

Psalm 86

“Praying in a Time of Trouble”

(A) A Prayer of David.

- 1(B)** Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am **(C)** poor and needy.
- 2** Preserve my life, for I am **(D)** godly;
save your servant, who **(E)** trusts in you—you are my God.
- 3(F)** Be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all the day.
- 4** Gladden the soul of your servant,
for **(G)** to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.
- 5** For you, O Lord, are good and **(H)** forgiving,
(I) abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.
- 6(J)** Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my plea for grace.
- 7** In **(K)** the day of my trouble I call upon you,
(L) for you answer me.
- 8** There is **(M)** none like you among the gods, O Lord,
(N) nor are there any works like yours.
- 9(O)** All the nations you have made shall come
and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.
- 10** For **(P)** you are great and **(Q)** do wondrous things;
(R) you alone are God.
- 11(S)** Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may **(T)** walk in your truth;
(U) unite my heart to fear your name.
- 12** I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.
- 13(V)** For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have **(W)** delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.
- 14** O God, insolent men have **(X)** risen up against me;
a band of ruthless men seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.
- 15** But you, O Lord, are a God **(Y)** merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
- 16(Z)** Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to **(AA)** your servant,
and save the son of your maidservant.
- 17(AB)** Show me a sign of your **(AC)** favor,

**that those who hate me may see and be put to shame
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.**

(A) A Prayer of David.

Introduction

It has been said that we become like the god we worship. This is so true. This is because we begin to reflect the one we worship, we seek to be like him, he is our model. This was true of King David as he worshipped Yahweh and it is true for us who worship the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will see in this Psalm that a key to understanding the heart of this prayer of David is that he focuses on Yahweh, his attributes, and he also desires to become like Yahweh.

It has also been said that “Every Christian should be a theologian,” i.e., a “God-studier,” that is, one who studies God. This is so true. This applies not just to professional theologians but to every Christian. We should have a great desire, a passion, to learn about God, to study him, to grow in the knowledge of him.

So as we begin to look at this Psalm, we’ll see that it says a lot about God; it teaches us much regarding his attributes, his nature – what kind of God he is. And this is a key to understanding David’ prayer here.

**¹(B) Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am ^(C) poor and needy.**

The first thing we see here is that David asks for God to pay attention to him, to hear him, to answer his prayer.

What we see is that in a time of need David looks to God. This is a great blessing. Trials and hardships come to all people – think of the recent natural disasters: the Tsunami in Japan, the tornados in Alabama, the floodwaters that at this very hour are beginning to inundate the homes and farms and business of 25,000 people in the Cajun country of south Louisiana – just to mention of few of the common trials of life that can affect anyone.

But David calls upon Yahweh, the covenant keeping God of steadfast love and faithfulness, the true God of heaven and earth, the Creator and Sustainer of all things – this is who David looks to.

He certainly doesn’t call upon the pagan gods of the various people groups who surrounded the Israelites. And he doesn’t call upon his military commanders or his parents or his sons or wives or anyone or does he look to anything – but he calls upon the only one who can really help him, the one who is in sovereign control of all things, the only one who can save him – he calls upon God.

This shows something very vital and important about David. He is a man who is dependent on God. It is easy to overlook this point and perhaps take it for granted, but it really is the vital thing. It is the key to victory right from the start.

You see, in our trials, if we do what David did, if we immediately look to God and call upon God, we have won half the battle already because we have called upon the one who has true power, the one who really is in control of all things, the only one who can really do anything good to help us or to help anyone.

As the apostle James says in his letter:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from^(AA) the Father of lights^(AB) with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
James 1:17

You see, David knew this and he knew it from the depths of his being. I dare say that if you are a Christian this evening, you know this also. You know this great truth, this great reality, that all things are in God's hands. Even our trials are allowed by him for his purposes and glory and for our good and our sanctification and growth in grace.

So to look to God, to call upon God in every situation and every trial is a great blessing. It is the most important thing in life. Your trials are secondary. Everyone has trials. Some have worse trials, it seems, than others. But the vital thing is, what do you do in your trials?

Who do you look to? Who do you call upon?

In our modern society with all of its wonderful advances in medical science, when the doctor diagnoses us with a serious medical problem, we immediately go to a specialist, or look on the internet to learn as much as we can about this condition – I'm not saying this is wrong, but what I'm saying is that we should call upon God first. We must look to him.

The man or woman who has learned to do this for every trial and every situation, who does this as naturally as breathing, is a person who is extremely blessed and fortunate.

Let me say this to you, because I think you should realize how blessed you are if you call upon God in all the situations of life. What this means is that God has put you in a living relationship with him, so that your relationship with him is a real or more real as the closest human companion you have – your relationship with God is intimate and constant and your are in constant conversation and prayer to him, so that when some problem comes up, you are just like David – you call upon God.

Now David not only acknowledges that God is the real Source of all that he needs, but he also importantly acknowledges how he stands before God and how he stands in life: He describes himself as "poor and needy."

This reminds us of the beatitudes, *Blessed are^(E) the poor in spirit, for^(E) theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. 5:3).

So in one breath, in one sentence, David acknowledges both the Source of his life, and the neediness of his life.

Again, I say, this is of vital importance. We must acknowledge before God and perhaps before others at times, that we are people in great need. We are poor – we are poor in strength, in stamina, in spirituality, in love for God – and perhaps poor in many other ways. Sometimes we are helpless to rescue ourselves from difficult and desperate situations. David certainly found himself in such situations on numerous occasions.

But to realize how “poor and needy” we really are is good. We need to acknowledge our great need and dependence on God. Moses was said to be the most humble man on earth. Why is that? Because he recognized both the greatness of God and the absolute dependence of man upon God for life and breath and all that we have.

So at the very beginning of this prayer David makes two great confessions: his own great need and the only one who can help him in his need.

He goes on to pray...

²Preserve my life, for I am^(D) godly;

Now David calling himself “godly” may surprise us a bit. We don’t normally tell others that we are “godly.” But if we have this orientation before God that I have been describing that David had and that all born again Christians have, then it is very true, is it not, that we are “godly.” To be godly means, and I will define it here, to take on the characteristics of God in our lives because we begin to reflect the one whom we worship, whom we serve, and after whom we model our human lives.

It doesn’t mean that we are perfect. In verse 4 David acknowledges that he needs forgiveness. He had sinned. In his life he had sinned greatly. But his sin did not cancel out his godliness. He was still a man who loved Yahweh, who worshipped Yahweh, and who sought to please and honor Yahweh. But he got off the track. But even when he was off the track he was a follower and lover of Yahweh. He got back on the track, by the grace and mercy of God.

The point I want to make here is that to be godly does not mean we are perfect. We are just saved sinners. We’re not as bad as we used to be, but we’re not as good as we’re going to be when Christ returns and rids every vestige and inclination to sin out of our hearts and lives.

So David is saying here, because I am a man to follows you, yes I follow you imperfect, but I love you; I am committed to you; I belong to you – because I am in a vital in unbreakable relationship with you, would you preserve my life. Would you keep me from perishing? Would you please sustain me?

save your servant, who^(E) trusts in you—you are my God.

Again, David makes his great confession here: you are my God and I trust in you. And make no doubt about it – this is a great and important confession. It is the essence of the Christian life. What is a Christian – it is a person who confesses that the Father of our Lord Jesus Chris is his or her God and that he or she trusts in God. This person, like David, relies on God, leans on God, rests on God, is looking to God and so depending on God that God alone becomes that person’s hope and help and resource.

More than we trust in the crew of that airplane and the mechanical reliability of the aircraft, we depend and trust in God to bring us safely to our destination. Not the things of this world, but ultimately and only, God is the one we look to, the one we trust in.

**^{3(E)} Be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all the day.**

**⁴Gladden the soul of your servant,
for^(G) to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.**

Notice here the intimate and constant relationship and communication that David has with God. This may not seem strange to you if you are a Christian – in fact, I am sure that this ongoing communication between David and the Lord is something that you find very natural, something quite true in your own experience.

To have this kind of relationship with God, as it is based on the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ, is the mark and blessing of a Christian.

Do you ever find yourself praying and crying out to God all the day long? Well, you are in good company. David did the same thing.

Do you ever find your soul downcast? David did, that’s why he asked God to “gladden his soul.”

**⁵For you, O Lord, are good and^(H) forgiving,
^(I) abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.**

David tells God what his nature is:

On the basis of God’s character, David makes his petition:

1. On the Goodness of God

God had been good to his people: he had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, he had brought them into the promised land. He had been good to David's family; he had chosen David to be king of his people.

2. On the Forgiveness of God

David had sinned – sinned grievously – but he also experienced the forgiveness of Yahweh.

3. Steadfast love

Here is that great Old Testament word, “hesed,” which refers to Yahweh's covenant-keeping love for his people, his faithfulness, his commitment to his people, his rock-solid dependability.

⁶(J) **Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my plea for grace.**

⁷In^(K) **the day of my trouble I call upon you,
(L) for you answer me.**

Note: 1) David's plea for grace – we need to ask God to be gracious.

2) David's Confidence: God will answer.

Now David is in trouble. He needs the grace of God. So he looks to God. But how does he look to God? How does he pray? This I think is a very important lesson in this Psalm.

What does David do? **How** does he pray?

⁸There is^(M) **none like you among the gods, O Lord,
(N) nor are there any works like yours.**

⁹(O) **All the nations you have made shall come
and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.**

¹⁰For^(P) **you are great and^(Q) do wondrous things;
(R) you alone are God.**

David declares God's:

Supremacy – there is no god that can compare to Yahweh

Uniqueness – What God has done what Yahweh has done? He created all things; he delivered his people from Egyptian bondage.

Creation – Yahweh is the great Creator of all things.

Power/ sovereignty- He shall bring all the nations to worship him.

Worthiness- because of all this attributes, his nature, he is worthy to be worshipped

Greatness- he is great, he has done mighty things.

¹¹(S) **Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may^(T) walk in your truth.**

David's request here is for personal piety.

David is asking that he might be like God, that he might reflect his character.

(U) unite my heart to fear your name.

He uses the word, "unite," as regards his heart. Here he may be acknowledging the natural tendency of his heart to stray in different directions away from God – into areas that are displeasing to God. He asks God to take all of his heart, all of his inner being, bring it all under the control of God so that he fears and reverences God in every area of his life.

David is acknowledging his weakness but he is willing, he wants God to take control over his heart.

**¹²I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.**

But now with this same heart that he has asked God to control, to reign in, to superintend – he gives thanks. And he gives thanks with all of his heart. This is not a half-hearted thanksgiving, but whole-hearted.

What is the consuming passion of David's life – it is to glorify the name of Yahweh forever.

**^{13(V)} For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have^(W) delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.**

The word "for" tells why he is giving thanks and glorifying the Lord. It's because of the greatness of his steadfast love....

...and because his soul has been delivered from the depths of Sheol.

**¹⁴O God, insolent men have^(X) risen up against me;
a band of ruthless men seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.**

David's petition becomes more specific. Now we know something more about the petition in verses 1 and 2.

The reason these men are so evil is because they do not acknowledge God, they do not fear God. They live their lives independent of God.

The lack of fear of God, of the acknowledgement of God, always leads men and women off into all kinds of sinful thinking and behavior.

**¹⁵But you, O Lord, are a God^(Y) merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.**

David again tells God, perhaps reminds God, of his own nature and attributes – the kind of God he is....

He expands on v. 5. He essentially repeats the great revelation of God's nature that Yahweh gave Moses on the mountain when he passed by him:

⁶The LORD passed before him and proclaimed,^(A) "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and^(B) gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast^(C) love and faithfulness,^{7(D)} keeping steadfast love for thousands,^{(a)(E)} forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but^(F) who will by no means clear the guilty,^(G) visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Exo. 34:6-7

^{16(Z)} Turn to me and be gracious to me;

On the basis of who God is, David requests the Lord's intervention.

How can David be so bold as to even expect that God would hear him or listen to him or respond to him? It's because of the kind of God he is.

If a parent is kind and gracious and loving and generous, their son or daughter would not hesitate to ask the parent's help in a certain situation. But if the parent is stingy and mean, they would know it would be a waste of time to ask for help.

But Yahweh is like the first parent – kind and gracious, so David asks God to "turn to him and extend his graciousness to him.

give your strength to^(AA) your servant,

This is a specific request...David must have been feeling weak, probably in the totality of his being: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

He was probably weak from his present trial, from his pursuers and persecutors.
and save the son of your maidservant.

1. *David asks to be "saved" – this is a serious situation. He needs to be rescued...*
2. *His mother must have been a godly woman...*

**17(AB) Show me a sign of your(AC) favor,
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.**

David asks for a sign that God hears him and will answer him.

Those who hate him are wicked and evil and need to be shamed.

David's confidence that God has helped him and comforted him in the past.
He has confidence God will continue this help and comfort.

Summary:

In the midst of troubles and persecution, David extols God for his attributes, pleads for help, and trusts in him.

"Every Christian should be a theologian," i.e., a "God-studier," a learner of God. So we see that David knew his God and in prayer he rehearsed the attributes of God, he told God what kind of God he is. David left his concern about his trials and focused his attention on Yahweh and worshipped him. He got a new perspective on his trials. They were put in their place as something temporary but Yahweh doesn't change and he is always worthy of worship.

The pattern of prayer that David is following is the same that our Lord Jesus gave his disciples when he taught them to pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

*¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹²and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. "*

We are to address God the Father and hallow his name, that is, reverence his name – count him special and unique and holy – high and exalted and separate from mankind. Then we pray for his kingdom and will to be done and to come. We do all this, we worship God first, we extol him, before we ask our petitions, for our daily bread and our needs.

This is the pattern that David follows. His primary focus is on Yahweh himself and his great attributes. Then from there he makes his petitions.

Applications:

1. In whatever trials come our way, we should acknowledge God and his attributes, plead for his help, and trust in him.

The substance of our prayer should be a declaration and thanks to God for who he is.

In our own prayer, even when we are in trouble, we should devote time to declaring and thanking God for who he is, for his attributes. Is there every any trouble or difficulty that would supersede the nature of God, or that would supersede our need to give glory to God for who he is?

2. If we look at the Psalms of David we see his life was a life of constant trials, of frequent persecution and pursuit by his enemies. Yet in the midst of all these he remained a worshipper of Yahweh.

He trusted in Yahweh. He was in constant communion and conversation with Yahweh.

So, whatever your trials, if you have this kind of communion and communication, you are of all people, most blessed. For you have begun an intimate relationship with God through Christ that will not end when these trials and this life ends.

To know God, to praise him, to declare his greatness, to be able to cry out to him in the time of trouble, these are the greatest blessings of life. So having these benefits, rejoice, persevere, look to Christ to sustain you and then give you a rich welcome into his eternal kingdom. Amen.

-by Jeff Gregory, Pastor
Good Shepherd Community Church
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