

Appeal for Compassion

Psalms 86

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

“⁷ When I am in distress, I call to You, because You answer me.”

The Oxford English Dictionary defines distress as “extreme anxiety, sorrow, or pain.”¹ When faced with unchangeable tribulations feelings of terror grip our very souls. Especially acute is our sense of hopelessness when we muster up enough strength and courage to ask advice from a spouse, parent, brother, sister or friend only to hear “crickets,” mere sympathy, or suggestions that have zero probability of success! O if we would only seek council from our Sovereign God instead of from the foolish “dust of the earth” we would find mercy, escape or be given the strength to endure our tribulations with joy! While today’s passage is a prayer from King David to be rescued from his enemies² it is also is a beautiful template on how to seek and find mercy from God when faced with overwhelming difficulties³ and turbulent seas of tribulations. Using a series of imperative verbs such as hear, answer, guard, show, save, teach, faith and trust;⁴ David humbly pleaded for mercy⁵ from God based on His sovereignty and character.⁶ This sermon is intended to show how one can cry out and receive mercy from the One who knit, shapes and sustains our very souls!

Vanity of Thoughtless Prayers

When the walls come tumbling in and one finds oneself in the darkest of valleys how does one ask a Sovereign God for aid and comfort? While prayer should be as natural as breathing, for it is the “central avenue which God uses to transform us,”⁷ the manner and attitude in which one addresses a holy God often gets overlooked. In the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus told the crowd that God is not interested in long prayers that “babble” or ones that contain “Christianese” language to impress others with one’s superior theology (Matthew 6:5-8). Floods

¹ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., [*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

² Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reburn, [*A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 751.

³ Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reburn, [*A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 751.

⁴ D. A. Carson, ed., [*NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1097.

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, [*Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 702.

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, [*Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 701.

⁷ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 33.



of words according to Spurgeon are often used in prayers to mask an unbelieving heart!⁸ Since pride goes before the fall (Proverbs 16:18) and creation has no right to command her Creator to dance when the pipes of prayer are sounded (Matthew 11:17), approaching the Throne of Grace in prayer without an attitude of humility is at best futile and at worst invites God's wrath. Also, since it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6), praying with an attitude of doubt will result in receiving nothing from God (James 1:5-8). Let's now turn our attention to how important it is for Christians to

pray with an attitude of humility, faith and trust in Jesus.

Praying with a Humble Heart

David did not start off his petition "arguing that God owed him anything"⁹ but with the humble words, "hear me, Lord, answer me for I am poor and needy" (verse 1, NIV). Instead of foolishly pleading for rights based on his accomplishments,¹⁰ David humbly pleaded with God to "bow down His ear" (verse 1, NKJV) so that the dust and worm of the earth might plead his case to a holy God!¹¹ Even though David was a somebody, i.e. an earthly king, he admitted that he was poor, feeble¹² and incapable of doing anything or being saved apart from the aid of his sovereign God!¹³ Being humble like David is not easy for giving up our "deadly confidence in self"¹⁴ or our "cursed trust"¹⁵ in the council of the ungodly (Palms 1) does not come naturally.¹⁶ Let me tell you the story of the "sin of our imagination:"

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 632.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, [Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 702.

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, [Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 702–703.

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 627.

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 627.

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 627–628.

¹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 633.

¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 629.

¹⁶ James Montgomery Boice, [Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 702–703.



“After a minister had preached a searching sermon on pride, a woman who had heard the sermon waited upon him and told him that she was in much distress of mind, and that she would like to confess to a great sin. The minister asked her what the sin was. She answered, “The sin of pride, for I sat for an hour before my mirror some days ago admiring my beauty.” “Oh,” responded the minister, “that was not a sin of pride—that was a sin of imagination!” - C. E. Macartney¹⁷

While there is nothing wrong in imagining or developing possible solutions to life-problems, it is arrogant to think that we alone can control the unknown future. God loves His children to humbly approach His mercy seat and cry out “I need You help me please my Father God!” Humility is the fertile ground in which God invites us to give Him our yokes in exchange for burdens that are truly easy and light (Matthew 11:29-30)!

Praying by Faith

The author of Hebrews defines faith as being “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (11:1). When it comes to receiving mercy from our sovereign God, having faith is critical! According to Scripture Jesus was not able to do any miracles in His hometown because they lacked faith (13:58). Without faith it is “impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). If we are to receive the promise of mercy and an easy yoke from God, then our faith in God must be “personally lived.” Spurgeon used the following illustration to show the



connection between God’s promised mercy and faith as follows:

¹⁷ Paul Lee Tan, [Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times](#) (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 1100.

“A promise is like a cheque. If I have a cheque, what do I do with it? Suppose I carried it about in my pocket, and said, “I do not see the use of this bit of paper, I cannot buy anything with it,” a person would say, “Have you been to the bank with it?” “No, I did not think of that.” “But it is payable to your order. Have you written your name on the back of it?” “No, I have not done that.” “And yet you are blaming the person who gave you the cheque? The whole blame lies with yourself. Put your name at the back of the cheque, go with it to the bank, and you will get what is promised to you.” A prayer should be the presentation of God’s promise endorsed by your personal faith.”¹⁸

Like Enoch we endorse God’s promise of mercy by following His commands and walking in the footsteps of His Son, Jesus (Genesis 5:22; 1 John 5:3; 1 Peter 2:21). Remember God will not even hear our prayers when we cherish sin in our hearts (Psalms 66:18)! This does not mean that we have to be sinless to approach a holy God, for then His throne would cease to be one of grace, but have an obligation to first ask Him to search our hearts and when He finds sin to have the courage to repent so that our faith might be living and not dead from the lack of righteous deeds (James 2:26). While our salvation is not dependent on our deeds, a living faith certainly is!

Praying with Unwavering Trust

An attitude of faith in God is cultivated best in a deep sea of unwavering trust! While it is easier to have faith when one is on the mountain top of blessings, it is quite another to have faith in God in our darkest valleys of tribulations! When every earthly prop of hope is stripped away and yet one can “hang on the bare arm of God”¹⁹ in glorious dependence, one’s prayers will overflow with an unwavering trust in Him! This is the kind of trust that rejoices when facing tribulations for not only will perseverance lead to spiritual maturity (James 1:2-4) but also the opportunity to glorify God’s name through our living sacrifice (Romans 12:12). When we raise to greater faith and trust in God Spurgeon says we “will probably suffer greater troubles” and in turn be given more



¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Concerning Prayer.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 632.

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Concerning Prayer.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 629.

opportunity to serve.²⁰ The foundation of unwavering trust in God is the belief that God always does good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). It is the kind of trust that even when one is experiencing a free fall into the abyss one does not frantically thrash about looking for any means of escape but instead approaches God's throne of mercy with the unwavering belief that one will be caught up into His loving arms (Psalms 23)!

Expect an Answer

When David was in distress, he called upon the Lord because He knew a sovereign God would answer him. Unwavering trust in God is not easily attainable, it must grow in the fertile ground of reflection on His sovereignty. "Yahweh is the only true God; He is incomparable."²¹



The Bible and our personal lives are full of His time-testing affirmations²² of His creation and sovereignty over all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16). David reasoned that the same sovereign God who had been compassionate, gracious and abounding in love to change humanity's circumstances in the past, will do so again in the present.²³ While God has given Satan power to rule for a while (2 Corinthians 4:4) this does not mean He is sovereign or able to change a single event that God has in store for one's life. Because David believed in God's sovereignty, he cried

out daily²⁴ but not as one without hope but with the unwavering belief that God would show him mercy. Like David instead of choosing to carry our burdens we are to draw nearer to God²⁵ and trust Him that in His sovereignty He will take our yoke upon Himself and give us rest!

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer.](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 628.

²¹ D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1097.

²² Robert L. Jr. Hubbard and Robert K. Johnston, "[Foreword.](#)" in *Psalms*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 348.

²³ Robert L. Jr. Hubbard and Robert K. Johnston, "[Foreword.](#)" in *Psalms*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 349.

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer.](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 629.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "[Concerning Prayer.](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 636.

Teach me and Give me an Undivided Heart

Since obtaining trust and commitment to God does not come naturally, David prays that God would teach him to have a wholehearted commitment to Him. Most people when they



pray are more concerned about deliverance than they are to serve God with an undivided heart that just wants to draw nearer to Him.²⁶ Since God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:9) the goal of prayer is not primarily deliverance but to know and accept His will in our lives. When asked to lead the children of Israel Moses did not ask God to make him a better leader but instead asked Him to teach him His ways so that he might always find favor in him (Exodus 33:12-13).²⁷ Like David the overarching goal of our prayers is to

show reverence to God by asking Him to remove all insincerity, irresolution and the tug-of-war of sin and righteousness from our heart ... for this is how we draw nearer to God and He to us!²⁸ I would rather walk through a thousand valleys of tribulations with God's arm around me

than to always be delivered my way and be distant from Him!



Show a Sign of Your Goodness

David finishes his prayer with a plead that God would show him a sign of His goodness. Boice says, "if we cannot think of reasons why God should answer prayers, it is probably because our requests are wrong and need to be revised or redirected."²⁹ It is amazing that despite our littleness and sinful nature God is willing to bow

²⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 703.

²⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 705.

²⁸ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 344.

²⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 703.

down and lend our prayers ears that hear and transform our lives. Praise be that You Lord are compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness (86:15)! Like David may our pleas for mercy be based on our poor and needy status, our devotion to God, and our continual cries to receive mercy from our sovereign God that does miraculous deeds to those who love Him.³⁰ David finishes his prayer by asking God for a tangible sign of an answer so that his enemies might see God's goodness.³¹ When we go to God in prayer it is not to be about getting what we want but about learning and accepting His gracious and good will for our lives. Based on the shed blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ³² may we approach God's throne of grace with the expectation that our obedient hearts can exchange our heavy burdens and receive His peace and rest!

³⁰ James Montgomery Boice, [*Psalms 42–106: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 705.

³¹ D. A. Carson, ed., [*NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1098.

³² James Montgomery Boice, [*Psalms 42–106: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 707.