encourage each group member to consider which one God is leading them to adopt this week.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: IN ADVANCE, bring an umbrella. Open the umbrella as a symbol of God's protection we can depend on to get us through the storms of life. Remind the group that our Lord is the ultimate protection for those who are lovingly devoted to Him through faith in Christ.

PRAY: Ask the Lord for strength to always trust in Him and to have faith that no matter what may come against us, we are sheltered in His loving arms. Thank Him for being our ultimate protection.

LIVE IT OUT

Review the applications below. How will you express trust this week in God's protection as a result of what you learned from Psalm 91?

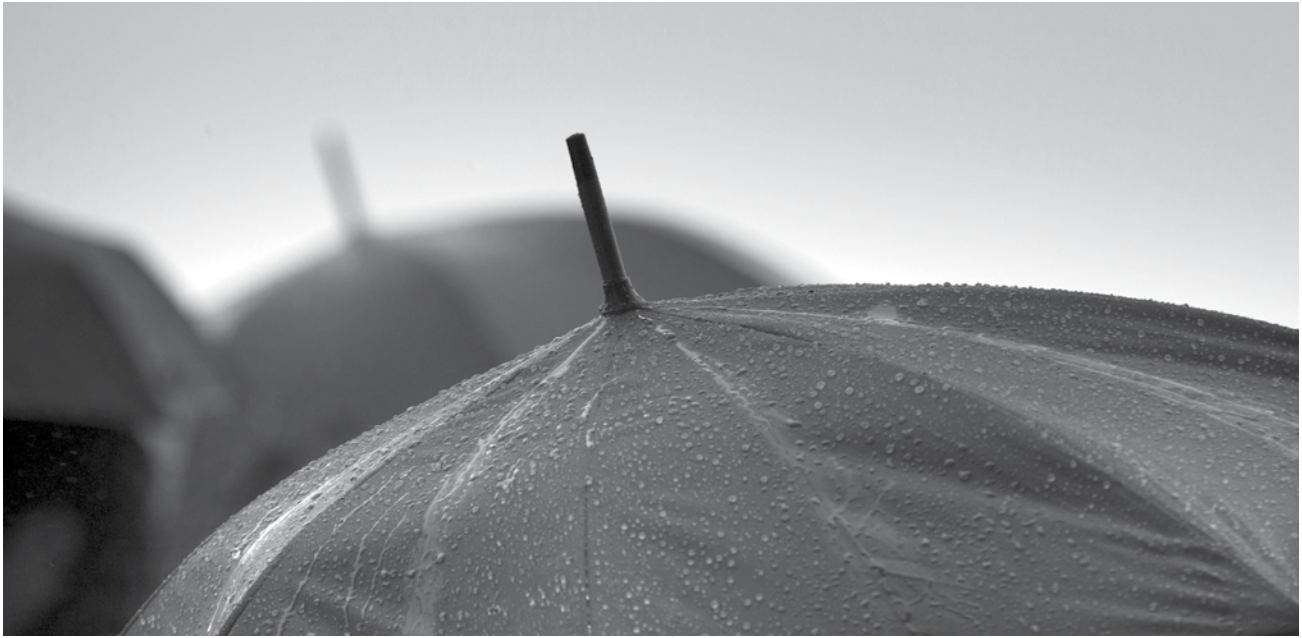
- ▶ **Recall.** Make a list of the times in the last few years when you trusted God in the midst of difficult circumstances. Start a journal of God's comforting work in your life.
- ▶ **Discuss.** Talk with a close friend about some of the barriers that keep you from trusting God completely with your difficult circumstances. Ask this friend to pray for you to be able to surrender to God's grace and become completely devoted to Him.
- ▶ **Share.** Read Psalm 91 to a friend who is in the middle of troubles. Share from your own experience with this psalm, and encourage him or her to trust God when the days get dark. Continue to minister to your friend as long as necessary.

As we learn to trust completely in God's protection and become devoted to Him, we gain the balance between living in unhealthy fear and living with total disregard of danger. Fearful self-preservation calls for a lot of "don'ts" and things to avoid. Instead, God invites us to do something: to be lovingly devoted to Him and trust Him completely.



Looking Back: *Storm Shelter*

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.



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 each other.

Community



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.

Culture



“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 complete it in the comfort and privacy of their homes, offices, or even on their mobile devices. Discover more at TDA.LifeWay.com.