

Morning Prayer
Psalm 5
Pastor Jason Van Bommel

To the choirmaster: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.

*Give ear to my words, O LORD;
consider my groaning.*

*² Give attention to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you do I pray.*

*³ O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.*

*⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.*

*⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.*

*⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.*

*⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house.*

*I will bow down toward your holy temple
in the fear of you.*

*⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.*

*⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth;
their inmost self is destruction;
their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.*

*¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.*

*11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.*

*12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.*

- Psalm 5, ESV

Morning & Evening: Psalms 3, 4, 5 & 6

We don't know much about how the psalms were collected or arranged. We know that the psalms are in 5 books, and the first two books are largely psalms of David, while the last book (Psalms 107-150) largely has psalms written after the exile, including many likely written by Ezra. Some people have argued that, while the individual psalms themselves were inspired by God, the arrangement of the Psalms in the book as a whole is just a matter of later human editing and not inspired. I disagree. I think God's hand was guiding every step, from the inspiration of the individual psalms, to their arrangement and collection into the 5 books that we now have.

Psalms 1 & 2 are introductions to the whole Book of Psalms, as they establish the major themes of Psalms. Then, Psalms 3-6 establish an interesting pattern:

Psalm 3 is a morning psalm: *"I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the LORD sustained me."* – Psalm 3:5, ESV

Psalm 4 is an evening psalm: *"In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."* – Psalm 4:8, ESV

Psalm 5 is a morning psalm: *"O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch."* – Psalm 5:3, ESV

Psalm 6 is an evening psalm: *"I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping."* – Psalm 6:6, ESV

All four of these are laments and were written by David when he was being pursued by enemies, probably either Saul or Absalom. They establish a pattern for life for us: Life is warfare, and we are constantly under attack, and we need to seek the Lord every morning and every evening. Why seek the Lord morning and evening? Because doing so reminds us of our constant need for the Lord. To say that we need the Lord every morning and every evening is to say that we need Him all the time, just as when we pray *"Give us this day our daily bread"* doesn't mean that we only need the Lord to feed us body and soul once per day, but that our constant moment-to-moment sustenance, body and soul, comes from the Lord.

Psalm 5 is also very helpful to us as a guide for how to pray in the morning, as we begin our day. Verse 3 in the ESV says, “*in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.*” The word that is translated “I prepare a sacrifice” doesn’t explicitly mention sacrifice; it means to arrange, to lay out in order. In fact, in the Hebrew, which is very sparse, the line literally says, “in the morning, I arrange and watch” or “In the morning, I set in order and look out.” The ESV footnote says “I direct my prayer to you.” I think the footnote is right in seeing the verse as referencing prayer and not a literal sacrifice, but the main translation is right in translating it as “prepare,” but “arrange” or “set in order” is even better – so, “*in the morning, I arrange my prayer before you and watch*” or “*in the morning, I set my prayer in order before you and watch.*” In just a couple of words, David is communicating two vital things about his prayer life: intentionality in how he prays and expectation in looking for answer to his prayer.

So, I think Psalm 5 can become for us a good pattern of how we should pray with intentionality and expectancy.

I. A Plea, vv. 1-3

David begins with a cry from his heart, asking God to hear his prayer:

Give ear to my words, O LORD;

consider my groaning.

² *Give attention to the sound of my cry,*

my King and my God,

for to you do I pray.

³ *O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;*

in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.

This is very similar to the way he began Psalm 4:

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

The first and most important issue in prayer is to know that God hears us. If God doesn’t hear our prayers, we’re wasting our time. Prayer is speaking to God, and if God doesn’t hear us, we’re just talking to ourselves, and that’s not really prayer. As we confessed earlier: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will” If God does not hear us, we are sunk.

We also see an intensification of the language of David’s prayer: from words to groaning to cry. David’s desperation is deep, and his emotions intensify as he is praying, until he is groaning and then crying. The language here reminds me of Romans 8:26: “*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*”

We also see that David addresses God as “my King and my God,” which is very personal. My King indicates God’s rule over David personally – King emphasizes rule as protector and provider, and God emphasizes strength. David needs God to protect and provide for him as his king and his mighty God.

This same heart of prayer is reflected in the Lord's prayer, when we call God "our Father" and then we ask Him to provide ("give us this day our daily bread") and to protect ("lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil").

At the end of this opening section, David adds something in Psalm 5 not found in the opening of Psalm 4, and that is his watching for the answer God will give. He is on the look-out for the answer to his prayer. How often do we pray to God and then act surprised when God answers?

2. **A Proclamation, vv. 4-6**

After David's opening prayer, he makes a proclamation to God about who God is:

⁴ *For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;*

evil may not dwell with you.

⁵ *The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;*

you hate all evildoers.

⁶ *You destroy those who speak lies;*

the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

What is David doing here in this declaration to God of His character? He is grounding his plea in the just and holy character of God. David is being unjustly pursued by wicked, bloodthirsty, and deceitful men.

Whenever we approach God, we must come to Him as He is, and approach Him on the basis of His character. When we need mercy, we can approach God because He is merciful. When we are needy and we need God to meet our needs, we can approach God because He is good and generous. When we are being unjustly persecuted and pursued, we can approach God because He is just and punishes wickedness.

David's language here is very strong, and it may shock us. In our culture, we're accustomed to hearing all the emphasis placed on the lovingkindness of God and His compassion, but God is all of His attributes, and if we start trying to delete certain attributes of God because they make us uncomfortable, we are no longer dealing with the one true God but the figment of our imagination.

God is perfectly holy and just, and He cannot delight in wickedness; He indeed hates all evildoers. In Psalm 7:11-13, David writes:

God is a righteous judge,

and a God who feels indignation every day.

If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;

he has bent and readied his bow;

he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,

making his arrows fiery shafts.

Here, David finds refuge in God's justice, for He knows that those who pursue him are doing so unjustly, and that David has justice on his side. And yet, even as David is thinking on the justice of God, he knows while he is relatively innocent in this particular case, he is not absolutely innocent or righteous, and so, if God hates all evildoers and destroys those who speak lies, what hope can David have of approaching Him?

3. Three Petitions, vv. 7-12

*7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house.
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in the fear of you.*

The late R.C. Sproul said the most important word in the Bible is “but,” and verse 7 is a great example of the importance of this word. God hates all evildoers, “but I [even though I have done evil] through the abundance of Your steadfast love, will enter Your house.” Our hope in life, in eternity, and in prayer, is found only “in the abundance of [God’s] steadfast love.”

The Hebrew word translated “steadfast love” here is *Hesed*, and we’ve talked about it before. It’s one of the most powerful words in the Bible. *Hesed* means God’s covenantal, loyal, steadfast love, mercy, grace and kindness for His people. That’s a lot of meaning packed into three Hebrew letters. It is undeserved, freely given, and covenantally committed love. And David says the abundance of it is what allows him – a sinner – to enter the presence of a holy and just God.

And yet David does not forget that the God whose presence he enters is holy and just, and so he says, “I bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you.” This is no casual, trite “Jesus is my homeboy” or “Jesus is my boyfriend” kind of approach. This is awesome, holy, fearful worship.

a. For Himself, v. 8

As David enters the presence of God in holy, fearful worship, the first actual request he makes (beyond asking God to hear him) is for himself to be more faithful to God:

*Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.*

This petition is similar to a more famous prayer of David from Psalm 23, “You lead me in paths of righteousness for Your name’s sake.” David wants to walk in righteousness, on the straight path of obedience.

He says “because of my enemies” for two reasons:

- I. He is appealing to God’s justice, and he must be in the right in this situation for such an appeal to make any sense.

2. He knows the actions of his enemies will tempt him to sin, to stoop to their level, as when he was tempted to kill Saul.

How often do we pray for God to lead us in obedience? How often are we concerned about righteousness and not about comfort in our prayers?

b. For the Wicked, vv. 9-10

David then prays against the wicked. This is what's called an imprecatory prayer, a prayer which calls down judgment on the enemies of God:

*For there is no truth in their mouth;
 their inmost self is destruction;
 their throat is an open grave;
 they flatter with their tongue.
 Make them bear their guilt, O God;
 let them fall by their own counsels;
 because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,
 for they have rebelled against you.*

The heart of David's request is "*Make them bear their guilt . . . let them fall by their own counsels.*" This is the very definition of justice, when someone is made to suffer the consequences of their own actions.

The reasons David gives for why they're guilty and deserve such consequences are sobering, because the Apostle Paul picks up verse 9 and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, quotes it in Romans 3 as a universal indictment against all people:

as it is written:

*"None is righteous, no, not one;
 11 no one understands;
 no one seeks for God.
 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
 no one does good,
 not even one."
 13 "Their throat is an open grave;
 they use their tongues to deceive."
 "The venom of asps is under their lips."
 14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."
 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
 16 in their paths are ruin and misery,*

17 and the way of peace they have not known.”

18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (ESV)

So, Romans 3:10-18 would tell us that we are among those whose throat is an open grave. We are guilty. So was David. If God were to pay us what we deserve, we would be cast out and would fall by our own counsels as we had to bear our own guilt.

Have you ever had to eat your own words? Have you ever been caught in a bit of gossip or in a lie and had your words thrown back at you, so you had to deal with them? Imagine if that happened openly with every lie you’ve ever told, every time you’ve ever slandered someone, every bit of gossip you’ve ever said, every unkind criticism you’ve ever given behind someone’s back! What would you do? Would you be able to stand in the face of such a revelation, such justice? Oh, how much we need the Lord’s mercy and *hesed* love!

c. For All the Righteous, vv. 11-12

David goes on in the last section of his prayer to pray for the righteous, those made righteous by the grace of God, those who take refuge in God alone –

*11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.
12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.*

Because the Lord blesses and covers the righteous with His favor – with His pleasure, with His delight, with His acceptance – we can rejoice in Him. We can ever sing for joy because we take refuge in Him and He spreads His protection over us in all the ways that really matter. We can exult – rejoice, triumph – in Him!

Conclusion: Do we pray like this?

Okay, it’s time for some honest, rubber-meets-the-road, real-life application, which I want to start with a question: Do we pray like this?

Praying like this is more about a mindset than about particular words. Do we have this mindset? Do we see ourselves engaged in warfare, surrounded by enemies? Do we feel the pressing need to have the Lord hear us in our prayers or are we content to just go through the motions, praying through our list of requests, not sure if God hears or not? Do we watch for the answer to prayer?

In his sermon on this topic, Pastor Rick Phillips from Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC gives a humorous example of what it looks like to not be on the watch for answer. In Acts 12, the Apostle James is killed and Peter is imprisoned. The church gathers to pray for his deliverance, and God

miraculously delivers him, sending an angel to lead him out of the Roman prison in the middle of the night. Peter goes to the house where the believers are gathered praying urgently for his deliverance:

he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. – Acts 12:12-16, ESV

They were not watching for an answer, were they? But how often are our prayers so much more petty? How much are we focused on the kingdom of God and His glory and the real good of His people? Or are we more focused on our creature comforts?

Here's what John Piper says about the right mindset necessary for war:

Until you believe that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission. It is as though the field commander (Jesus) called in the troops, gave them a crucial mission ("Go and bear fruit"), handed each of them a personal transmitter coded to the frequency of the general's headquarters, and said, "Comrades, the general has a mission for you. He aims to see it accomplished. And to that end he has authorized me to give each of you personal access to him through these transmitters. If you stay true to his mission and seek his victory first, he will always be as close as your transmitter, to give tactical advice and to send in air cover when you or your comrades need it."

But what have millions of Christians done? They have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance, no strategic planning. Just easy peacetime and prosperity. And what did they do with the walkie-talkie? They tried to rig it up as an intercom in their cushy houses and cabins and boats and cars - not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask the maid to bring another pillow to the den.

May the Lord be pleased to make us prayer warriors and not prayer couch-sitters, not prayer pillow-arrangers. Understanding and following the pattern of prayer we find in the Psalms and throughout Scripture can help us.