

David, Teach Us to Pray (Psalm 86:1–17)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (6/3/2018)

Introduction

1. Psalm 86 is the only psalm of David in Book III. It is unique, yet familiar, quoting frequently from other scriptures.
2. It is also filled with divine names: (1) *Yahweh*, God's covenant name, is used four times, (2) *Elohim*, God's generic title, is used five times, (3) *Adonai*, master or sovereign lord, is used seven times, thus, the *Lord* is directly referred to 16 times in 17 verses.
3. Critics think scribes who feared profaning the divine name, *Yahweh*, replaced it with *Lord*.
Spurgeon wisely observed the foolishness of that speculation: Did the copyists fear profaning the sacred Name, but not fear altering the sacred Word?
4. J. I. Packer observed that we have no less than 150 wonderful examples of prayer to guide us in our quest to pray aright, and this psalm is particularly helpful.
Observe the three sections of the psalm: (1) a plea for Divine audience based on who God is (vv. 1-7); (2) a plea for God's audience based on who David is before the Lord (vv. 8-13), and (3) David's single request for Divine intervention (vv. 14–17).

I. The Three Divine Names

1. His proper name, *Yahweh* ("I Am"), the eternally self-existent One who is faithful in all things (Exodus 3:14 and 34:4-8) Answers two questions: (1) How does He exist? and (2) How does He act? (note verses 5 and 10)
2. *Elohim* (the divine title) is the intensive plural of *El* (the Strong One), implying Trinity in Unity and designating His glorious power.
 - a. The root of the word for *Elohim* means "to swear" (see Hebrews 6:13), implying a *covenant* relationship in the outworking of His purpose.
 - b. "[*Elohim*]" refers to absolute unqualified, unlimited energy" (Campbell Morgan).
3. The title *Adonai* (intensive plural of *Adon*, lord or master) expresses His sovereign dominion over all things.
 - a. It is the title of His authority and designates Him as master and owner.
 - b. His will is to be unquestionably obeyed.
 - c. Failure to keep His commandments is *sin* (1 John 3:4).

II. Arguments for Divine Audience

1. An argument for God to condescend to hear and respond to his prayer (v. 1)
 - a. His reason: "*I am afflicted and in great need.*"
 - b. We must always come to the Lord as beggars in abject poverty, never as equals or even as lessers needing a little help.
2. An argument for God to watch over his life in order to preserve him from all that is dangerous and destructive (v. 2)
 - a. We live in a dangerous sin-cursed world that is governed by God's enemies.
 - b. His reason: "*I am devoted to you.*"
3. The argument for God to keep on saving or preserving His *servant* (slave) who is devoted to His service
 - a. Here David pleads his *humility*—the Lord must hear him because King David is really just a slave in the true King's service (v. 2).
 - b. His reason: "*you are my Elohim.*"
4. The argument for *mercy* (v. 3).
 - a. Mercy is relative to the suffering that one experiences (*consequences*) because of one's own sins.

- b. His reason: “*I call upon you ceaselessly*” (importunate praying). The believer never outgrows his need for God’s merciful attendance upon him; therefore, one must ever plead for mercy.
5. The argument for God to put *joy* and *gladness* in his heart by granting his request (v. 4)
 - a. Joy is God’s gift that we experience when we know that all is right with Him and we have his ear.
 - b. His reason: “*To you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*” David is not trusting anyone or anything else for life.
 6. Verse 5 forms the reason or foundation for all five preceding arguments.
 - a. The sovereign Lord is *good* (*tobe*, generously granting the benefits of welfare, joy, and prosperity).
 - b. The sovereign Lord is *forgiving* (*callach*, ever ready to forgive offences).
 - c. The sovereign Lord is “*abounding in steadfast love*” (*chesed*, covenant love).
The sole qualification to claim His goodness, forgiveness, and covenant love is to “*call upon*” Him (Romans 10:13). This *calling* is a responsive reaction of one in whom God has granted light, understanding, and enabling grace.

III. Preparation to Pray

1. David acknowledges who God is and what He purposes to do in the earth (vv. 8–10). His purpose forms the absolute backdrop for all prayer—the will of God. Knowing His will gives one confidence that He will grant the request.
2. David asks what he needs for his prayer to reach God’s ear (vv. 11, 12).
 - a. “*Teach me your way,*” so that “*I may walk in your truth.*” David needs instruction from the Word of God (Psalm 27:11; 119:33; 32:8; John 14:4-6) so that he may have a firm resolve to obey the truth (Psalm 119:30; Matthew 22:16; Acts 16:17; 18:25, 26; 24:14).
 - b. “*Unite my heart to fear your name.*” David wants a *heart*—a whole, single, and united heart (Matthew 16:24; 5:8; John 15:7ff) with respect to God and His will.
 - c. When the Lord unites his heart, David resolves, “*I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart*” (see 1 Thessalonians 5:18) and “*I will glorify your name forever*” (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).
3. Again, David gives the reason or foundation for his supplication: His standing before God in covenant grace (v. 13). God has saved him from the *penalty* of his sins (v. 13); now he asks that God save him from the *consequences* of them (v. 14).

IV. David’s Sole Petition

1. His need is expressed (v. 14) as contrasted to His understanding of God (v. 15; quoting Exodus 34:6, 7).
 - a. God showed great mercy to Israel for her great sin against Him at Sinai.
 - b. David is being chased by Absalom, the situation of which David himself is largely responsible.
2. His request offered (vv. 16, 17)
 - a. “*Be gracious*” (show favor) to me in the face of my enemies’ attacking me as a result of my own foolishness.
 - b. “*Give strength to your servant*” by *saving* (delivering) the son of your handmaiden—preserving your own purpose in establishing my throne.
 - c. “*Show me a sign of your favor*” (*tobe*, goodness).
David asks that those who hate him may see that the Lord has helped him and comforted him—that God has accepted David’s repentance for his sins and foolishness resulting in the present problem—so that the enemy may be put to shame.

What Can We Take Away?

1. Our one great need is to learn and practice powerful and effectual prayers that the enemies of Christ may be put to shame.
2. Like David, we must seek God’s face for the grace to repent of the sins in our lives that have enabled the enemy to gain such success in our day.