

He Heard My Voice
(The Prayer Warrior's Anthem)
Psalm 18
Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20 (or 6:18-20)

Bethany Baptist Church
December 31, 2017
July 19, 2014

...pray...

The last time we examined *Ephesians*, Paul's letter was almost *over*.

The closing section of *Ephesians* examines *spiritual warfare*...

...and ends with some *closing instructions on prayer* (→ *to enter the battle with prayer, to pray hard for your church & to pray hard for your spiritual leaders*).

This morning I'd like to *apply* the connection between *prayer & spiritual warfare* by visiting one of my fav *psalms*.

(Call centers...service desks. You feel good about calling those places?)

Long "call waits" (you are call number 42; please hold for the next available service rep)

Automated information gathering (you have 5 seconds to say or enter your 16 digit serial number)

Multiple transfers (please wait some more while I transfer you to our backline support group)

Strange accents (we won't even go there)

Dropped calls (→ start over!)

No help (sorry, that version is no longer supported)

Aren't you glad that prayer always works & that God's response time is always perfect!)

Turn w/ me to Psalm 18. Read Psalm 18:1-3

Psalm 18 is the *fourth* longest of the psalms (**50** verses)!

The *superscript* is lengthy & informative:

The *author* is David.

The *occasion* is the defeat of David's enemies, particularly (not exclusively) *King Saul*.

Psalm 18 was written to be *sung* by a *choir*.

So I like to think of it as an *anthem* – a **prayer warrior's anthem!**

David's theme is simple: a *hymn* to the *God who answers prayer*.

Psalm 18 is like a *sandwich*: on either end of the hymn is a *brief but passionate* exclamation of devotion to the LORD. →

vv.1-3 ... *I love you, O LORD, my strength!*
 vv.46-50 ...*The LORD lives, & blessed be my rock!*

In the *middle* (vv.4-45) is the long account of *David's desperate prayer* for deliverance & the *record* of God's *answer*.

This is one of my favorite psalms because of its *intense & graphic images* of God's *answers* to our *cries*.

In the time we have, we **can't** thoroughly *explore* every detail of David's long psalm, but I want to *survey* its highlights & *draw out* some prayer pointers.

Ten lessons on prayer from the man after God's own heart.

1. God wants to be your *first line of defense* (vv.1-3; *introduction*)
2. God *hears* your prayers (vv.4-6).
3. God *answers* your prayer with *passion* (vv.7-15).
4. God is *stronger* than your enemies (vv.16-19).
5. God has *regard* for your faithfulness (vv.20-24).
6. God gives *grace* when the *humble* cry out (vv.25-29).
7. God *keeps* those who *place themselves* in His care (vv.30-36).
8. God *ignores* the prayers of the wicked (vv.37-42).
9. God can *turn* your situation *completely around* (vv.43-45).
10. God gets the *complete credit* (vv.46-50; *conclusion*).

God wants to be your *first line of defense* (vv.1-3; intro).

1. What a great way to introduce this powerful & encouraging piece! Listen again to the *rescued David's declaration of love and complete dependence* – “*I love you, O LORD, my strength.*”
 - a. David immediately reveals that *love for God & faith in God* always go *hand in hand*... *faith* is a key component in the arsenal of the *prayer warrior*.

2. Do you remember from Eph 6 that prayer is a vital tactic in *spiritual warfare*...? David deploys **seven** military expressions (2) to describe the *strength* of God, who is the fugitive's *refuge* in desperate circumstances.
 - a. *Rock – Concealment*
 - b. *Fortress – Protection & base of operations*
 - c. *Deliverer – Rescuer* (God, and why we *petition* Him)
 - d. *Rock (2) – Unshakable*
 - e. *Shield – The soldier's defensive weapon* (Eph 5 – *shield of faith*)
 - f. *Horn – OT symbol of strength*
 - g. *Stronghold – David knew the wilderness strongholds & ran to them*

3. So David *ran* to God like a *prayer warrior* running for a fortified *bomb shelter*!

4. Prayer lesson #1: *God needs to be your first line of defense.*
 - a. Why try to *fight* your battles or *fix* your problems **w/o** Him when He so clearly describes Himself as a *fortress & deliverer* for His beleaguered children?

God hears your prayers (vv.4-6).

1. David now begins to review the *reasons* for his confidence in God's strength. If you read carefully, you notice that the psalm has moved from its *present tense* introduction to a *past tense* report.
 - a. The point is that David's *confidence* is built on God's *history* of proven *responsiveness & faithfulness*.
2. David's situation had been desperate & prolonged. King Saul was *jealous & malicious & capricious & persistent* in his pursuit of Jesse's youngest son.
 - a. **Vv.4-5** repeat & emphasize just how dangerous David's predicament really was: *cords & torrents & snares...death & ungodliness*.
 - b. *Spurgeon* points out that the situation was so bad that the young man who had run **at** the *giant Goliath* with taunts ran **from** the *madman Saul* in terror (v.4)!
3. But David knew what to do (and it had little to do w/ a *sword* or *slingshot*): "*I called upon the Lord & cried to my God for help.*"
4. Which brings us (6b) to our **second lesson** in prayer from the *distress* of David. Very simply (prayer lesson #2): *God hears your prayers (read 6b)*.
 - a. Prayer is not in *vain*. Prayer is not an emotional *placebo*. Prayer is not "*all in your mind*."
 - b. God, in heaven, *hears* the voice of His children!

Pray! Perhaps the situation seems *desperate*! *Cry out*! God hears your prayers!

God answers your prayer with passion (vv.7-15). *His passion – not yours!*

1. This, perhaps, is my *favorite* portion of Psalm 18! David is still recounting the *reasons* he loves & depends on the LORD.
2. You might think that the God who is *all powerful & all knowing & all ruling* doesn't need to get in a *hurry* about anything. That *wasn't* David's experience.
3. David's cry was *desperate* and the LORD's response was *urgent* → *passionate!*
 - a. Notice, v.7, "*then*" → the *moment* God hears David's cry (v.6) He springs into action. God never puts you *on hold!* He never waits for a *free moment* to answer your *text!*
 - b. The earth below the heavens *rocked* in response to God's *offended anger* at the mistreatment of His child (v.7).
 - c. God's anger is pictured as *smoking nostrils & a devouring breath of fire.*
 - d. God *flew* as fast as the wind to David's rescue & He brought along an *angelic escort.*
 - e. God *cried out* in the storm & *fired* His artillery in the hail & lightning; the *result* on David's foes was devastating.
 - f. God's angry cries *laid bare* the underpinnings of the world! *Nothing is hidden from God's sight!*
4. David's *poetic imagery* is powerfully instructive.
 - a. Does God really have *nostrils & mouth & feet & voice & breath?* (no)
 - b. Does God actually need *cherub* to ride or *darkness* to hide? (no!)
 - c. But David's point is *colorfully clear...!*
5. **Prayer lesson #3:** When your situation is *desperate*, God answers with *passion*, not *passivity*. Don't you just *love* it...!
 - a. **V.6** – *He heard my voice out of His temple.*
 - b. **V.9** – *He bowed the heavens also, and came down!*

God is *stronger* than your enemies (vv.16-19).

1. In **1 Sam 24&26** we read that Saul *pursued* David in the wilderness, leading a force of **3000** *chosen men* of Israel. David, by comparison, led a band of **600**.
 - a. *Do the math*: David was outnumbered **5:1!**
2. Not only was Saul's force more *powerful*, Saul was *powered* by an irrational, evil *hatred*.
 - a. David simply admits (**17**) that *they were too mighty for me!*
3. Yet *despite* the strength of the enemy, and on the *very verge* of apparent calamity, God *rescued* David.
 - a. Notice the varied vocabulary of *deliverance*: *sent from, took me, drew me out, delivered me, my stay (→ security), brought me forth...*
 - b. All of which that **911** *action* is fueled by this (19b): "**He rescued me, because He delighted in me.**"
4. **Lesson 4** is *simple*, but please don't rush past it: *God is stronger than your enemies.... Do you believe that? Are you trusting in that?*
5. **OBTW (before we move on)**: *why* did God rescue David? "*Because He delighted in me.*"
 - a. Savor the fact that *God delights in you – 2X* (after all, the gospel is so clear: *God demonstrated His own love for you, in that while you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you; Rm 5:8*).
 - b. What *greater* assurance do you need!

As you pray, God has regard for your *faithfulness* (vv.20-24).

1. The *gospel of Jesus* is wonderfully clear: you are *justified by faith alone*, not by *tradition or ritual or works*.
2. So what do you *do* w/ **these** verses? *The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness?*
 - a. David is **not** writing about the basis of His *salvation*. We know from **Rm 4:6-8** that David understood the blessing of being *forgiven*. His own *future* moral failures would soon reinforce him the wonders of God's *forgiveness & grace* (documented in **Psalm 32, Psalm 51**)!
 - b. Yet in the *context* of **Psa 18** (+ 1 Sam) David was *innocent* of any *wrong-doing* against **Saul**, and protested this to Saul *more than once*.
 - c. Further, David was *righteous* in his repeated refusal to *stretch out his hand* against King Saul, the Lord's anointed ruler over Israel.
 - d. David was *righteous* in his faith that *God would deliver him* from his enemies & *deliver him* to the throne...in God's perfect timing.
 - e. So *righteousness* in Psa 18 is not *saving righteousness* but rather a *righteousness* that is *relative* to David's *relationships/circumstances*.
3. There **is** a *connection* between **our faithfulness & God's responsiveness** to our prayers. Consider both sides of this principle from the **NT**:
 - a. **James 5:17** – *The effective prayer of the righteous man availeth much*. The *righteous man* experiences effectiveness in prayer.
 - b. **1 Peter 3:7** – *You husbands, likewise, live w/ your wives in an understanding way...lest your prayers be hindered*. The man who is *sinful* in his relationships will experience *hindrances* to his prayers. Similarly, the unfaithful Christian *grieves & quenches* the Holy Spirit, who is *tasked* (Rom 8) with helping us in our prayers.
4. This, then, is our **5th** prayer lesson: *God has regard for your faithfulness. Live **righteously** if you want to pray **effectively**!*

God gives *grace* when the humble *cry out* (vv.25-29).

1. *God is just*. He treats men & women *justly*; as they *deserve* (v.25). This principle continues/expands the previous point that God *recompenses* according to *righteousness* (20-24).
 - a. David has *changed up* his *grammar* again! Previously the poet has written *about* God (3rd person – *He*). Now the writer humbly writes *to* God (2nd person – *You*).

2. Then David appears to address *a fundamental Bible truth* about how God relates to men & women. This principle influence *prayer success!*
 - a. **V. 27** – *For You save an afflicted people, But haughty eyes You abase.*
 - b. Note the *contrasts*: *afflicted* vs. *haughty*; *save* vs. *abase*. The *haughty eye* looks **down** on others...
 - c. Sound *familiar?* Need a *hint?* How about this: *God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble* (Prov, Jas, 1 Pet).

3. David then goes on to provide examples how God *saves* the *afflicted*...
 - a. **V.28** – *illumination*. The familiar image of God providing the *light* we need (esp *spiritual illumination*) to follow His path.
 - b. **V.29** – *vindication*. David's early life was set in the context of conflict. God gave him strength to run upon his enemy. One translation says *For by You I can crush a troop!* And God gave him strength for *surprise* or *escape* – like a scene from a 21st century action drama, *I can leap over a wall!*

4. The *prayer lesson* in vv.25 -29 is that *God has regard for the humble (afflicted) as they pray – i.e. He cares about their prayers.*
- a. Ten centuries later the apostle Peter still connected *humility to prayer* (1 Pt 5): *God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble, therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, **casting all your anxiety upon Him**, because He cares for you. “Humble yourselves” → “**casting all your anxiety on Him**” **Why?** “Because He cares for you”*
 - b. Do you want *grace* (→ *God at work in your life*)? David endured *affliction*, & David *cried out* & David *humbly proclaimed* that the **LORD** is my strength.

Prayer principle #7. God keeps those who place themselves in His care.
(vv.30-36).

1. David continues building on the theme of *God's integrity*, begun in v.25.
 - a. God's dealings w/ men (*His ways*) are *impeccable*. There is no reason to *blame* God when disaster *strikes* – not in the sense of accusing Him of *evil*. He **is** the Sovereign *Creator & Sustainer* of all, but in all things, He remains *blameless*.
 - b. God's *word* to us is *tried*. David is picturing a *testing process*. God's word has been *tested & proven perfect* by experience & by (other) Scripture. The *psalms* elsewhere claim, "*Your word is more precious to me than thousands of gold or silver pieces.*"
 - c. The promise here is that you can trust God to ***deal square*** & to ***guide straight***.

2. **Psa 18** now returns to its emphasis on God's *strengthening* when His children come into *harm's way*.
 - a. The language is again very *military*; much of it David has already employed.
 - i. *The LORD is shield & rock.*
 - ii. I.e., He comes to our *defense* when we are under *assault*.

- b. But the greater emphasis is on God's **equipping** us for *battle*. Does this remind you of the *spiritual warfare & spiritual armor* of **Eph 6**?
- i. *The God who girds me w/ strength* (like buckling on armor).
 - ii. *Makes my feet like hinds feet & sets me on high places*. David spent a lot of time *hiding & scouting & fighting* in the *rugged Judean wilderness*. The Lord made David *agile* for *desert guerilla warfare*.
 - iii. *He trains my hands for battle*: the ancient soldier grasped *sword, spear, bow, & shield*. He *grappled* w/ his enemies in *mortal hand to hand combat*. David credits God even w/ the *strength* to bend a *bronze bow*
 1. A bent bow *stores energy* to catapult its arrow; a bronze of bow pictures a weapon that is humanly impossible to wield. Thus David needed to be *extremely strong*....
 2. Only God can give the *strength (grace)* for *spiritual warfare*!
 - iv. God *secures* me. In **v.35** David suddenly shifts again to **2nd** person address: "*You*." David is thanking God for *upholding him by His right hand*. **Psa 63:8** – *My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me*.
3. Here, then, is our 7th **prayer principle**: *place yourself in God's care*.
- a. You need God's *strength & equipping* (= *grace*).
 - b. **V.30** recognizes that for God to help you, you must **place** yourself in *His care*. Beloved *come* to Him – *cling to Him!*

Prayer lesson #8: God ignores the prayers of the wicked (vv.37-42).

2. You can be grateful that God *ignores* some people's prayers! *Really...?*
3. **Re-read vv.41.** *Who is this...?*
4. As we come to this section of the **18th Psa**, David *recounts* the glorious days in which God *turned the tables* on his enemies.
 - a. The OT confirms that God often used David to *defeat* Israel's foes (enemies like *Goliath* & the *Philistines*).
 - b. In a *great reversal*, David relentlessly *pursues, consumes, shatters, subdues, routes, destroys, pulverizes & pours out* the very enemies which had once made his life *so miserable*.
5. In their *bitter demise*, *David's foes* were reduced to begging **David's God** to help them! What a *thought!*
 - a. *God's answer?* ... **No** answer at all! God remained *silent!* And David continued to *pursue* his enemies until they were all *defeated*.
6. Let's **re-read vv.40-41**. Here is another principle of prayer: God has **no regard** for the prayers of the *wicked*, until they genuinely *repent*.
 - a. **V.41** is emphatic – look at it *carefully!* *They cry for help...Even to the Lord...He did not answer them!*
 - b. If a man is going to *oppose* God & *oppose* God's people, he can *drop* prayer from his *arsenal!*

Prayer lesson #9: God can turn your situation *completely around* (vv.43-45).

1. The idea of *reversals* is a familiar theme in the Scriptures (e.g. Mordecai & Haman in the OT *Book of Esther*).
 - a. David is praising God for *reversing* his misfortunes.
 - b. Recall that David's men urged him to *strike down* Saul in the *cave* & in the *star-lit circle of the camp*.
 - c. David *refused* to take vengeance into his own hands, knowing that God had a *holy timeline* for keeping His promise.

2. **Psalm 18** reminds us that God *reversed David's misfortunes* as He took David from:
 - a. being *pursued to pursuer*.
 - b. ...from *fearing to being feared*.
 - c. ...from *fugitive to king*.
 - d. And as a result (43), "a *people whom I have not known serve me!*"

3. Have you ever prayed in a situation that *looked completely hopeless*? That you were afraid would come to *no good end*?
 - a. That Ts-up this prayer principle: ***even when things look hopeless, pray! God is the God of incredible reversals! He can turn your situation completely around.***

Out tenth & last prayer lesson is that God should get the *complete credit* (vv.46-50; → conclusion).

1. We've come to the *concluding section* of Psalm 18 – so we aren't surprised when it *bookends & echoes* the initial excitement of **vv.1-3!**
 - a. We've gone from (1) *I love the LORD, my strength*, to (46) *the LORD lives, and blessed be my rock!*
 - b. Sandwiched in between v.1 & the end, God's *answers* to David's cries for deliverance have been *powerful & personal & passionate*.
2. David is careful about where the *credit* for his wonderfully reversed fortunes should go!
 - a. **God** *is to be exalted* (46).
 - b. It is **God** *who executes vengeance* (47).
 - c. [**God**] *delivers & lifts above & rescues* (48).
 - d. Even when David *whirls the sling* or *bends the bow*, he understands who *gives strength* & who *guides the missile!*
3. **Therefore (49)** David vows to give God the *thanks* & to *sing to God the praises His name evokes*.

4. So David's *warrior poetry* (Psa 18) provides each of us w/ a *note of assurance* and also our *concluding lesson in prayer*. When you *experience success*, **God gets the credit**. (Spurgeon points out that this idea is all over Psalm 18.)
 - a. When David & Saul returned together from the battle against the Philistines & the giant Goliath, the women of Israel sang this song: *Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands*.
 - i. King Saul was *not too keen* on that!
 - ii. But here David points out that the **hand** that *strengthened his hands* & the **hand** that *guided the stone* to crack the skull of the *bronze helmeted mega-warrior* was none other than the hand of God Himself. **...prayer...**
 - b. So, do you *give God the credit* in your *conversations w/ men*?
 - c. And, do you *give God credit* in your *conversations w/ God*!
5. The next time your prayers are answered, **give God the glory!**
 - a. Which is exactly how David draws his anthem to a close: *I will sing praises to Your name! He gives great deliverances to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David & his descendants forever.*

Ten lessons on prayer from the man after God's own heart.

1. God wants to be your first line of defense (vv.1-3; intro)
2. God hears your prayers (vv.4-6).
3. God answers your prayer with passion (vv.7-15).
4. God is stronger than your enemies (vv.16-19).
5. God has regard for your faithfulness (vv.20-24).
6. God gives grace when the humble cry out (vv.25-29).
7. God keeps those who place themselves in His care (vv.30-36).
8. God ignores the prayers of the wicked (vv.37-42).
9. God can turn your situation completely around (vv.43-45).
10. God gets the complete credit (vv.46-50; conclusion).

Here is a homework assignment to fortify your QT as the new year begins:

Incorporate **Psa 18** into your **QT** for the next **10** days, and focus on **1** section & **1** prayer lesson *per day*?

I love you, O LORD, my strength...The LORD lives, and blessed by my rock & exalted be the God of my salvation!

**...pray... Thanks for answers & strength & thus Your faithfulness in 2017!
Beg You for grace & guidance in 2018!**

Ten lessons on prayer from the man after God's own heart.

1. God wants to be your first line of defense (vv.1-3; intro)
2. God hears your prayers (vv.4-6).
3. God answers your prayer with passion (vv.7-15).
4. God is stronger than your enemies (vv.16-19).
5. God has regard for your faithfulness (vv.20-24).
6. God gives grace when the humble cry out (vv.25-29).
7. God keeps those who place themselves in His care (vv.30-36).
8. God ignores the prayers of the wicked (vv.37-42).
9. God can turn your situation completely around (vv.43-45).
10. God gets the complete credit (vv.46-50; conclusion).