



# A PSALM

IN YOUR HEART

GEORGE O. WOOD

# A PSALM

I N Y O U R H E A R T

GEORGE O. WOOD





# A PSALM

IN YOUR HEART



GEORGE O. WOOD



Published by Vital Resources  
1445 N. Boonville Ave.  
Springfield, Missouri 65802

Each chapter in this book first appeared in Dr. Wood's column, "A Psalm in My Heart," in the *Pentecostal Evangel*.

Originally published as two separate volumes:  
Volume 1 (Psalms 1–75) © 1997 and  
Volume 2 (Psalms 76–150) © 1999.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®; NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society®. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

[www.vital-resources.com](http://www.vital-resources.com)  
3rd printing 2015

Cover design by Sheepish Design ([www.sheepishdesign.org](http://www.sheepishdesign.org))

© 2008 by Gospel Publishing House, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the copyright owner, except brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers.

ISBN 978-1-68066-015-9

Printed in United States of America

# Preface

As a younger Christian, I did not like the Psalms—except for a few of the most well-known ones.

I figured God had no business letting David write Scripture. More psalms (seventy-three to be exact) are ascribed to his authorship than any other. I couldn't understand why the words of a man who committed murder, adultery, and made a mess of his family life should be used for worship, spiritual instruction, and encouragement.

But I was not the only person with a low opinion of David. His brothers didn't think much of him (1 Samuel 17:28), nor did the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:43,44). His wife despised him in her heart (2 Samuel 6:16) and his own son tried to kill him and usurp his throne (2 Samuel 15). At the beginning even the prophet Samuel would have overlooked him for selection as king, but the Lord prepared Samuel for meeting David by saying: "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). And God, from start to finish, accorded David the highest of designations: "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:14).

The psalms of David do show us his heart, as the other psalms reveal also the inner life and attitude of writers moved upon by the Holy Spirit. So also God sees the insides of you and gives you grace when others look only at your external person and stand over you in criticism and judgment.

You will value the Psalms most when you experience a season of pain, misunderstanding, or deep need—for the greater part of the Psalms reverberate with cries for God to help in desperate times.

I found myself in such a place several years ago. In those moments of hope abandoned, the Lord met me in the Psalms.

I had been surface reading a psalm a day. In my second journey through Psalms—at Psalm 24—I felt an urging from the Spirit to

## 6 / *A Psalm in Your Heart*

do more than read a psalm daily. I felt impressed to take the time early each morning to journal through Psalms.

My personal study of Scripture has always included the use of outside resources such as Bible dictionaries, concordances, commentaries—but, this time I felt constrained not to rely on any assistance except my own written interaction. Sometimes I would journal several hours daily; other times less—but I noticed that always I came away encouraged.

Often the good feeling lasted just a few moments—but as I continued week after week, God moved more blue skies and sunshine hours into my life.

David and the other psalmists had spoken to me, through the Holy Spirit, because they knew from deep pain that often there are no quick answers or speedy changes in our external circumstances. I would come to know that truth also.

Our sorrows arise from the three sources constantly identified in the Psalms: the hurts others have done to us, the hurts we have done to ourselves, and the hurt because God—who could have spared us—let it happen. Over and over, the psalms grapple with these issues.

By allowing the psalms to help me gain perspective on my most personal needs, I was permitting the Holy Spirit to speak God's truth into my life. I would have drowned in the depression of my own feelings—I needed truth from outside my unreliable and wildly oscillating emotions to provide stability, balance, and hope.

So, what began as a psalm in David's heart and the hearts of the other psalmists became a psalm in my own heart. After a long while, I felt deeply stirred by the words of Psalm 84 that we make our valley of Baca (the dry desert in our life) "a place of springs." The resources of insight given me in my own time of need perhaps, if edited and better illustrated, could provide encouragement and resource for others.

I am deeply indebted to those who helped in the preparation of this manuscript: Hal Donaldson, who encouraged me to attempt the venture; Beth Wannemacher, who gave honest feedback on what made sense and what didn't; Barbie Long, whose editorial skills kept my words focused; and Jean Lawson, who spearheaded the development of this book.

Now, the metamorphosis is complete. I pray and trust the psalm in my heart now becomes one in yours as well.

# Life's Alternatives

## PSALM 1

**K**orean Airline Flight #007 departed Anchorage, Alaska, on October 31, 1983, for its direct flight to Seoul, Korea. However, unknown to the pilot and crew, the computer engaging the flight navigation system contained a one and one-half degree routing error. At the point of departure the mistake was unnoticeable; one hundred miles out the deviation was still so small as to be undetectable. But as the giant 747 continued through the Aleutians and out over the Pacific, the error was picked up by Soviet radar. Jets were scrambled for the intercept, and over mainland Russia Flight #007 was shot out of the sky. All aboard were lost.

A small error made at departure point resulted in a tragic trajectory and a destructive finish.

Psalm 1 presents two possible navigational plans which result in far different endings, and offers a checklist for measuring our direction.

**<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man  
who does not walk  
in the counsel of the  
wicked or stand in the  
way of sinners or sit in  
the seat of mockers.**

### **Do I walk in the counsel of the wicked?**

---

Whenever my feelings or emotions or the advice of friends urge me to do what is inconsistent with God's Word, I am presented with "the counsel of the wicked." It is a matter of choosing to live outside God's stated will (as expressed in the Bible) and the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit.

## **Do I stand in the way of sinners?**

---

Standing means taking a fixed and steady position. I have progressed past walking with the wicked to taking on their point of view. I can be counted on to stand up for my wrong choices and justify my sinful behavior and theirs.

## **Do I sit in the seat of the mockers?**

---

Sitting is a posture which is finalized. I refuse to be uprooted; I remain fixed in my seat. I scorn and ridicule those seeking God's will and way. Ultimately, my departure from God becomes so extreme I become a critic of God and others—and a foul one at that.

## **Do I delight in the law of the Lord?**

---

In the depths of depression, hurt, or rebellion, I may resent God's standard. I may feel it precludes my happiness as a person, intrudes on my options, and loads me down with injunctions I neither want nor feel I can obey.

Were it not for the grace of God, I could never delight in His law. It is, however, in choosing to obey Him that the joy progressively comes as I see what He is up to in my life.

## **Do I meditate continually on His law?**

---

Do I reflect upon His Word—memorizing, studying, and integrating it into my life—and thereby find stability, healing, and restoration?

**<sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup>He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.**

My answer to these five questions determines my destiny. There are only two possibilities for my future: prosperity and permanence or impermanence and void.

If I forsake the postures of walking, standing, and sitting with the wicked and embrace waiting upon the Lord, delight in His Word, and meditating thereon, my life becomes like a tree planted by streams of water, whose leaf does not wither, bearing fruit in season.

On the other hand, I can become like chaff, which, on the threshing floor is separated from the grain when tossed by a pitchfork into the air. It blows away while the more substantial grain falls back to the floor.

In the end the wicked are lightweights, persons of no real substance or depth of character—rootless, weightless, and useless.

There are two ways in life—only two. “The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (v. 6).

The security of the believer does not come from personal obeisance and effort. It is the Lord who watches over his way.

You and I choose which word will describe our destiny, now and eternally. We need not be on an errant path as Flight #007; but by daily choosing to follow Christ, complete the exact course laid out for us. (See 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:1,2.)

**<sup>4</sup>Not so the wicked!  
They are like chaff  
that the wind blows  
away. <sup>5</sup>Therefore the  
wicked will not stand  
in the judgment, nor  
sinners in the assem-  
bly of the righteous.**

**<sup>6</sup>For the LORD  
watches over the way  
of the righteous, but  
the way of the wicked  
will perish.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord Jesus, in the events of this day may I find myself in the path of the blessed. Keep my heart from evil—from walking, standing, or sitting in the places of the heart and mind where I ought not to be. May I delight in You and Your Word, and may my inner thoughts be open to and upon You moment by moment.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 1 . . .*

# Change Your Course

## PSALM 2

**T**he captain of the fleet flagship ordered his signalman to radio ahead this directive when an obstacle appeared on the radar screen directly within his course of navigation: “Move 20 degrees starboard.”

An abrupt answer returned, “You move 20 degrees starboard.”

The captain raged to his associate, “Doesn’t he know who I am? Tell him again to move 20 degrees starboard and that I am the captain of this vessel—which is the flagship of this fleet!”

A second answer came in: “I am Seaman 2nd Class Jones. You move 20 degrees starboard.”

The captain, now enraged, ordered: “This is a battleship. We can and will blow you out of the water. Change your position or else.”

Jones radioed back, “This is a lighthouse.”

Of course, that settled the matter. There’s no way a mighty battleship can win a contest with a lighthouse.

That’s the spirit of Psalm 2—rebellious humanity telling God to move over, and God radioing back, “Change course.”

**<sup>1</sup>Why do the nations  
conspire and the peo-  
ples plot in vain?**

**<sup>2</sup>The kings of the  
earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather  
together against the  
LORD and against his  
Anointed One.**

**<sup>3</sup>“Let us break their  
chains,” they say,  
“and throw off  
their fetters.”**

### **Break the chains**

---

Psalm 2 evidently was written as a coronation psalm for kings of the Davidic line. The death of a king brought fearsome uncertainty and provided domestic plotters and foreign opponents an opportunity to rebel. In such a time they would say, “Let us break their chains and throw off their fetters.” (See v. 3.)

But the new king of the line of David had the assurance in this inaugural psalm that his anointing and empowerment were from God himself. Indeed the Lord God promised David he would always have an heir: "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Samuel 7:14).

Nations and individuals rebel against God at their peril. They should sue for peace instead.

Like the "lighthouse" in the story, God holds in derision any who rebel against Him. Our threat of rebellion, while taken seriously by us, is laughed at in the heavens. The Lord God ridicules puny insubordination. How absurd to think we might change God's eternal and immutable will through our own personal acts of defiance.

### **Kiss of surrender**

---

But God does more than roar with laughter. My rebellion ignites His scorn and anger. (See vv. 5,6.) He is offended at my impudence against His king.

Psalm 2 shows us a side of God which is tough and uncompromising. I may be more comfortable with the brokenhearted portrait of the Father given by Jesus in the story of the Prodigal Son. (See Luke 15.) I would rather envision Him as my weeping parent rather than my offended king. But He is both.

What should I do when I break away from Him and insist on my own will? The psalm answers: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry" (v. 12). The kiss is that of a formal surrender to sovereign, the supplicant on his knees prostrate before the king whose feet are kissed. This is not the kiss of friendship, but the kiss of

**<sup>4</sup>The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.**

**<sup>5</sup>Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, <sup>6</sup>"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."**

**<sup>7</sup>I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. <sup>8</sup>Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup>You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."**

**<sup>10</sup>Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. <sup>11</sup>Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.**

obedience. That's why it's accompanied by fear and trembling. (See v. 11.)

Never press ahead in rebellion so as to slide past His role as loving and yearning Father and risk His censure. The Lord, enthroned upon His holy hill (v. 6), seeks to be installed also as king on the high places of your heart.

Psalm 2 closes with a warning to the disobedient and the rebellious: "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned" (v. 10). I may not be the political king admonished by this psalm, but I do exercise kingly powers when I make decisions which control my life. Therefore, the psalm applies to me whenever I seek to rule my own life outside of His will.

Though we might well deserve His wrath for so violating His sovereignty over our lives, God is pleased that we "take refuge in him." (See v. 12.) Thankfully we do not have a cold-blooded autocrat general manager in heaven who impersonally accepts or judges our wrongful behavior without blinking an eye. He is the Father who cares about His children.

If we are wise and warned, then we will lay down our arms. We will surrender to Him each particular disobedience. We will say to Him, even in the areas of life where we want our own way, "Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). For "blessed are all who take refuge in him" (v. 12).

**<sup>12</sup>Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, there is no refuge from You. You will always find me no matter how far I may seek to get from You. I cannot outrun Your presence or Your judgment. I am grateful, however, that if there is not refuge from You, there is refuge in You. May I be among those who submit to Your authority (vv. 11,12) rather than those who rebel against you (vv. 1–3).*

*My thoughts on Psalm 2 . . .*

# Betrayed!

## PSALM 3

**T**he young wife and mother stood before me, tears mingled with mascara streaming down her face. I prayed with her at that Sunday evening altar as we asked the Lord to help her deal with the terrible pain of her husband's betrayal.

A long road now lay ahead. She would have to recover from the traumatic emotional injury of betrayal and abandonment, as well as rejoin the workforce, nourish her wounded children, and downsize their lifestyle.

I wanted to tell her there was a quick cure for her deep grief, that in just a day or two everything would be all right. But as a pastor I knew better. Deep wounds normally require a long period of healing.

David found himself in a similar dark night of despondency. His son Absalom had betrayed him, along with trusted counselor and friend Ahithophel. No one has the power to wound us more than a family member or a trusted friend. The tragic story unfolds in 2 Samuel 15–19. David fled for his life from his son.

It would not be a swift journey back. David knew it. His psalm reflects it. He wrote his prayer to God in the very first spasms of enormous pain.

If you have suffered a nightmare experience, there's help for you from this psalm. Follow the example of David.

**1 O LORD, how many  
are my foes! How many  
rise up against me!**

### **Take your pain directly to God**

---

Note how David begins with, "O Lord" (Psalm 3:1). He could no longer talk with Absalom or Ahithophel, but David knew he could talk with the Lord and the Lord would listen. In your own hour of need, like David lift

## 16 / A Psalm in Your Heart

your voice to God. He has not abandoned you.

### **Write down your feelings**

---

David gives concrete expression to his pain, anger, and faith. Talk to the Lord on paper. This exercise of the soul brings therapy for the injury. Too often we tend to dwell on an injury, mulling it over and over, without arriving at any specific statement of need or request.

Whether you write down your pain or not—it is critical that you release your feelings and your faith to God. If you have no faith, tell Him.

### **Look at the problem realistically**

---

David paints the picture as it is—dark. He does not begin with a statement of confidence. Nor does he waste any time denying the reality of what had happened to him. He lays out the absolute seriousness of his peril (vv. 1,2).

How can we deal with overwhelming negative feelings?

### **Declare God's truth**

---

David declares God's truth—even when it is contrary to his feelings. He whistles his faith while walking through the dark forest of the soul where unseen monsters lurk (v. 3).

There is always a layer of protection around God's people—especially so in the time when it appears there is none.

### **Choose life**

---

In his hour of great trial David must have wrestled with whether or not he

<sup>2</sup>“Many are saying of me, God will not deliver him.” *Selah.*

<sup>3</sup>But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.

even wanted to or could go on living. He resolves his despair by coming down on the side of life. He asks God for help (v. 4).

Your problems on earth have come into the full attention of your Father in heaven—and your answer therefore comes “from his holy hill.”

## Rest

---

Knowing God hears led David to a moment of respite: “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side” (vv. 5,6).

When you are deeply troubled you need rest, so “lie down and sleep.” In the dawn of a new day, like David you can begin with confidence.

## Express your anger

---

In anger David cries, “Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked” (v. 7). Though easily misunderstood, expressing anger is a very necessary step in working through the pain of deep emotional injury from another. Anger, without vengeance, is God’s mechanism for protecting us when we have been hurt by another. Anger puts needed distance between us and that person.

The young mother suffered guilt for feeling angry with her husband. She needed to express it. Depression was pushing her away from the Lord, her children, those who were reaching out to help her. She needed distance between herself and the betrayer.

**<sup>4</sup>To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah.**

**<sup>5</sup>I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. <sup>6</sup>I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.**

**<sup>7</sup>Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.**

## Be exemplary

---

David senses his struggle is being watched, and his testimony has value for the needs of those who look on. So he recognizes those who empathized and interceded for him in his struggle: "From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people" (v. 8).

The young mother is well down the road to wholeness again. God did not give her deliverance all at once, but "little by little she possessed the land." (See Numbers 33:53.)

God can bless and free you when you do not have the power to free yourself. He blesses those who trust Him. He does deliver.

**<sup>8</sup>From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. Selah.**

## Prayer of response

*Thank You, Lord, that You have not abandoned me. When sorrow tilts my head downward, I remember You are the lifter of my head. You will sustain me and bring me through every dark season of despair.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 3 . . .*

# A Good Night's Sleep

PSALM 4

**H**ow well are you sleeping? Do you find, along with David and Job, that there are hurtful seasons when you toss and turn the whole night long? Is it possible to reach the calm and repose reflected in Psalm 4?

If you are yet in the first flush of a hard experience, Psalm 4 holds encouragement. The wrecking ball of life may have demolished what you thought was safe and secure, but God intends to give you strength to rebuild. Psalm 4 finds you in the rebuilding process where gaping holes still exist, but enough damage has already been repaired by the Lord to make you confident of the final result.

**<sup>1</sup>Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.**

True, the pain is still there. That's why David begins the psalm saying: "Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer" (v. 1).

## A tight place

---

The word "distress" carries the connotation of being in a very tight place where there is little room to turn around or maneuver. You are penned in or pinned down and there seems no escape from your difficulty. David shows us what we must do in such a circumstance: call upon the Lord.

But it's hard to keep your attention solely on the Lord, for you cannot help but focus on what put you in the tight

place. For David the pain had come from others (vv. 2,3). How could they have done this to him? David smarts in the realization that he did not deserve the treatment he received. And had his injurers really known God and been close to Him, they would not have treated him so unjustly. Such ones had pushed him away, but God held him close.

Our society is filled with spouses who have betrayed or hurt each other, parents who have abandoned children, children who have turned against parents, friends who have fallen out with one another. When you are on the receiving end of such hurtful conduct, your sole consolation may be that, when the one you love has drawn away from you, the Lord has drawn even closer to you.

## Dealing with feelings

---

David came to grips with his own hard feelings against those who wounded him. The anger surfaced as he thought about them and spoke in an imaginary way to them (vv. 2,3). He lay down to sleep, but memory threatened to keep him awake. He struggled to gain control over his rage and hurt. In doing so, he made a foundational decision. Rather than focusing on how others had mistreated him, he focused on the need for change in his own life (vv. 4,5). In place of holding them to blame for his condition, he looked within his own heart. Rather than extracting the speck from their eye, he sought removal of the log from his.

You cannot change the other person, nor can you change the events which

**<sup>2</sup>How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Selah. <sup>3</sup>Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him.**

**<sup>4</sup>In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah. <sup>5</sup>Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.**

have brought you harm, but you can take responsibility for your attitudes (anger), cease thrashing and striving (be silent), and do the right thing (offer right sacrifices and trust in God).

At first things may not get much better: “Many are asking, ‘Who can show us any good?’” (v. 6). However, David looks not to the external showing of good, but to an inner presence of the Lord: “Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord” (v. 6).

What you need in the darkness of despair is not the changing of your circumstances but light to see the face of Jesus. David lets us know that the Lord’s face is always shining toward us with the light of compassion, acceptance, endearment, friendship, and love.

Life had stripped him of much, but not the presence of the Lord. Thus David came to the gentle resolution: “You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (vv. 7,8).

Sleep can come when you realize that your happiness is greater than the external laughter of those who wounded you. While they may feel good about the pleasant trappings of their life (“grain” and “new wine” abounding), your position is far more enviable because you no longer require external things to be favorable in order for you to find fulfillment.

Spiritual growth comes as you pour out your heart to the Lord. Through prayer you move from the “distress” (v. 1), the “tight” place where you are squeezed in, to the “safety” (v. 8) where you can stretch out and sleep. Prayer does more than change things. It changes you.

**<sup>6</sup>Many are asking,  
“Who can show us  
any good?” Let the  
light of your face  
shine upon us, O  
LORD.**

**<sup>7</sup>You have filled  
my heart with greater  
joy than when their  
grain and new wine  
abound. <sup>8</sup>I will lie  
down and sleep in  
peace, for you alone,  
O LORD, make me  
dwell in safety.**

## *Prayer of response*

*O Lord, You well know my anxiety. Quiet my heart so I may be content and joyful. Help me to do right even if others have done me wrong. May I lie down tonight and sleep in Your peace and safety.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 4 . . .*

# Morning Calm

## PSALM 5

**H**ow do you respond when someone has badly hurt you or pain of any kind is present in your life? David wrestles with that question through the Psalms. In Psalm 3, he cries aloud because his foes are many and he's sleepless. In Psalm 4, others have put him in a strait of distress, but he safely sleeps. Now, in Psalm 5, he faces a new day with the recognition there have been no overnight solutions for his problems.

<sup>1</sup>Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. <sup>2</sup>Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

<sup>3</sup>In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

### Sighing and crying

---

In Psalm 5 David begins the morning with a sigh (v. 1) and a cry (v. 2) to God. The two are not the same. One, the sigh or groan, slips from you as you look in the morning mirror, sit at the breakfast table, or put the dishes in the sink. Memory or imagination evokes in you moments of the past and fears of the present or future. You may be filled with wistfulness and a soft sigh slips from your heart as you long for an end to sorrow and a reentry of joy.

But there are times far more shrill. Once as a child I almost drowned. I did not let out a sigh; I let out a cry. A cry reflects a heart in great danger and emergency.

Sighing and crying may bring catharsis but David derives great comfort from knowing that One hears him (v. 3). We may even be more assured

than David for we know the Holy Spirit understands and interprets the unarticulated words in our sighing as He intercedes for us before the throne of God. (See Romans 8:26,27.)

## A benevolent listener

---

As a king himself, David knew what it was like for a petitioner to have him as the court of last resort. Such a person had hope in bringing petitions to him because of the good character of the king.

Like David we may confidently bring our request to the eternal King because of His moral goodness (vv. 4–6). He stands opposed to evil and wickedness, to arrogance and wrong, to untruthfulness and deceit.

David flings himself on the great mercy of God (vv. 7,8). He will continue worshipping despite his reverses, confident the Lord has a straight path out of the bewildering maze.

Are you relying completely upon the Lord in your time of need? The enemy tells you to turn away from God's house, that Jesus has abandoned you, and His people do not care. But the Holy Spirit through this psalm tells you that your deliverance from this dark hour will come as you draw near to Him. Surrender ("bow down") and trust ("lead me"). (See vv. 7,8.)

The prayer commits David's keeping to the Lord, while the raw emotions (vv. 9,10) intensify.

## Path to calm

---

David has been badly burned by someone he trusted, by one who deceived him

**<sup>4</sup>You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. <sup>5</sup>The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. <sup>6</sup>You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.**

**<sup>7</sup>But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. <sup>8</sup>Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make straight your way before me.**

**<sup>9</sup>Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. <sup>10</sup>Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.**

with words (v. 9). Paul quotes David in Romans 3:13 to illustrate that everyone has also sinned in the same manner.

Like David we find it easier to pray for the reformation of another person's character rather than our own. Our emotions quite naturally seek the vindication that the Lord will declare the person who injured us as guilty and will banish them for their sins. (See v. 10.) But David's Son, our Lord Jesus, showed us the higher way—beyond the stage of anger—forgiveness. (See Luke 23:34.)

The wounds of life force dependence upon God. The mighty blows of alienation, betrayal, insensitivity toss you into raging waters. You are carried in a surge far more powerful than yourself. The harder you try to survive, the more you sink beneath the surface. Only God can rescue you.

With that thought David concludes Psalm 5. In prayer he has progressed from the clouded dawn to reach the morning calm. "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield" (vv. 11,12).

Like David and a host of others you have no other safe refuge than the Lord. It is He who gives the song, who protects your life from the power of despair and self-destruction. He shields you today from what harms you and cups your life in His hands.

**<sup>11</sup>But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. <sup>12</sup>For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord Jesus, I too want to trust You. I want You and not emotions to control me. In the morning I lift my voice to You, asking for Your protection. Caress me with a mother's touch; embrace me with the Father's arm. I know You hold me today.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 5 . . .*

# Soul Trouble

## PSALM 6

**A**n older and godly saint in the church came to me deeply distressed. He had lost all assurance of salvation and felt under the judgment of God. No observable or known sin marked his life, yet he felt totally cast off from the Lord.

Psalms 6 describes such an experience in David. It is one of the seven penitential psalms. (See also Psalms 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.) In this psalm David feels faint, in agony and anguish, worn out from groaning and weeping, full of sorrow, and surrounded by those who seek his destruction. But worse is the prospect of God adding His own judgment to David's grief: "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath" (v. 1).

**<sup>1</sup>O LORD, do not  
rebuke me in your  
anger or discipline me  
in your wrath.**

**<sup>2</sup>Be merciful to me,  
LORD, for I am faint; O  
LORD, heal me, for my  
bones are in agony.**

### How long?

---

We do not know the specific incident which caused him to dread facing God. However, we can relate to this psalm when we too have sinned and the painful consequences hit us like a ton of bricks; or when, as the older saint who came to me, we enter a time of utter despair labeled by some as the Sahara of the soul.

Are you in that place today? Have you lost confidence in God? Have you become absorbed with the enormity of the wrong you have done? You too ask God: "How long, O Lord, how long?" (v. 3).

Charles Spurgeon said, “God has measured the crosses of all His children: Israel in Egypt, 430 years; Joseph in prison, 3 years; Judah in Babylon, 70 years.” But He alone knows the duration, and that’s why we ask Him: “How long?” With the passing of time the cross does not become more comfortable.

## The agony

---

David is in agony; his spirit-man anguishes. And the terrifying doubt comes that God may not answer before he passes from this life. At that thought David’s faith dives into the abyss as he considers that in death God may totally forget him. And indeed if it were not for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the transfer of His life to us, death would forever silence our worship (v. 5), shatter our plans (Psalm 146:4), and cut us off from God. (See Psalm 88:5.)

Added to David’s own misdeeds is despair caused by his “foes” (v. 7). His soul trouble has not been completely self-inflicted after all. Others contributed to his injury.

## The ecstasy

---

Then a marked shift occurs. The first seven verses of Psalm 6 carry no confidence—only lament and sorrow. But what a change dawns in verses 8 through 10.

David exudes assurance that the Lord has heard his weeping and has accepted his prayer. Even those who harmed him would now be embarrassed and dismayed. What happened? What accounts for this sudden switch? We are not told.

<sup>3</sup>My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?  
<sup>4</sup>Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unailing love.

<sup>5</sup>No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? <sup>6</sup>I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. <sup>7</sup>My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.

<sup>8</sup>Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. <sup>9</sup>The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer. <sup>10</sup>All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed; they will turn back in sudden disgrace.

The elderly Christian who came to me with such depression experienced the same. One day the dark cloud lifted—by the grace and mercy of God.

Many desire easy solutions to their dilemmas. They are prey to the elixir: “Take these three truths, and you will be all better again.”

Certainly repentance, right attitudes, practical wisdom, and abundant faith are important. But the solution doesn’t rest in self-effort, rather in throwing ourselves upon God’s mercy and unfailing love. David’s answer came not because there was anything noble in himself, but because it is in the character of our Lord to rescue us.

Are you in soul trouble? Follow David’s example: Talk with the Lord all the way through the long night hours of your pain. It will not always be like this. The Lord has promised: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). He does not tell how you will be comforted, but that you will be comforted.

Because of Jesus you know more about God than David did. You have an intercessor in your heart, the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:27); and an intercessor in heaven at the very right hand of God, Jesus Christ. (See Romans 8:34.) Take heart today. God has an answer for your “How long?”

**Romans 8:27**

**He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.**

**Romans 8:34**

**Jesus Christ . . . is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, I leave the time of release from soul trouble with You, knowing that You who did not abandon David will not abandon me. You have heard my weeping and my cry for help, and I will see Your salvation.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 6 . . .*

# Falsely Accused

PSALM 7

**A** pastor friend in China was falsely accused. In 1956 the government sent him to prison for nine years and then kept in him on probation another sixteen years. Twenty-five years is a long time to remain falsely accused, forbidden to preach the gospel, or conduct services.

I have visited with this pastor three times in the past several years. For me, he represents the vast sector of the Church outside the Western world where Christians suffer greatly and endure much false accusation solely because they believe in Jesus.

**<sup>1</sup>O LORD my God,  
I take refuge in you;  
save and deliver me  
from all who pursue  
me, <sup>2</sup>or they will tear  
me like a lion and rip  
me to pieces with no  
one to rescue me.**

**<sup>3</sup>O LORD my God,  
if I have done this  
and there is guilt  
on my hands— <sup>4</sup>if I  
have done evil to him  
who is at peace with  
me or without cause  
have robbed my foe—  
<sup>5</sup>then let my enemy  
pursue and overtake  
me; let him trample  
my life to the ground  
and make me sleep in  
the dust. *Selah.***

We may ultimately face such a time in America. Before the German Nazis began to exterminate Jews and Gypsies around WWII, they caricatured and dehumanized them through ridicule and false accusation. In America, evangelical believers committed to biblical stands on morality are commonly typed as intolerant, hateful, or even dangerous.

## Hurt

---

Psalm 7 is written for the believer who has been falsely accused. You sense the pulsating hurt as you pray this psalm with David. An air of desperation prevails; you feel hunted and about to be torn in two. (See vv. 1,2.) The false accusations of betrayal and robbery hang in the air. (See vv. 3,4.)

The rotten treatment given David is

undeserved. (See v. 5.) His actions have been blameless in regard to those who have wounded him, and he pleads with God to affirm his integrity and convene the court of justice against those who treat him wrongly. (See vv. 6–9.)

We know nothing of David's nemesis except he was Cush, a Benjamite, Saul's tribe, who had been bitter enemies of David. (See 2 Samuel 16:5–14; 19:16–23; 20:1–26.)

Pain is hard enough to bear when you are mostly or partly responsible; it becomes a heavy cross when you are not at all to blame.

## Trust

---

Have you been falsely accused or lied about?

Like David, you may be completely powerless to do anything—other than trust in God. That is what you must do: trust.

The pastor in China and suffering saints through the ages survived because they lifted their eyes from their circumstances to the Lord who reigned over the circumstances. Man may be against us, but God is for us.

David begins Psalm 7 terrified and panic stricken; but as he prays, calm and confidence enter. He sees a different future. He would not be torn to bits; God would shield him. Those who hunted him would themselves be targets for the flaming arrows of God. (See vv. 10–13.)

## Confidence

---

David inwardly resolves his pain by knowing those who dug the pit for him

<sup>6</sup>Arise, O LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice.

<sup>7</sup>Let the assembled peoples gather around you. Rule over them from on high; <sup>8</sup>let the LORD judge the peoples. Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High.

<sup>9</sup>O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

<sup>10</sup>My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart.

<sup>11</sup>God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. <sup>12</sup>If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. <sup>13</sup>He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows.

would themselves fall into it. Those who sow trouble will reap it on their own heads. (See vv. 14–16.)

How can we be so confident that in the end everything will turn out all right? Because the Lord is righteous, and in the long run He will not let evil prevail. Therefore, with David, we declare our faith even before an external change has occurred in our condition (v. 17).

My friend in China was officially exonerated in 1980. By the time he assumed leadership again of his congregation in 1983, he was seventy-five. The church had dwindled to thirty. Now he is eighty-seven, and in these twelve years some six thousand adults have been added to the Lord and baptized in water.

Such would have never happened had he not continued to trust in Jesus during the long winter of undeserved imprisonment. But God intended to more than compensate for the lean years by giving him an abundant spiritual harvest at the end of his life. Through nearly ten thousand days of suffering he never permitted vengeance, blame, or self-pity to rule his spirit. If he had, he would have emerged from the experience a useless and bitter old man rather than an incredibly fruitful pastor.

Keep praying and trusting during the period of false accusation and the desperate loneliness. It may not change your circumstances, but it will stabilize your spirit. And, remember, you have a basis for confidence since God himself is righteousness. In the end His justice and fair play will abound toward you as well. So, like David, worship Him even before you see the resolution of your circumstance. Despite your present need you have a great future . . . in Christ.

**14 He who is pregnant with evil and conceives trouble gives birth to disillusionment. 15 He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. 16 The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.**

**17 I will give thanks to the <sup>Lord</sup> because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, like David I feel about to be torn and ripped apart by the dishonesty in another. But I trust You to protect me. In the end Your justice will prevail.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 7 . . .*

# His Majesty and Our Dignity

## PSALM 8

**T**he elderly widow welcomed her new pastor and his wife into her farm home in Kansas. She had three sons in the Navy, but was perplexed why boys from the farm would have gone to sea.

At the end of their visit the pastor said, "I think I know why. Ever since I stepped into your living room I have been admiring your beautiful oil seascape painting over the sofa. Do you think your boys, looking at that every day of their growing up years, could have developed a yearning to experience the sea?"

I don't know if his guess was right, but we do move in the direction of things upon which we fix our attention.

The goal of the Christian is to become like Christ. To do that we must first fix our eyes upon Him.

**1 O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your  
name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory  
above the heavens.**

### God's place

---

Today's self-help psychobabble tells us to focus on our inner self. A better way is found in Psalm 8. Only when we ascribe worth to God (i.e., worship) do we discover our true identity.

Thus, the first three verses of Psalm 8 begin with adoration to the Lord: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

David, of course, expressed his praise a thousand years before Jesus came to earth. How much more fully can we describe the excellence of God because we have seen His character in the face of Jesus Christ!

David reflects that the Lord has ordained praise from children and infants because of His enemies. (See vv. 2,3.) Simply put: Children and infants don't know much; they have little of doctrinal content and understanding necessary for the artful formulation of praise. The best they can say is: "I love you." From God's point of view this offering of praise from the toddler room and the nursery more than drowns out in heaven the hostile voices of Christ's enemies on earth.

## Our place

---

After David expresses wonder and adoration for the character of God, he turns to awe at the creation God made: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (vv. 3,4).

It may seem David is being negative: "In view of the greatness of God and the vastness of the night sky, man is nothing." But that is not his answer.

David expresses the high nature of human life. We are created by God as a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned with glory and honor, ruler over the works of God's hands—including animal life on the ground, in the air, and in the sea. (See vv. 5–8.)

Notice the connection between verses 1, 2, and verses 3–8. A proper and right understanding of the true nature of God's majesty inevitably leads to a right and proper understanding of the dignity of man. We are below God, but above everything else.

**<sup>2</sup>From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.**

**<sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?**

**<sup>5</sup>You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: <sup>7</sup>all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, <sup>8</sup>the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.**

That's God's design, but is it your experience? Maybe you feel underneath everything, with control over nothing. You are stripped of self-worth. You feel lower than a worm and wish you could die. Or maybe, like Isaiah, when you see the majesty of God you see most clearly your own sinfulness and unworthiness. (See Isaiah 6.)

## The portrait

---

Do what David did. Focus on the Lord, not on yourself. Begin to worship Him. Bring Him your praise. Worship His majesty.

To recover a sense of the person you really are, God wants you first to rediscover Him. It will take time—more than the few seconds it takes to recite Psalm 8. The power of this psalm is the pattern it presents.

What lifted those three Kansas boys out of their flat farmland for a career on ocean waves? A picture of the sea.

What will lift you into becoming a person who is a victor (in control) rather than a victim (being controlled)? The portrait of Jesus: your Savior, Helper, and Friend; Guide, Counselor, and Deliverer; Redeemer, Repairer, and Healer.

**<sup>9</sup> O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your  
name in all the earth!**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, I reverence You. I am in awe of Your handiwork. You give my life meaning and a high purpose. I need Your help to become all You desire of me.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 8 . . .*

# The Upper Side

## PSALM 9

Recently I visited Toledo, Spain, and viewed paintings of the great sixteenth century artist, El Greco. Perhaps his most famous work is *The Death of the Conde de Orgaz*, a huge, breathtaking tableau.

The painting has an upper and lower side. In the bottom half, El Greco depicted the ornate funeral of a count, with casket attended by richly dressed family members, nobles, and priests. The scene is one of sorrow and grief.

On the upper side, El Greco painted the reception of the count into heaven. Down below, he lay within the casket; but up above, he was being flown or carried into the presence of God by angels and surrounded by the joys of the heavenly hosts.

This exquisite work of art was El Greco's way of saying that, for the believer, every down-here scene of human sadness has a concurrent corresponding scene up there.

When we lose sight of the upper side, sometimes life becomes intolerable.

David paints Psalm 9 amid a difficult lower-side experience, described in the last eight verses of the psalm. But in the opening twelve verses, he focuses first upon the scene in heaven.

**<sup>1</sup>I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. <sup>2</sup>I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.**

Are you in a place of sadness, grief, or loss? Read Psalm 9 and get the upper-side perspective even before you get to heaven. Here's what you'll see.

### Worship

---

In the presence of God we will experience unrestrained joy. Our perilous moments now will be among the "wonders" for which we praise Him

then, for we will testify that He brought us through. No longer will our faith war against feelings. Over there we hold nothing back since we praise Him “with all [our] heart” (v. 1).

## Final outcome

---

In the latter half of Psalm 9 David remains hard pressed by formidable enemies and circumstances; however, on the upper side he speaks of their power in the past tense. They have been turned back, ruined, destroyed, and even their memory has perished.

One day we will see how God acted to make our problems perish while preserving us. How different is the perspective of the lower side where the opposite seems to be the case—we feel our problems will finish us.

## Reliability

---

A young woman gave her boyfriend her photograph on which she inscribed, “Sweetheart, I will love you forever.” On the back side she wrote: “P.S. If we ever break up, please return this photo.”

How different is God’s love. His righteous character changes not. I always can count on Him to be just and fair. I find shelter and protection in Him during times of trouble. He will never forsake me nor ignore my cry when I am afflicted.

Look at how David describes the peril of the present moment.

## Hard-pressed

---

On the upper side, you know God does not ignore you. (See v. 12.) On the lower side there is panic: “Lord, please take a

<sup>7</sup>The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. <sup>8</sup>He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.

<sup>9</sup>The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. <sup>10</sup>Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

<sup>11</sup>Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. <sup>12</sup>For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.

<sup>13</sup>O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and

look. Do You see what's happening to me? My problems are about to overrun me!"

## Powerless

---

His present crisis has pushed David down to the very gates of death. He has no human solution, but only the hope that God will bring him to the opposite polarity: the gates of Zion. Despite insecurity we must trust the Lord to help us. David remembers God's just character and that He has a way of snaring those who set traps for others.

## Forgotten

---

On the upper side, we know the Lord does not forsake. (See v. 10.) On the lower side we say, "You will not always forget me, but right now I feel You have forgotten me." To be forgotten devalues personhood; affliction compounds loneliness and isolation.

## Defeated

---

David implores God to "let not man triumph" (v. 19). When the evil against you is so large it threatens to overwhelm, you are inclined to call out with David: "God, please do something!" Thankfully through the indwelling presence of the Spirit and worship we have access to the upper side.

When we turn our attention away from the source which brought us harm, and focus upon the Lord, we discover we can rely on His righteous character, eternal rule, and fair judgment. We have confidence that in the present hour He has neither forgotten nor forsaken us.

lift me up from the gates of death, <sup>14</sup>that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation.

<sup>15</sup>The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden. <sup>16</sup>The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. *Higgaion. Selah.*

<sup>17</sup>The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God. <sup>18</sup>But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.

<sup>19</sup>Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence.

<sup>20</sup>Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men. *Selah.*

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, today I determine to see the upper side. Even when I am at the bottom, the very gates of death, I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. You are my refuge and my strength.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 9 . . .*

# Losing Your Grip

PSALM 10

I watched the sandy-colored puppy struggle valiantly against the swift current of the Yellow River, paddling furiously with its paws trying to reach the bank. The child of missionary parents, I was living in the remote town of Guide (pronounced Gway-dah) in the northwest China province of Qinghai.

I had been playing out by the river not far from our home when I witnessed the life/death drama of the little dog. A group of boys also loitering by the river saw the dog and began tracking him as the river swept him along. Each time the puppy got close to the bank, cruelly they threw large stones, forcing it back into the current. Finally, the exhausted puppy sank from view.

The scene still plays out in slow motion in my memory. It was my first brush with injustice, inhumanity, mercilessness, and the cruelty of the strong against the weak.

## The injustice

---

Psalm 10 carries the same pathos. It is the cry of a victim drowning in the current of adversity, enemies throwing rocks from their safe positions on the shore. David pours this psalm out of his heart during a time when he had lost his grip on safety.

Has this ever happened to you? Are you right now in a dangerous life current, wondering if you will ever be secure again? Has someone wounded or victimized you to such an extent

**<sup>1</sup>Why, O LORD, do  
you stand far off?  
Why do you hide  
yourself in times of  
trouble?**

you honestly question whether you can recover?

## Where are You, God?

---

David's first instinct is to ask God why He is distant and has absented himself when most needed. "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (v. 1).

David complains. He catalogs the inhuman and ungodly traits in persons who victimize, who impose suffering on others for their own pleasure or advantage. (See vv. 2–11.)

David feels absolutely helpless in coping with such powerful adversaries. As he struggles for survival, his nemesis alternately parties and plots against him. It's so hard to deal with the unfairness.

Though it is emotionally healthy to express our pain, we must escape the trap of feeling the Lord does not care and remains indifferent to our plight.

## He does care

---

Suddenly, in verse 12, David cries out to God in a far different way than the despair with which he began the psalm: "Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless." His faith begins to kick against his doubts. His knowings start arguing with his feelings.

Your emotions may tell you God is far away (v. 1); but, upon second reflection, you too can say, "But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless" (v. 14).

In victimization there are rarely quick deliverances. Psalm 10 reflects the struggle

<sup>2</sup>In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. <sup>3</sup>He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. <sup>4</sup>In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

<sup>7</sup>His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. <sup>8</sup>He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. <sup>9</sup>He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. <sup>10</sup>His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength.

<sup>11</sup>He says to himself, "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees."

<sup>12</sup>Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.

of the long battled, of one trying to stay afloat amid the pain inflicted by others. It helps us understand our feelings of abandonment by God during such a season. Ultimately, as we continue in relationship with the Lord, faith will return. (See v. 14.)

Any victim can understand the retribution David asked for in his prayer (v. 15): “Break the arm of the wicked. . . .” The victim can bear the burden more easily if he knows that one day his victimizer also will feel some pain. But inflicting pain must be left with God himself rather than through personal vengeance.

This psalm, which began with why, ends on a note of supreme confidence: “The Lord is King for ever and ever; He does listen to the cry of the afflicted, and defends them. He ultimately will put an end to the terror of man.” (See vv. 16–18.)

So what should you do when victimized? With David, affirm that the Lord rules—not just over the universe, but over your situation as well. He takes note of your pain. Through His Word and His Spirit He encourages you. He listens to you. And right now He is not motionless or hiding in some remote place but is acting to defend you. He has a stronger grip on you than you have on Him; therefore, you will not sink beneath the waters. You will make it safely to the shore because you are not alone—He is with you.

**14**You, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

**15**Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.

**16**The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land.

**17**You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, <sup>18</sup>defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, today I take my place with those who trust You. Thank You for giving me room to rage and question, but, even more, thank You for helping me gain stability. Thank You for giving me faith that all will end well because You do act on my behalf.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 10 . . .*

# Don't Fly Away

PSALM 11

**T**he Church of All Nations in the Garden of Gethsemane sits near the bottom of the Kidron Valley. Its dome has a most unusual artistic representation: two stags tethered to the cross.

I have adopted my own version of what they represent based on the events of the night in which the Lord there prayed and was betrayed.

In that last evening before His death, Jesus was free to crest the Mount of Olives beyond which lay the Judean wilderness and safety. Yet He willingly chose not to take the escape, but to remain at the base of the hill earnestly yielding to the will of the Father.

## Lure of escape

---

How alluring must have been the tempter's voice: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart" (vv. 1,2). Psalm 11 is a Scripture passage to use when we need strength to remain and not fly away. Have you desired to run? Perhaps you have a very trying home situation, problems have arisen in your church, your work or school environment is extremely difficult, or you feel trapped. You hear the siren call of temptation: "Flee like a bird to your mountain."

**<sup>1</sup>In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. <sup>2</sup>For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart."**

## The tempter

---

Flight seems all the more attractive because danger lurks. You know you are helpless within your own strength to deal with the danger. When asked, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (v. 3), you are tempted to answer, "Nothing!"

Remember who asks the question. It's the tempter. He seeks to get you to leave the battlefield before the fight ever begins.

David, however, already had his answer: "In the Lord I take refuge" (v. 1). He had made up his mind not to fly away from the danger. His security was in the Lord's care over him. Psalm 11 is for the times when either you cannot or must not abdicate. The Holy Spirit calls you to resist the thought that your safety lies in escaping.

## Our security

---

Your true security is in God. He is in His holy temple on His heavenly throne. From that vantage point He fully knows the inner life of the wicked and the righteous because He has observed and examined both. (See vv. 4,5.) He can be counted on to act justly toward evildoers and the upright: "On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face" (vv. 6,7). God will have the last word.

Jesus knew crucifixion and death were not the end. Such would be swallowed up in the victory of His resurrection and ascension. He could endure dark Gethsemane because He had faith in the

**<sup>3</sup>"When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"**

**<sup>4</sup>The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them.**

**<sup>5</sup>The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.**

**<sup>6</sup>On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. <sup>7</sup>For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.**

promise that the upright would see the face of God.

## Reason to remain

---

What kept Him there in the Garden that night when it would have been so easy for Him to fly away? He was tethered to the cross—not with a rope, but with the cords of commitment and devotion to duty. Love for the Father and for us tied Him to responsibility. He chose not to flee because our eternal life depended upon His remaining put.

When I remember the two stags tethered to the cross, I mentally picture myself as the second stag. Jesus, my companion, calls me to deny myself and take up my cross daily. (See Mark 8:34–38.) The ropes that bind me to His cross are not externally imposed by others, but are the cords of commitment from my free choice to remain faithful to Him.

Psalm 11 and its application to Jesus in Gethsemane help us remain steadfast during the times we too would rather run away.

### Mark 8:34

**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord Jesus, renew my strength to do right even when all my feelings shout, "Escape." I am counting on You to keep me secure even though arrows from the shadows are aimed at me. When I see Your face, I will be glad I did not flee.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 11 . . .*

# Whom Can You Trust?

## PSALM 12

I saw an experiment, captured on film, demonstrating how adversity may condition us into a state of hopelessness.

A pike was placed in a large tank. At feeding times minnows (its favorite food) were poured into the water. The pike energetically swam, gobbling up dinner.

Next, a clear glass cylinder was set in the center of the tank, and the minnows were placed within the oval. Unaware that an invisible wall separated him from his prey, the pike darted for the first minnow—only to slam into the glass. Stunned, he backed away and tried again. Same result.

For a number of hours this process continued. Finally, in defeat, the pike settled to the bottom of the tank.

The glass cylinder was extracted, freeing the minnows. They swam right by the nose of the pike, but conditioning had convinced him the minnows were inaccessible. Eventually he died of starvation.

**<sup>1</sup>Help, LORD, for the  
godly are no more; the  
faithful have vanished  
from among men.**

**<sup>2</sup>Everyone lies to his  
neighbor; their flat-  
tering lips speak with  
deception.**

### Stunned by circumstances

---

Sometimes life takes on the hopelessness of the pike in the tank. Psalm 12 finds David in such an environment.

David is at the bottom of circumstances, stunned. Persons in whom he trusted, whose word he believed, had not told him the truth. He had been lied to, suckered by flattery. People had told him what they thought he wanted to hear rather than their true opinions.

David feels devastated, so he sinks into depression and expresses: “No one can be trusted. I am alone, surrounded by persons who, given the opportunity, will likewise take advantage of me.” David doesn’t trust anyone anymore: “Help, Lord, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception” (vv. 1,2).

Our prayers do not always express God’s truth. Sometimes they reflect our emotional state. Biblically, it is not true that “the godly are no more,” nor is it accurate that “everyone lies to his neighbor.” But hurtful experiences can make us feel that way. If, like the pike, we are slammed by unwelcome, unanticipated surprises, we too may lie on the bottom and assume there’s no use trusting anyone again.

## Demanding retribution

---

In his hurt David cries for the Lord to even the score. He has been so devastated by persons who took pride in their smooth speech that he lashes out: “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue” (vv. 3,4).

Politely God refuses David’s request for retribution and answers: “I will now arise . . . I will protect them from those who malign them” (v. 5). God simply promised David: “I will protect.”

## Trusting God

---

How can we trust the Lord to protect when we don’t know what actions He will take on our behalf? David’s faith rises to the answer: “The words of the

<sup>3</sup>May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue <sup>4</sup>that says, “We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips—who is our master?”

<sup>5</sup>“Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,” says the LORD. “I will protect them from those who malign them.”

<sup>6</sup>And the words of

Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times” (v. 6).

Armed with the assurance that God’s promises can be counted upon, David closes Psalm 12 with a paradox: a statement of personal assurance in the Lord’s protection (v. 7) along with the realization nothing has changed in the behavior of one who brought him harm. Rather, “the wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men” (v. 8).

Has someone harmed you with words? Perhaps a Christian leader misled you; another believer used you; a spouse broke covenant with you; a salesman sold you a lemon; a friend talked about you behind your back; a boyfriend said “I love you” at the same time he was saying it to someone else; an employer promised you a raise or promotion that never came to pass. You wonder whom you can trust.

Don’t be like the pike who gave up after a number of bruising encounters. Follow the example of David and begin to trust again by first placing your confidence in the Lord. Throughout the Bible, He affirms His love for and loyalty toward you. You can count on His words. He will protect and keep you.

**the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. <sup>7</sup>O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever. <sup>8</sup>The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord Jesus, help me to be like You—honest. Keep me from mistrusting everyone just because someone has let me down. I thank You because Your words can always be relied upon as truthful. I know You will keep me secure.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 12 . . .*

# Turning “How Longs?” into Hallelujahs

## PSALM 13

**A** relatively new Christian experienced a string of difficulties sufficient to almost swamp her faith. A mature sister in the Lord counseled her with the promise: “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

“See,” the friend said encouragingly, “the Lord knows your limits. All these difficult things would not be happening to you if He thought you could not handle them. The fact you have so much adversity just shows how much confidence He really has in you.”

In frustration, faith, and a touch of humor, the stressed-out believer responded: “Well, I just wish the Lord did not have such a high opinion of me.”

Psalm 13 pours out of David’s heart when he faced more than he thought he could handle. Sometimes, in such a circumstance, David asked “Why?” (Psalm 10:1). Here he asks “How long?” (Psalm 13:1).

**<sup>1</sup>How long, O LORD?  
Will you forget me  
forever? How long  
will you hide your  
face from me?**

### **How long will You forget?**

---

I could never forget the persons who are closest to me. It would hurt to think they had forgotten me. That’s the pain we sometimes feel when circumstances convince us God has forgotten us. If we were really on His mind and heart, He would have already intervened.

Feelings do not always tell us the truth about God. Jesus reminds us that our Father cannot even forget a

sparrow—and we are worth far more than that. (See Luke 12:6,7.)

### **How long will You hide your face?**

---

David has lost a sense of nearness to the Lord. He feels that God has disengaged and disconnected from him. While forgetfulness may be attributed to negligence, hiding one's face appears to be a deliberate act.

Do you feel God himself doesn't want anything to do with you? Whenever your emotions tell you God has abandoned you, your faith must answer: Nothing will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord. (See Romans 8:35–39.)

### **How long will I be sad?**

---

David “wrestles with [his] thoughts” (v. 2). Like us, he struggles: “If I had only . . . ,” or “What might have been if . . . ?” Sorrow lies heavy on his heart. Grief only occurs when there is the loss of something or someone precious. This loss may be a person, an expectation, a thing. The more value we attach to what is lost, the greater our depression. We need, like Martha, to believe Jesus is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

### **How long will my problems have the upper hand?**

---

David's enemies triumph over him, even as problems often seem stronger than our ability to successfully resolve them. Weakness and loss of control combine to produce apprehension and fear.

**<sup>2</sup>How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?**

We wonder if the rest of life will be like this. It's easy to forget "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

## The answers

In Psalm 13, God never directly responds to David's questions. He never gives a deadline by which He will act. Resolution to our desperation often comes when, like David, we still our hearts before God in prayer.

Often we must simply leave a matter with God. David states what he wants the Lord to do—answer, illumine, and protect. (See vv. 3,4.) But then he leaves the issue with God: "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation" (v. 5). Contrast these words to the opening of this short psalm.

As you pray, the Holy Spirit helps you experience another side to your struggle. It's not all pain, trauma, or weeping. After a few moments on your knees your perspective begins to change. God's love doesn't fail after all.

In your anxious moments keep trusting. You too will find reason to sing, for you know far more of the Lord than David. You will see that God has not abandoned you nor will your problems win the battle over you. Let your "how longs?" be swallowed up in hallelujahs.

**<sup>3</sup>Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; <sup>4</sup>my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.**

**<sup>5</sup>But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.**

**<sup>6</sup>I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.**

## *Prayer of response*

*Lord, sometimes I come into Your presence unthinkingly. I begin by complaining, doubting, and assuming You really don't care about me. How wrong I am to do that. My times are in Your hands, and I do trust You to make everything all right. If You were not with me, I could not make it. How good You are to me.*

*My thoughts on Psalm 13 . . .*

# Atheists

## Anonymous

### PSALM 14

Several years before his death, Nicolae Ceausescu, dictator of Romania, addressed the hand-picked audience filling the five thousand-seat palace hall of Bucharest, the capital. The speech was beamed to the nation through the government-controlled television and radio networks.

Ceausescu reviewed the efforts of his administration to stamp out the church and, satisfied with his progress, boldly declared: “Communism is like a young flower that will continue to unfurl its flowers for centuries to come. Within ten years we will outlive Christianity in Romania.”

Evidently he had not read, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”” (Psalm 14:1).

Not all atheists publicly declare themselves as did Ceausescu. Psalm 14 singles out the person whose conduct, not speech, evidences refusal to believe in God. The atheism is anonymous for the fool speaks not to an audience, but “in his heart.”

**<sup>1</sup>The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.**

### Human folly

---

Whenever I act in a manner inconsistent with the character of God or His will for my life, at that moment I too become an anonymous atheist. My behavior only illustrates what I really believe: “God, in this area of my life, I do not want You to exist. I will do my own thing.”

Are there pockets of resistance to God’s presence in your life—places you go, things you do, thoughts you ponder—where you hang out a “Not

Welcome” sign to the presence of Jesus?

Romans 1 magnifies Psalm 14: “What may be known about God is plain. . . . Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . . and . . . they did not see fit to acknowledge God.” (See vv. 19,22,28.) The assertion, “There is no God,” whether made by verbal proclamation or silent behavioral choices, is treated in Scripture as an irresponsible gesture of defiance.

### **Divine examination**

---

God does see and know. He “looks down from heaven on the sons of men” (v. 2). Nothing escapes His notice. He sees that “all have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one” (v. 3).

Contemporary society labels the biblical teaching of human depravity as quaint and out-of-date. But God’s Word declares us sinners and our human condition hopelessly undone. Outside of Jesus Christ, God has given up on the human race and abandoned it because of its mortal folly and evil. (See Romans 1:18–32.) But through the good news of Jesus we may experience, through faith in Christ, the power of God to save us from both sin and death. (See Romans 1:16,17.)

Atheism cannot create a noble society or nation. As someone has said: “Without God, man rots; without God, society rots.” When people act as though God does not exist, family and society disintegrate.

### **Divine indictment**

---

God’s examination brings two accusations against atheists: mistreatment of

**<sup>2</sup>The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. <sup>3</sup>All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.**