

Life of David: Trusting God For All of Life's Challenges

Psalm 31

Lessons learned in the furnace of affliction often get etched deeply into our hearts and lives.

David learned a lesson in his hard times. That lesson was that life must be lived on purpose for God. Coasting, going along with the flow and living carelessly always leads to wasted life. David wanted to place and keep his trust in the Lord.

Don't Waste Precious Life Live Life Deliberately

Living life intentionally, on purpose, and deliberately for God became the theme of Psalm 31 as David drew inspired lessons from three eras of his life: the times of his "running" from Saul years; the times of his "not running" from sin years; and the years of "again running" from Absalom. These eras are reflected by divisions of Psalm 31:

1. Psalm 31:1-8 reflects lessons David learned in his **running-from-Saul years**. As a fugitive David writes twenty-three different Psalms, many of which we have studied and others we know well (David wrote Psalms 4, 7, 11, 13, 16-17, 31, 34-36, 39-40, 52-54, 56-57, 59, 63-64, 70, and 141-142).
2. Psalm 31:9-11 reflects lessons David learned in his **not-running-from-Bathsheba year**. These are the years that Psalm 32, 38, and 51 are written.
3. Psalm 31:12-22 reflects lessons David learned in his **running-from-Absalom years**. (These are Psalms 3, 63, and now 31).

What we see through David is that God has placed each of us on earth, in a specific time: for a specific purpose. When we know that and live accordingly, we have a life lived deliberately for God.

God then measures whether we accomplished what He desired in that time period.

As we begin our look at Psalm 31, we find David's personal resolve, which captures why God thought so highly of him:

Living deliberately for God Means choosing to live—

This concept we will see in Psalm 31 is also reinforced in the New Testament.

- Living deliberately involves: **Carefully counting the cost**, as Jesus said in Luke 14:28;

Luke 14:28 (New King James Version) For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—

- Living deliberately involves: **Circumspectly walking through life**, as Paul said in Ephesians 5:15;

Ephesians 5:15 (New King James Version) See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

- Living deliberately involves: **Not hastily or rashly saying or doing anything**, as James warned in James 1:19.

James 1:19 (New King James Version) So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

- Living deliberately involves: **Warily watching out for the devil**, our prowling adversary, as Peter said in 1 Peter 5:8;

1 Peter 5:8 (New King James Version) Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Each of those four elements of deliberate living are small choices we make in daily living.

Let's now walk through this wonderful psalm section by section to see the lessons David learned from his troubles that helped him walk the rest of his days for the glory and purpose of the Lord his God.

LESSONS FROM DAVID'S RUNNING-FROM-SAUL YEARS v. 1-8

In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness. Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me. Pull me

out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, for You are my strength
(Psalm 31:1-4).

David seems to have started this Psalm by reflecting upon all his years on the run from King Saul, fleeing from one cave to another, from one wilderness fort to another.

This period is when David discovered that only God was the place where we could safely rest. In verse one David said, ... "*I put my trust ...* [v. 1 *chacah* #2620 'to seek refuge; to trust']; then he used four different nouns to describe how he found the Lord as his place of safety.

Only God can Gives True Security

His security in God is seen in his usage of:

- **rock/strength** [vv. 2,4 *maowz* #4581 "fortress, stronghold, strong"].
- **refuge** [v.2 *tsuwr* #6697 "cliff, rock wall"].
- **fortress of defense/fortress** [vv.2-3 *matsuwd* #4686 "fortress"]. (Note: For any of you who have gone to the Land of the Book and seen that majestic refuge, this is also a word for Masada in today's Israel.)
- **rock** (different Hebrew word) [v. 3 *sehlah* #5553 "rock, stronghold," as in Psalm 18].

David used every word in the Hebrew language he could find to sing of the security he found in his great God during his years of running from King Saul. Such graphic pictures symbolized both comfort and help in a time of desperation. Saul's vast superiority in both numbers and strength were blunted by David's God-given ability to hide in and out of the many caves, canyons, and rocks of the wilderness.

As David looked back, he drew lessons from that period of intense fear on the run from Saul. Because his hope now rested more firmly in the Lord, rather than run from his problems with Absalom, he purposed to walk forward in the strength of the Lord.

This is very clear even in the word order David used: the "*In You, O LORD*" precedes the "*I put my trust.*" God was being put first as the source, the target, and the point of all David intended to do from then on. Before, when David had stepped out on his own, he fell deep into sin with Bathsheba. But no more—serving his beloved Lord faithfully was now his heart's greatest desire.

God wanted David to learn that as those natural outcroppings gave him a safe haven all those years, so the supernatural Presence of the Lord, who was always there and always able to protect, was his real Rock, Refuge, and Fortress. So David often referred to God this way, as his rock fortress, in Psalms 18-19; 28; 61-62; and 71.

Next we can see that David filled Psalm 31 with statements to the Lord that "**You are ...**"; then he applied them to his need by saying to himself by faith—"... **then be ...**"

Applying God to My Daily Life

This practice is well worth developing: each time you're in the Word, stop when you find a truth about the Lord; repeat the truth back to Him in the "You are ..." form.

Next, pause and by faith say, "Then be ..." For example, you could say to the Lord:

- God, You are a *Rock*—then be *my* Rock.
- God, You are *Strength*—then be *my* Strength.
- God, You are a *Refuge*—then be *my* Refuge.
- God, You are a *Fortress of Defense*—then be *my* Fortress of Defense.

Forming such a habit is how we can derive the greatest comfort and strength from God's Word as we learn to apply what He *is* to our lives!

This next verse contains another treasure. See if you recognize it.

Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth (Psalm 31:5).

After three-and-one-half years of public ministry, after six long hours of horrific suffering on the cross, Jesus lifted His head one last time, pulled Himself up on the spikes, and cried out David's initial words in Psalm 31:5 as His final words on earth (Luke 23:46)!

Those same words also found their way into the hearts and lips of many notable saints of the past. For example, those who stood at the bedside of the following great saints as they died have reported that, like Christ, they spoke Psalm 31:5a as their last words on earth:

- Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), author of the words to the now famous song entitled "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee," died quoting this verse.
- John Hus (1369-1415) was burnt at the stake in Constance by the Roman Catholic Church for believing and preaching justification by faith alone. At the end of the ceremony condemning Hus to death by fire, the presiding bishop uttered this chilling condemnation, "And now we commit thy soul to the devil."

To which John Hus calmly was heard to say by those who loved him and stood by him to the end, "I commit my spirit into Thy Hands, Lord Jesus Christ; unto Thee I commend my spirit, which Thou hast redeemed!"

- Martin Luther (1483-1546), who wrote "Blessed are those who die not only **for the Lord** as martyrs; not only **in the Lord** as all believers; but likewise **with the Lord**, as breathing forth their lives in these words: 'Into Thy Hands I commend my spirit.'

And so on his death bed in February 18th 1546 that great reformer confidently left this world faintly uttering those words of triumph!¹

In this next passage David expressed his trust in the Lord by affirming truths he held on to in dangerous times:

*I have hated those who regard useless idols; but **I trust in the LORD**. I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities, and have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place (Psalm 31:6-8).*

Lessons in How to Trust God

Four truths in verses 6-8 gave David special strength:

1. David trusted in the fact that **God was well aware of all his trouble** (31.7a “*I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, For You have considered my trouble*”). God was aware and close by in every bit of his agony.
2. David trusted in the fact that **God responded to his anguishing soul** (31.7b “*You have known my soul in adversities*”). When God sees something we are struggling with it is not merely that He just notices it, He also responds and comes to help us in our time of need.
3. David trusted in the fact that **God did not hand him over to his enemies** (31.8a “*And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy*”). God will keep us from falling and is very near to us in time of need. He promises that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.
4. David trusted in the fact that **God set his feet in a wide place** (31.8b “*You have set my feet in a wide place*”). Since God is faithful, always had been—David knew that all he needed to do was trust in Him! The memory of a past deliverance can bear the fruit of a present confidence.²

Next we see the second section: Psalm 31:9-11 reflects what David learned as:

LESSONS FROM DAVID'S NOT-RUNNING-FROM BATHSHEBA YEAR v. 9-11

***Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble;** my eye wastes away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones*

¹ J. J. Stewart Perowne, in loc.

² James Boice, *Psalms-Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books), p. 271.

waste away. I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors, and am repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee from me (Psalm 31:9-11).

David moaned in these verses that his sin with Bathsheba was just not worth it! His moment of stolen pleasure was repaid with months of unbearable tortures.

Look at how many ways David described all he went through: "trouble," "wasting with grief," "years of sighing," "strength fails," "bones waste away," "reproach," "repulsive," "fled from."

None of those woes can be found recorded in either 2 Samuel or 1 Chronicles where David's biography was written by God. They appear only in the Psalms he wrote—his personal diary. In the Psalms God allows us to pull back the curtain and see what was going on inside. That is why the Psalms are so valuable.

Because David was excruciatingly aware of sin's high cost, he now purposed to avoid headlong plunges into sin.

Finally, in Psalm 31:12-22 we see reflected:

LESSONS FROM DAVID'S RUNNING-FROM-ABSALOM YEARS v. 12-22

*I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. For I hear the slander of many; **fear is on every side**; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life. **But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD**; I say, "You are my God" (Psalm 31:12-14).*

Lesson #1: Fear is real and part of life. The fearsome times of being chased and hunted to the death is described by David using a curious word in Hebrew. In verse 13 he said "*fear is on every side*," which is the translation of the Hebrew words *magor mishaviv*.

Jeremiah used this same phrase six times to describe those final days as Judah was besieged and destroyed by the relentless Babylonian armies (6:25; 20:3-4, 10; 46:5; 49:29; Lam. 2:22).

***My times are in Your hand**; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me. Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake. Do not let me be ashamed, O LORD, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous (Psalm 31:15-18).*

I want you to particularly pay attention to the beginning of verse 15: *My times are in your hand* Why? Because David was confident every part of his life was held by God.

Lesson # 2: My Life is in God's Hands. Today, wherever we are on the path of life, we should affirm this same truth with David:

Our Times Are in God's Hands

- We can trust God in the **times of our youth**, when others make decisions for us, are in God's hands. He guides, directs, protects, and works all things together for our good.
- We can trust God in the **times of our career** are in God's hands—every choice, every victory, every defeat, all our accomplishments, all our possessions, all our troubles and triumphs. He is guiding them, and if we will just let Him, He will fashion all our life for His glory.
- We can trust God in the **times of our decline** are in God's hands—when our days run out, and our starting of new projects ceases, even then God holds those days and wants to bless them with His presence and power. He cares for us and wants to make those final years the *best of all* (Psalm 92).

Remember that God is never surprised; nothing gets past the boundaries of His good, acceptable, and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Because God is working for our good in all things (Romans 8:28), He wants us to be content in what He allows to come our way (Philippians 4:11).

The third lesson David learned is: that **God is good all the time**. This means that we can be sure that:

Whatever God Does Is Good v. 19-22

Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You (Psalm 31:19-22).

George Gallup once found in his research that "highly religiously motivated" people had a much higher quality of life—fewer divorces, less strife with others, and more involvement helping out. But all those factors only present a tiny perspective of what

God's goodness brings to the lives of His children.

Most of what God does is unseen by outsiders. His constant comfort in time of need is unknown to them. So is the indescribable rapture we find in those moments we truly connect with God in worship and praise.

Those outside Christ can never know the assuring strength of His Presence felt in the darkest of times and places. They have never felt the strength of seeing immediate as well as long-awaited answers to prayer—when we are struck with the fact our awesome God heard us and has responded.

But all of this, great as it may seem, is nothing compared to what the Lord is preparing for His children in eternity! As David said early on in life (Psalm 23:5-6), what we have now is wonderful, but what is yet to come is the best.

Five Challenges from David To Apply This Truth

Now note that the last two verses of Psalm 31 are different than verses 1-22 where David addressed the Lord. He concluded by challenging all who will listen to learn from his lessons in life's unending struggles:

Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD (Psalm 31:23-24).

1. David challenged us—**Love the Lord like I do:** *Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints!* ... (31:23). The Lord knows our deepest desires and responds to them.
2. David challenged us—**Trust the Lord like I do:** ... *For the LORD preserves the faithful* ... (31:23b). God always looks at our hearts.
3. David challenged us—**Fear the Lord like I do:** For God ... *fully repays the proud person* (31:23c). Don't mess with the Lord! Never forget that He has built into this universe the inescapable laws of the consequence engine.
4. David challenged us—**Wait for the Lord like I am:** *Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart* ... (31:24a). "Fear not" is the most repeated negative prohibition in God's Word, and He means it. Fear is the devil's playground. Fear disables us, debilitates us, and robs us of joy and peace. Whenever you're tempted to fear, ask for and receive God's heart-strengthening treatments. As much as you would seek a cardiologist for blockages, seek the Great Physician for His all-sufficient strength (2 Corinthians 12:9).
5. David challenged us—**Hope in the Lord like I will:** ... *All you who hope in the LORD* (31:24b). Here David uses that great Hebrew word (*yachal*) which denotes

“trusting hope.”

In light of God’s exceeding great goodness, have you said in your heart and at the center of your will—“Lord, You are first”?

In light of the fact that all your times are in Almighty God’s loving hands, whose plans for you are perfect, have you said in your heart and at the center of your will—“Lord, You come ahead of me, my plans, my desires, my way”?

If you’ve been coasting spiritually by feeding your soul on yesterday’s blessings, last week’s devotions, and last month’s ministry, I exhort you, like David, to choose a new focus for your spiritual life: Live deliberately for God—no coasting allowed!

As an aid to renew your longing for God, these words by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux provide precious truths to meditate upon for just such a moment:

Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee # 79

*Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.*

*No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find
A sweeter sound than Jesus’ name
O Savior of mankind!*

*O Hope of every contrite heart!
O joy of all the meek!
To those who fail, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!*

*But what to those who find? Ah! this,
No tongue or pen can show
The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.*

—Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)