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Learning How to Plead with God; Psalm 31
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Introduction – We study the psalms because they are the best biblical counseling for the believer. The psalms are real to real life! The psalmist is the greatest biblical counselor I know. He doesn't shy away from hardship or heartache. He doesn't present the life of faith as a bed of roses. He doesn't candy-coat his own sin or the cruelty of others toward him. But in the midst of all the challenges he has faced in life, He does not forget the God of his salvation either. He rejoices in the strength and grace and faithfulness of God, he never fails to praise God for His many blessings, and while he's honest in his description of various trials, he exults in the salvation and graces of the Lord in his life.

Yes, the psalms are songs, songs meant to be shared and sung by those who have the sure hope of salvation in Christ and are learning to rest in the promises of God. Yet many of these songs we know are in the form of a prayer, and that's certainly true of Psalm 31. While I love prayer guides, prayer lists, and prayer tools such as the acronym "ACTS – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication," some occasions call for us to set aside our prayer guides and just pour out our hearts to God. Sometimes we just need to plead with God. And that is where we find David in Psalm 31. In his pleading with God, we can learn how to plead with God when we too find ourselves caught up and caught in the struggles of life.

- I. Root Our Prayers for Mercy in the Mercy of God (vv1-8)
 - a. Note how the mercy of God informs David's pleading in vv1-8.
 - i. There is a striking interplay in these verses between David calling for mercy and the mercies of God. He bases his pleas for mercy on the twin foundations that God is a merciful God and that God has been merciful to Him.
 - ii. V1 – "in Your righteousness, deliver me" Because You are who You are and act the way You act, I can cry to You for deliverance – in Your righteousness, deliver me.
 - iii. Vv2-3. V2 is the cry for mercy. Now v3 begins with "For", so v3 is the foundation upon which David can confidently plead for God to be his rock. There simply is no greater surety for us that God will lead, guide, and save other than

for His name's sake for if He were to fail in any of His promises to His people, then He would be less than God.

Therefore, for His name's sake, He will never fail His people!

- iv. V4 – That's why You take me out of their hidden net!
- v. V5 – I give my very soul to You FOR
- vi. When we must cry to God for mercy, let us do so on the fact that God is a merciful God. Mercies from God come from the mercy of God. As we do that, it allows us to view our circumstances which place us in need of mercy in proper perspective to the God of mercy. These circumstances can be big, but God is bigger. Placing the God of mercy over our need for mercy will then bolster our faith and right our perspective, and that's just what happens to David in vv6-8.
- vii. V7 – David is still in his trying circumstances here but he says "I will rejoice and be glad in Your steadfast love." Yes he is in trying circumstances but he is also in something far greater than his present condition, he is in God's steadfast love! And David tells us why the steadfast love of God causes him to rejoice and be glad in his condition
 - 1. 4 things "because" read. you have seen. you have known. (God is a God of mercy) you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy. You have set my feet. (God is merciful to His people).
- viii. V8 – the enemy of our souls is simply no match for God's grace. "You have set my feet in a broad place" means that God will not let us fall. Oh we may stumble and fail at times, but we will never fall utterly away from God due to the weight of trials and persecution because He sets our feet.

- II. Counter an Honest Assessment of Our Condition with Faith in the Greatness of God (vv9-18)
 - a. The greatness of God informs David's pleading in vv9-18.
 - b. Vv9-13 is a vivid picture of where David is and it is not a pretty picture. It's ugly. It's painful to just read. He's reaping the consequences of his own sin, he's feeling the vengeance of his enemies, he's lonely. His description to God of his current circumstances is filled with gut-wrenching honesty.
 - c. Let us be just as honest with God. When we plead with God, let us lay our hearts before him. Honestly describe our condition. State

our case. Whether real or perceived, and often more than half of our despair is perceived wrongs, just be transparent before God but never stop at an honest assessment of our condition. If you stop there, you stay there. David doesn't stop there. He meets vv9-13 with faith in the greatness of God in vv14-18.

- d. Even in the pit of despair, opposition, and loneliness, David asserts his confidence and faith in God. He assesses his condition and then asserts his faith in God – v14. The reason why David can have such faith and confidence in God, what gives him the strength to assert faith when assessing his condition is the greatness of God. Vv15-18.
- e. V15 – God is great in His sovereign control of all things.
- f. V16 – God is great in His power to save
- g. Vv17-18 – God is great in His ultimate and final justice
- h. The greatness of God is David's solace in his condition. God's great sovereignty counters David's despair. God's great salvation counters David's loneliness. God's great justice counters David's opposition.
- i. Now that David has placed his cries for mercy on the mercy of God and has met his honest assessment of his condition with the greatness of God, he is now able to proclaim and rest in the goodness of God.

III. Pleading Begins with Desperation, but Ends in Confident Celebration of the Goodness of God (vv19-22)

- a. The goodness of God informs David's pleading in vv19-22.
- b. V19 – He has not only worked His goodness, but He has an abundance of goodness stored up – for all of us!! He never fails and He will never cease doing good to His people!
- c. V20 – You've heard the saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me." Well, that's not true. Words can be much more hurtful than sticks and stones. But David rests in the goodness of God because while words may be cutting and plots of men may be threatening, nothing lands on the believer except what the sovereign hand of God allows. We need to rejoice in the protecting, loving hand of God over us. I dare say we don't deal with or even face half of what is meant to come our way because God simply protects us from it.

- d. Vv21-22 David recalls a specific incident where God was good to him. V22 – That’s what it felt like. David felt cut off from God!
- e. Even though it felt like he was cut off from God, the truth was that God was so very near.
 - i. Dear believer, listen and listen well, when you are sure that heaven is silent and heaven is shut and God is nowhere near and is not listening, you can be even more sure that the very opposite is true. Feelings and perceptions often place God in a far, foggy, distant land, but by faith we can be assured that we rest in His loving arms.

IV. Our Pleading with God is for the Pleading of Others (vv23-24)

- a. David clearly moves from speaking to God in vv1-22 to addressing believers in vv23-24, and he exhorts us to love the Lord, be strong, and let our hearts take courage when like him we find ourselves in desperate times.
- b. You know there is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is when you feel compassion for someone’s troubles. Empathy is when you understand someone’s troubles because you have been there too. As believers, we should always sympathize with, always demonstrate compassion toward, the sufferings of others and especially toward the sufferings of believers. But when you are suffering as a believer, sometimes it’s difficult to rightly hear the sympathetic voice exhort, “Be strong, take heart.” But there is something wonderfully consoling, a balm to the soul, when the empathetic voice comes alongside and says, “I know exactly what you’re talking about. I’ve been exactly where you are. Love the Lord. Be strong. Take Courage.”
- c. David is telling all believers who find themselves in the middle of anguish, upheaval, and discouraging circumstances, “I know from personal experience that you can fully rely on the mercy, greatness, and goodness of God. Love the Lord. Be strong and take heart as you wait on Him, for God will come through for His children!”

Conclusion – May we learn how to plead well with God. The next time we find ourselves in the middle of a mess of life, lonely, discouraged, despairing and in need of help – the mercy, greatness, and goodness of God will see us through. So be strong and take heart!