

How to Pray in Our Time

Psalm 5

Studies in the Psalms #5

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WE are living in dark days. There is worldwide economic uncertainty and injustice. There is worldwide chaos with wars between armies, between armies and terrorists, between hackers and nations. There is worldwide religious persecution of Christians: communist China tries to control its churches and those it can't it bulldozes; Hindu majority India is seeing the rise of the spirit of Hindutva, fanatical Hinduism; in supposedly peaceful Buddhist Tibet Christians are crucified; Islam continues to seek the eradication of our brothers and sisters; and in the west government is becoming more and more godlike in its power and scope over our lives. We are living in dark days. But this shouldn't surprise us. The New Testament teaches that since the resurrection of Jesus the world has existed in the last days, even the final hour. And Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (Matt. 24:6-8).

So what do we do in these dark days? Psalm 5 teaches us *how to pray in our time* for God's help in hard circumstances. And we pray as those united to Jesus, who as our Mediator also prayed in difficulties (Matt. 26:57–61).

And as you notice on the sermon notes page, this Psalm is divided into two prayers, each with a main request (vv. 1–2a; 8), a shorter reason (vv. 2b–3; 12), and a longer reason (vv. 4–7; 9–11).

Praying with Passion (vv. 1–2a)

In our time, Psalm 5 teaches us that we should be *praying with passion*. We see this as we note how in verse 3 David speaks of praying **in the morning**. This is the morning after he went to sleep in confidence in Psalm 4.¹ The first thing David did when he woke up was to pray. How about you? It was Martin Luther who once said that he was so busy that the only way he could accomplish his daily work was to spend the first three hours of the day in prayer.

We see this passion in prayer in the words used here as well. **Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray.** Look at that

¹ The language of “hear” is also related to Psalm 4:1.

progression: he goes from general **words** to **groan[s]** to **cr[ies]** and finally to **pray[er]**. There are words, the inner groans Paul speaks of in Romans 8,² and the tearful cries of the heart. And in all “this stammering” we should know that it “is more acceptable to God than all the figures of rhetoric, be they ever so fine and glittering.”³ As Jesus taught us, when we pray we are to ask God, and when he doesn’t answer we are to seek God, and when we find him locked behind a door we are to knock until he opens, and we find him, and he answers us (Matt. 6). John Calvin commented that David “prayed neither coldly nor only in few words...he was earnest in bewailing his calamities before God...he persevered in repeating the same complaints.”⁴

And this passion was personal. Note all the “mys” here: **my words, my groaning, my cry, my King and my God**. We can come to God with such passion because we know God intimately in Jesus Christ and we know that he knows us as his sons and daughters. As Luther said, “Where prayer is genuine, there must be earnestness.”⁵ In our time, more than ever, we are to pray with passion.

² *Hagiq* is only used elsewhere in Psalm 39:3 of inmost thoughts; but here the context is groans.

³ Calvin, 55

⁴ Commentary, 52.

⁵ Large Catechism, 82.

Praying for Leading (v. 8)

I have to admit that from time to time when I consider what is going on in our world and in our own nation, in the visible church and in our own, I feel helpless and like giving up. Do you feel that way sometimes? It's okay to be honest. But then when my thoughts turn back to Scripture I see that I cannot give up. Here David teaches us that in the midst of our time we should be *praying for leading*. Look at verse 8: **Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me.** We need to be praying, "Lord, guide me in my interaction with this person at work that I would reflect your righteousness; Lord, when I go back home to see my family lead my feet through all the twists and turns they will try to bring upon me." We all know Jesus says there is a straight and narrow path, but why is it so hard to stay on it?

This is where the contrast in this Psalm between righteousness and wickedness is so stark. We need to pray for the leading of the Lord in our time because of the absolute wickedness around us. We see that in verses 4–6 and 9–10. **For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you** (v. 4). Psalm 1:2 described the delight of the godly in law of Lord, but here the Lord says he does not delight in those who love their

own ways. **The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers** (v. 5). This is not the popular God whom we are told, “loves the sinner but hates the sin.” **You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man** (v. 6). This is the world we live in; this is the world we need the Lord in to lead us. **For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue** (v. 9). This is where Paul drew his language in Romans 3 to describe the sinfulness of sin and of sinners. **Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you** (v. 10). That word for **cast...out** (*ndh*) comes from the list of covenant curses in Deuteronomy 30:4 (and later of the Exile: Neh. 1:9; Jer. 8:3; 24:9; Zeph. 3:19), showing how serious was the law of God against the ungodly in David’s time. To be cast out of the land was a literal way to be cast out of God’s presence; it is typological for the doom that awaits all who reject God in Jesus Christ. If you do, you too will be cast out of God’s gracious presence forever and will only know his justice.

This kind of praying says two things to us. The first is something about us. I’ve said before that biblical prayer, true prayer, has a quality of being

raw. It's honest. It hurts. It expresses pain and frustration. If that how you're feeling right now about yourself, your sin, your situation in life, the time you live in, God invites you to approach him and to pour your heart out. He'll sort it all out!

The second thing this kind of praying says is about God. We're told here that God hates, destroys, and abhors. That's harsh. Those old enough to remember The Johnny Carson Show remember that he would have Jack Hanna on from time to time with all sorts of animals. And sometimes the show would go off the rails because animals are just that: animals. They are not tamed. Brothers and sisters, God is God. Are we willing to accept that? If he is pure love he must also be pure justice. That's what makes him God. This isn't popular with some, so let me state it like this: there is the god you want and then there is the God who is, who just happens to be the God you need! Yes he is pure justice, but as pure love he has sent his Son Jesus Christ to this world to die as a satisfaction to that pure justice so that God can pour out his pure love upon you! Receive Christ today!

Praying in Confidence (vv. 7, 11–12)

The third thing David teaches us here is that in our time we should be

praying in confidence. At the end his life, Caspar Olevianus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, was surrounded by his friends to pray. One friend then asked him, “Dear brother, are you undoubtedly sure of your salvation, as you taught others constantly?” Olevianus answered with his last word: *certissimus*—“most certainly!”

How can anyone be so certain? I mean, we like David are sinners. And as sinners we are no different than the enemies, the wicked, the evil, the boastful, the lying, the bloodthirsty, the deceitful, the untruthful, the flattering, and the rebellious people we know. Here was David’s confidence; here is our confidence: **But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house** (v. 7). The Lord’s **steadfast love** (*chesed*) is his faithfulness? His faithfulness to what? His own promises. He is a promise-making and a promise-keeping God. He promises to save the repentant and believing sinners; and he keeps that promise. And this is no miniscule love. David and we come to God through Christ because of the **abundance** of God’s love. While Psalms 3 and 4 described the abundance of the sins of the many (3:2, 4:6), God’s **steadfast love** superabounds! (Rom. 5:20–21) And when you are feeling totally low in your doubts and sins, meditate on the greatness of God’s grace to a sinner like you!

And it's in this confidence in Christ that verse 11 says, **But let all who take refuge in you rejoice**—how can we not?—**let them ever sing for joy**—will you join me in this?—**and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you**—what a God we serve because he has saved us! As Calvin said, “The remembrance of God must be sweet to us, and fill our hearts with joy, or rather ravish us with love to him, after he has caused us to taste of his goodness.”⁶

Are we living in dark and difficult days? Absolutely. But we have the Lord. He is still God. He is still in charge of the universe. He is still the God who **bless[es] us** and who **cover[s] us with favor as with a shield** (v. 12).⁷ Dark days? Yes. But who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? (Rom. 8)

⁶ Commentary, 63.

⁷ The Hebrew *tsinnah* refers to a large body shield in contrast to the smaller *magen* in 3:3.