

How to Pray When Alarmed by Evil

Psalm 5

When Christians feel the sting of wickedness in our land, God calls us to pray.

LTS: Psalm 70

As long as there have been newspapers, radio and media programming on TV, bad news has been sensationalized. More often than not, reporters approach stories of tragedy, pain, loss and chaos from an angle that makes it sound as interesting and gripping as possible. And we like it that way, right? Watching the news – even when it's bad news – has become a form of entertainment. But it seems to me that the stories that need to be reported on have become progressively darker, more disturbing, and more difficult to hear.

Consider some of the recent themes. On the top of the list of disturbing stories are the multiple mass-shootings that have left many innocent people maimed or dead. Shootings at schools, shopping centers, movie theaters have become almost commonplace these days. And then there are the stories about terrorist suicide bombings that have repeatedly killed American servicemen and women. Here in the homeland we also have to contend with the recent shift in local and federal legal statutes designed to accommodate the modern sexual revolution. With that has come a militant insistence that what is verifiably false about human sexuality be accepted as true, and what is verifiably established as human life must be thought of as non-life.

This kind of news doesn't have to be sensationalized, it is inherently gripping, frightening, and alarming. There is no doubt that the situation in our country has changed and is changing. You don't have to be a Christian to feel the shockwaves of this kind of news, but it does seem that more and more of it is designed to target people of faith.

Whereas once the church was viewed as the anchor of moral stability for our country, it is now viewed as the primary obstacle standing in the way of moral progress. Men and women in powerful positions are now telling the church to either get on board or pay the price.

Of course, when Christians feel the sting of wickedness and evil in our land our first impulse is to become fearful, worried, and alarmed. Rather than give into that impulse, however, the Lord would want us to pray. But how do you pray when the wicked are in power. How do you pray when it feels like the enemy may soon show

up at your door? Well, King David had personal experience with living under the threat of evil and in Psalm 5 he teaches us to pray.

Before we dig into David's prayer, let's take a moment to read this Psalm together.

Read Psalm 5

No one knows for sure what the context of this psalm was. Some think it is simply a continuation of the context of Psalm 3 where David's son, Absalom, had usurped the throne, and David was on the run for his life. But there is nothing in Psalm 5 that would indicate such a context. And we can be grateful for that because the lack of explicit context opens the door for us to insert our own personal context.

What we do know about David's experience in this Psalm is that he is concerned about powerful, wicked men who have made themselves his enemies and were seeking to cause him harm. Consider the words David uses to describe them.

- A. (4) they delight in wickedness and evil.
- B. (5) they are boastful evildoers
- C. (6) They speak lies, are bloodthirsty and deceitful
- D. (9) they have no truth in them, and they are destructive flatterers.
- E. (10) they have rebelled against the Lord and have committed an abundance of transgressions.

These are the kinds of people who are exercising influence in Israel during David's reign as king. There is no need to sensationalize this story, it is disturbing and alarming on its face. So, what does David do? He prays. And the first thing we learn from David's prayer is that when we find ourselves in a similar situation (which I have argued that we now do) we should:

I. Call on the Lord with Confident Earnestness:

1. Notice how David prays:

Read 1-3

2. In the two previous psalms David talked about the extraordinary grace God gave him in the ability to enjoy restful sleep. I say it was an extraordinary grace because he went to sleep knowing that his enemies were on the hunt for him. But here it seems

that David has just awoken from sleep, and his concern about God's enemies and his own are still plaguing his soul.

2. At this point in the prayer David is not really praying, but rather "groaning." He says, "consider my groaning." You know, there are sometimes circumstances in life that affect your soul so deeply words seem inadequate. All you can do is groan. But David was confident that God would hear the unexpressed desire of his soul.

3. His words remind us of what Paul says in Rom. 8:26 that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

- A. Over the years I have counseled men and women whose grief was so pronounced; whose sorrow of heart was so deep that, in the presence of God all they could do was groan and weep.
- B. Some of you have experienced this level of sorrow or grief, and you know what it's like to wake up in the morning and lack the capacity to do anything more than sigh and groan. Can I just encourage with this truth? The Lord understands your groaning. He receives it as earnest prayer.

4. At the beginning, David's is a wordless prayer, but it is not a timid prayer. David prays in the confidence that God will hear him. Notice the three expressions:

- A. (1) "Give ear to my words, and consider my groanings"
- B. (2) "Give attention to my cry"
- C. (3) "You hear my cry."

5. That last statement "You hear my cry" tells us that David did not wonder whether God cared about his concerns. He prayed with a confident earnestness.

6. Notice too, that David's prayer is marked NOT only by earnestness, but with humility. He calls God "my king and my God."

- A. I say this is a mark of humility because in Israel David was king. He was the highest authority in the Land. Whenever the court gathered, David always had the first seat and the final word. Nevertheless, he was happy to concede that before God he was merely a servant.
- B. Beloved, this is why in past generations when people approached God

in prayer, they did so on their knees.

7. And by the way: David did this as a daily discipline. He says (3) “In the morning you hear my voice. In the morning I prepare a sacrifice. The Heb scholars I consulted this week indicate that the idea here is that he had a standing appointment with God – Morning, by morning.

- A. Do you have a daily standing appointment with God? Do you have a time each day when you approach the throne of grace in confident humility to offer humble worship, confession of sins at time and to pour out your secrete concerns?
- B. David apparently met with the Lord, morning by morning.
- C. And BTW: when David says “In the morning I prepare a sacrifice and watch,” the Heb. text might better be rendered, “in the morning I prepare and watch. Some translations read “in the morning I will direct my prayer.” To “prepare” or “direct” carries the idea of placing things in a row or putting thing in order.
- D. David approached the Lord in a thoughtful manner. He wasn’t flippant, rash, or casual when approaching God with his concerns. And when he was done, he “watched.” He looked up” in expectation.
- E. Albert Barnes writes:

Prayer should not be rash; it should not be performed negligently or with a light spirit; it should engage the profound thought of the soul, and it should be performed with the same serious regard to time and to propriety which was demanded in the solemn and carefully prescribed rights of the ancient temple-service.

- F. I think what he means is that prayer should be something we plan for; something we take seriously, and something worthy of significant time. This is how David apparently prayed.
- G. And when he did pray, he offered his petitions with confident humility, and then he believed that God would do something in response to his prayers. This is confident, humble faith. He expected things from God. He expected that God would move and do marvelous things in

response to prayer? So how do you pray when the wicked are on the move. How do you pray when it feels like the enemy may soon show up at your door. Or at least in your town? You call upon God with confident earnestness. Second, you...

H.

II. Remind your Soul of God's Mercy and Holiness

Read 4-7

1. While it is true that in his distress David calls upon God with confident earnestness, when he actually begins praying, the first thing he does is remind himself of what he knows is true about God.

A. You see, this is the ground and anchor of our confidence in prayer. Our confidence in prayer is not in our own eloquence. Our confidence is not even in our own faith. Our confidence is in what we know to be true about God.

B. We might say, our confidence is in the attributes of God as he has revealed them to us.

2. So what did David know about God that gave him confidence to call upon him when he was alarmed by evil? Notice what he says.

- (4) For you are NOT a God who delights in wickedness; evil may NOT dwell with you.
- Implicit in this statement is (I think) is David's belief that God is sovereign even over the deeds of evil men. It's as if David is wrestling with the role that God plays in the drama of evil in the world. But of this much he is sure: though God rules over the wicked, He does not delight in wickedness, nor does he allow evil to dwell in his presence. IN other words, God is not on the side of the wicked. If it looks like evil people are gaining ground, it is NOT because God is with them. Why? Because he is Holy.
- In our day and culture people like to think of God as a loving God, a merciful God, a patient God. And although these things are true, the most important thing about God is that he is Holy. God is infinite in all

his perfections and all of his perfections are holy perfections. Everything about God is holy.

- Yes, he is a God of love, but his is a holy love.
- Yes, he is a God of mercy, but it is a holy mercy.
- Yes, God is a God of patience, but it is a holy patience.
- He is a just God, and all his justice is holy.
- He is a wrathful God, and all of his wrath is holy.
- He is a jealous God, and all his jealousy is holy.

3. Beloved, listen to me (all eyes up here for a moment). As long as the God you preach is tolerant, loving, merciful, and gracious, the world will love your God. But the one thing they will not tolerate is Holiness.

- A. The holy God is indeed loving, but he does not tolerate sin.
- B. The holy God is a gracious God, but he does not tolerate sin.
- C. The reason people take offence to the gospel is NOT because they have logically, or scientifically reasoned that there is no such thing as God. Rather, they are offended by the gospel because it presents God as supremely holy. And because he is Holy, he Must, he Must, He Must address our sin.
- D. Friend, do you know why Jesus died such a horrific death? Do you know why his hands and feet were pierced with huge nails to hang him on a Roman Cross? Do you comprehend why he was mocked, ridiculed, and stripped naked for everyone to see? Do you know why he suffered such shame? Do you know why he was pierced in the heart to make sure he was dead? He endured all of this because God is Holy.
- E. You may say, “But I thought Jesus himself was sinlessly holy!” Yes, but God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might be saved. You see, on that cross, Holy God treated His own son as if he had committed all of your wicked, evil, rebellious sins of thought word and deed. And he did that so that he could treat you as if you are... Holy in his sight. He bore your sin in his body on the cross. Since the wages of sin is death, he died in your place.

- F. Why can David pray with earnest confidence? Because he understands that the most important thing there is to know about God: He is Holy!
- G. And because he is Holy, the sins of the wicked must be judged. Think about it. If a known criminal is caught in the act and brought before a judge, what should the judge do? Any rogue judge can declare him Not Guilty and set him free. But what about all the damage he has done? What about justice? You see, if God us a good judge - if He really is a holy judge - than there must be justice.

4. David understands this. He knows that God will not leave the guilty unpunished. So, in his prayer he says...

Read v. 5-6

5. And he doesn't stop with verse six. Pick up in v. 9.

6. Now, if you are thinking clearly, honestly, and humbly at this point you are probably saying to yourself something like, "Wait a minute. I think I can identify with these wicked men much more than I can identify with Jesus. I Mean, I've done a number of these wicked things and Jesus didn't do any of them!

How does anyone get to have a relationship with God? That is exactly the question we should be asking.

7. And the answer to that question is this: if you get justice from God, there is no hope. But God also delights to give mercy. And David knows that's his only hope. So he says,

Read 7

8. You see, David knows God is Holy. That explains the last words of this verse, "In the fear of you." The fear of the Lord is a Holy Reverence. The fear of the Lord arises in your heart when you embrace the reality of what you deserve from God because of your sin, and that he offers you mercy anyway.

9. How Does David get a vital relationship with the Lord so that he can call on him with earnest confidence? He received that relationship through the abundance of God's Loving-kindness (Hesced: O.T. word for Grace)

10.

So how do you pray when the wicked get the upper hand? I. Call on the Lord with Confident Earnestness (1-3)

II. Remind Your Soul of God's Mercy and Holiness

III. Petition the Lord to Guide us in Righteousness.

Read v. 8

1. There's nothing complicated here. "Lead me in your righteousness" means two things. First, it means lead me down the right path. Second, if it is the right path, it is also the righteous path. It is the path that will honor the Lord. That's the path every believer wants to be on. We just want to please our Savior.

2. David knows that when the wicked are out to get you, you feel like you're walking through a minefield. So, what do you ask of God? You pray, Lead me, O Lord. By the invisible hand of your providence and by the instruction of your word, guide me. Direct me. Carry me. And give me the grace to follow.

3. As for the wicked who hate God's word and despise God's holiness (read v. 10).

4. It's NOT OK for you to take justice in your own hands, and we are not allowed to be vindictive toward our enemies. But there are times when the wickedness is so wicked that it is right and proper to petition God to give the perpetrators the justice they deserve. Not a sinful kind of justice, but a holy justice that is meted perfectly out by the God who is Holy, Holy, Holy.

5. So when we feel the sting of the wicked getting the upper hand, how should we pray?

I. Call on the Lord with Confident Earnestness (1-3)

II. Remind Your Soul of God's Mercy and Holiness

III. We Petition the Lord to Guide You in Righteousness

6. And finally,

IV. Expect the Lord to Guard us with Joyfulness.

1. IN the end, the wicked will receive a just condemnation. But for those who love the Lord, they will be rewarded with inexpressible joy.

Read 11-12

2. Nehemiah said, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). In the day when the wicked seem to be making unhindered progress, the righteous can still have joy. Why, because their joy is in God himself; the forgiver of all their transgressions and the lover of their souls.

3. When they take refuge in God, they are truly safe. And where there is security in God there is joy. Those who love the name of the Lord (i.e. the person and character of the Lord) exalt in him. They are ever praising him, delighting in Him, being satisfied in Him. And that brings Him great glory.

When Christians feel the sting of wickedness in our land, God calls us to pray.

Ruth Brown Funeral:

Visitation Sun 2:00-4:00

10:00 Service - 9/16/2019

Graveside service.

Dinner for your family (12 family members)

Order of service will be provided

Music

Steve wants to thank everyone for coming

Psalm 23 (ask Melanie and Joe)

Song: How Great Thou Art (Check with Melanie, Joe, and Jason)

Family members talk? No

Meet with Family Sunday Evening after visitation 4:30 or 5:00.

Funeral Director

Elizabeth Hernandez