

# Psalm 5

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you for having us here this evening and for inviting me to preach. We've been very grateful to be able to come and perch here for some services recently while our own church is unable to meet in person.

! So it's been lovely to be with you all, albeit under such restrictions. I wonder if it's not cheeky if I might be allowed a second reading. Would you open Romans chapter 3, please, before we turn back to Psalm 5.

And have a look at Romans chapter 3, verse 9 and following, which I'm going to read before we start back with the psalm. Romans 3, verse 9.

Paul writes, What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written.

None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

[ 1 : 06 ] Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

In their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Let's pray together.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray. Heavenly Father, that is our prayer tonight, that you would teach us to pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, would you turn back, please, to Psalm 5. There is a children's sheet. Anyone primary school age, there's a sheet with both some words that you could tally mark as we go, and also some questions.

[ 2 : 25 ] So you might want to set eyes on that if you are in primary school. I take it that we'll find praying hard.

I could invite those of you who don't to put your hands up at this point, but I'm confident of the result. We find it hard to find time to pray.

We find it hard to be motivated to pray. And we find it hard sometimes to know what the content of our prayers should be. It's no surprise, then, to find the disciples asking the Lord Jesus, teach us to pray.

They knew that they needed help with their prayer lives. And that's exactly what we're going to find in Psalm 5 this evening. Help to pray. Specifically, three elements of our prayer lives.

First of all, the when. Secondly, the why. And thirdly, the what. So Psalm 5 is going to help us with the when of praying, the why we should pray, and the what we should pray.

[ 3 : 27 ] And first of all, then, with the when. I wonder when you find it easiest to pray. I suspect, if you're anything like me, that you find it easiest to pray when there's some kind of pressing crisis coming upon you.

That we realize when all other helps are taken away, that we must cast ourselves on the Lord. That would certainly be my experience, and I think our experience as a family, that we most readily pray when things are going badly.

And there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, that's exactly what you find in Psalm 5. Because David is in a bad way. Verse 1, Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my groaning.

He's groaning. So he's not just speaking. He's also groaning. It goes deeper than merely words. There's a deep groaning in David at this point.

In fact, he's crying out. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God. For to you do I pray. And I wonder if, when he says in verse 3, O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice.

[ 4 : 34 ] That's because when he wakes up in the morning, the trouble is so great that it's the first thing on his mind, is the trouble, and he cries out to God. It could just be a reference to his daily quiet time.

But I wonder if there's more going on there, that actually his waking thought is the trouble that surrounds him, and so straight away he cries out to God. Sometimes in the Psalms, the title will help us to know exactly what the situation was that the psalmist faced.

But here that is not the case. To the choir master for the flutes, a psalm of David doesn't tell us much about the trouble. But I think we should understand that the psalms were put together in the way they're put together for a reason.

It wasn't just that whoever collected the psalms threw them all up in the air and they landed in a particular order. They're arranged. And when you think that, you go back to Psalm 4, and then you go back to Psalm 3, and you look at the title of Psalm 3, and I think we find a bit more detail about the kind of crisis that the anointed king of Psalm 2 is in, in this section of the psalms.

A psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his son. Absalom, his son, who plotted to take away his father's kingdom.

[ 5 : 57 ] Absalom, his son, who therefore turned against David personally, but also politically. Remember those events that flowed out of David committing adultery with Bathsheba and killing Uriah the Hittite, her husband, or having him killed.

Then the prophet says the sword has entered David's house. It's never going to leave it. And the ultimate outworking of that is that Absalom, his own son, turns against him and wrestles his kingdom from him.

And I think that makes sense of some of the details of Psalm 5. When he describes his enemies, he focuses very much on the way they speak. So verse 9, There is no truth in their mouth.

Their inmost self is destruction. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue. And there's a memorable moment with Absalom when he positions himself at the city gates of Jerusalem.

And anyone who's coming to Jerusalem with some trouble that they need help with, he accosts them on the way in. And he says, Oh, you know, Oh, that I were the judge. Oh, that I were the judge.

[ 7 : 00 ] And by doing this, by intercepting people on their way in and talking to them about their difficult situations, we read, He stole the hearts of the men of Israel. So he's sitting there at the gates, using his tongue to flatter and to deceive.

So that, I think, fits with the trouble in Psalm 5, being a continuation of the trouble from Psalm 3 with Absalom. And so most simply, we learn from this that it's right to cry out to God in a crisis.

Here is King David crying out to the Lord because he is surrounded by dreadful trouble. His very own son has turned against him and he is losing or lost his kingdom and he's on the run.

So it is right to turn to God in a crisis because the crisis is often the time when we realize there is no one else who can help us. So that's the when.

But secondly, the why. Well, I wonder why you pray. And one way to discover why you pray is perhaps to think of some of the verses that come to mind that encourage you to pray.

[ 8 : 11 ] Yes, when you find yourself praying, what are the sorts of verses you're thinking of that get you praying? And it might be the kind of verse that you find in Philippians 4.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. So you think, I'm feeling anxious.

Ah, Philippians 4. I must turn to the Lord. I must rejoice in the Lord. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I'm anxious. I turn to the Lord to pray and he promises me peace. What a fantastic why for praying. Because God promises us peace in the midst of our anxieties.

Or maybe you think, for example, of 1 Peter 5. And it's the Lord's care that motivates you to pray. Casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

[ 9 : 14 ] These are excellent reasons to pray. And they're probably fairly commonly held reasons why we pray. But we find something different in Psalm 5.

And it's pretty surprising. And it's pretty shocking when you line it up against the normal thoughts that I think we have that get us praying. We get in the course of the psalm three reasons to pray. Three whys. And they're each expressed with a four. So verse four, here's a reason, for you. Verse nine, for there. And verse 12, for you.

So those are the three reasons we're going to look at briefly. And the first two are fairly similar. So the first why you should pray follows those prayers in verses one to three that we've just talked about.

Comes in verse four. And it's a big surprise. So David says in one to three, Lord, I'm praying to you. Verse four, for you are not a God who delights in wickedness.

[ 10 : 18 ] Evil may not dwell with you. And he gives you really three D's here. You're not a God who delights in wickedness. Evil may not dwell with you.

The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Delighting, dwelling, and destroying. Three reasons that get David praying. Putting it simply, David prays because he knows that God hates evildoers.

He prays because he believes that God hates. And notice that it doesn't say that God hates evil, that he hates the sin, but not the sinner.

No, it says he hates the sinner. He hates evildoers. It is, along with the verse in Psalm 11, an astonishing testimony to the hatred of God for people who do evil.

[ 11 : 26 ] And that, to our ears, is shocking. And perhaps all the more shocking as a thing that should get us praying. We pray, let me put it like this, because God is intolerant.

And in an age which prizes tolerance, that might disturb us. Although, actually, we don't have to pause for long, do we, before we realize that our age does not prize intolerance. Our age is very quick to be...

Sorry, it does not prize tolerance. Our age is very quick to be intolerant of all sorts of things. You only need to look at the protests on the streets, on many issues, to see that people, in some cases, rightly, are intolerant of many things, and prize being intolerant.

Intolerant. It's not as simple as saying, oh, our age loves tolerance. It tolerates certain things, but remains very intolerant of others. So, actually, the Lord's intolerance is not that countercultural.

What is countercultural is what it is that he doesn't tolerate, namely, evil doers. Scripture, of course, teaches that God loves sinners, but it also teaches that he hates sinners.

[ 12 : 40 ] And the marvel of the gospel is how those two things come together and how he deals with his own hatred of evil doers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore, his love proceeds towards sinners.

So, God is to be praised because he hates evil doers. David, opposed by an evil doer, probably Absalom, turns to pray because he knows that the Lord hates evil doers and will therefore listen to him when he prays.

He knows that the Lord is concerned for this. It is his business. He knows that the Lord is more offended by it than he himself is. And so he finds hope and reason to pray.

So I want to encourage you this evening, will you add this to your armory of reasons to pray? Will you add this to the things that motivate you to pray?

If you pray to deal with your anxiety, if you pray because you know that the Lord cares, will you also pray because you know that the Lord is absolutely, implacably opposed to evil doers?

[ 13 : 59 ] God hates all evil doers. The second why. So in verses 7 to 8, David talks about entering God's house, bowing down, and he prays to him.

And then he gives this reason in verse 9, for. And what he does then is he describes the evil of the evil doers. So 7 and 8, he comes and prays again and then says, for there is no truth in their mouth, their inmost self is destruction, their throat is an open grave, they flatter with their tongue.

In other words, the second thing that motivates David to pray here is simply the evilness of the evil doers. He observes their evil and that's what has led him to pray.

Now there's no sugar coating the reality of evil in the Bible. I wonder if you've ever met someone who has said to you that they ceased being a Christian because they observed some horrific thing that happened.

I think John Humphreys was somebody who talked about that with the Abbafan disaster, didn't he? How that was the thing that finished it for him and God. Well the scriptures are very clear from beginning to end that the world is full of the most horrific evil.

[ 15 : 20 ] There's no pretense in the scriptures about that. we shouldn't be surprised when we meet evil. We shouldn't allow it to disillusion us when we meet evil.

And here's a good example of a text which tells us just how bad the wicked are. And it focuses quite topically for us I think on the mouth.

You are masked because of the harm that might come out of your mouth at the moment. Well that's what we find here isn't it?

Their throat is an open grave. Imagine an open grave. It has a voracious appetite. It's going to swallow you up. It's like the jaws, literally the jaws of death wanting to swallow you up.

Well that's what their throat is like. They lie. There's no truth in their mouth. And they're smooth as well. They flatter. So here's another reason to pray.

[ 16 : 26 ] Because we know that the evil that's around us is really, really bad. And it has all of these dimensions of deceit.

They could be personal, a son against a father, an Absalom against a David. They could be political, stealing the kingdom from him. all sorts of evil. They can be systemic. We can think of many examples of the evilness of evil.

And as we see it, and we understand how bad it is, that itself is a reason to pray. So that when we hear about the persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria, or we hear about the camps in North Korea, or we hear about the destruction of churches and the imprisonment of pastors in China, we are hearing about the evil of evil, and that is exactly what led David to pray, was the observation of how bad evil is.

So add that to your armory of reasons to pray. When you feel the horror of the things that we see in the world or hear about in the world, that is a reason to pray.

And then there's a third why. This comes in verse 12. So verse 11 again is David talking about praying, asking the Lord to protect people.

[ 17 : 51 ] And then here's the reason, verse 12, for you bless the righteous, O Lord, you cover him with favor as with a shield. So David's reason for praying, his third why, is that he believes that God blesses the righteous and covers them with his favor as with a shield.

It's a beautiful image, isn't it? You imagine the Lord putting a shield of protection over you and that is his favor protecting you. But isn't there a bit of a problem here?

For you bless the righteous. Now, bear in mind, I've just tried to persuade you that this is probably off the back of Psalm 3 from the time when David was being pursued by his son Absalom and was losing his kingdom.

Now, why was that happening to David? Because of his adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah the Hittite. And yet, we find him here in Psalm 5 delighting in the fact that God blesses the righteous.

And surely we have to ask, who is David to stand there and take comfort in the thought that God blesses the righteous? Surely he's one of the least righteous people.

[ 19 : 15 ] Surely he's only in this situation because he isn't righteous. And then, of course, we think of ourselves. Could you ever envisage taking the words of the Psalms on your lips in which you say, Lord, I plead my righteousness before you?

given your consciousness of your own sins? And actually, we're not the only ones who think that way about Psalm 5.

And this is why I wanted to read Romans 3. Because in Romans 3, Paul quotes from Psalm 5, from verse 9, and a series of other texts as well, and he quotes from Psalm 5 precisely to prove that nobody is righteous.

So think of how that reading from Romans 3 began. We've already charged, Paul says, that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

So everyone is under sin. And then he says at the end of it, by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight. Since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Every mouth is stopped by the word of God, Paul says.

[ 20 : 35 ] And he says that using our psalm, using Psalm 5. He takes the words of Psalm 5 and says, well, actually, those descriptions from Psalm 5 aren't only true of an Absalom.

They are actually true of the entire human race. So it's not that the world is full of righteous Davids and unrighteous Absaloms.

Rather, according to the way that Paul uses this psalm, we are all unrighteous before God. In which case, we have to end up thinking, well, how does this reason really help us pray?

For you bless the righteous, O Lord. God because we read it and think, well, that's not us. But we need to remember that that was also true of David.

He could have thought the same thing, couldn't he? And we need to remember that David functions in Scripture and in the Psalms to point ahead beyond himself so that the David who comes out of Psalm 2 as the anointed king, the Messiah, that's what the anointed one is, he's the Messiah, who comes into Psalm 3 with Absalom as his enemy and ends up in the trouble of Psalm 5, is a David who is pointing us beyond himself to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 22 : 04 ] And it's striking that Psalm 5 verse 12 says, you bless the righteous, it really, literally, you could translate it the righteous one. You bless the righteous, capital T, capital R.

and there is a righteous one, that is the Lord Jesus himself. And we can imagine, because we know he did, the Lord Jesus praying Psalm 5.

We know he got up in the morning to pray Mark 1 verse 35 and maybe he took the words of this Psalm on his lips. We know that the Lord Jesus had lying enemies, don't we?

just like David does here. People bearing false witness against him leading to his crucifixion. So we know that he was in similar circumstances and that he was the righteous one.

And we know indeed that God the Father did bless this righteous one after his enemies killed him by raising him from the dead and exalting him to glory.

[ 23 : 15 ] He did indeed favour him. So we can understand how this Psalm, this pleading of righteousness could be true for Jesus.

But how does that help us understand its application to David? And does it have any relevance to us? Well it does. I think the key here is that when we read the Psalms we're to find Christ in them. We're to think what does it mean for Christ to pray this Psalm? But we're then to ask ourselves this question. Well where am I? Where am I?

And the answer to that question is not I'm in healing. It is I am in Christ. Christ is the head as Paul puts it. We are the body.

And so the way that we get to pray a Psalm like Psalm 5, the way that we can stand before a holy God and plead our is as those who are in Christ as the body of this head.

[ 24 : 21 ] And then indeed like David we can plead our righteousness because in Christ it's Christ's righteousness. And the favour that God shows to us is the overflow of the favour that he shows to his son the Lord Jesus.

So there's a wonderful third why to pray. Not because you think you're righteous in yourself but because you know that you are in Christ the righteous one and the will of the father is to bless the son and those who are in him and to cover them with favour as with a shield.

So three whys. and lastly the what. What should we pray? What do we learn from this psalm about what we should pray?

Well verse eight is the first prayer I think lead me O Lord in your righteousness because of my enemies make your way straight before me. Is it that David is conscious of being tempted? Is it just that he needs protection from them?

Well he prays that the Lord would today I think is his prayer about the enemies themselves. Verse 10 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.

[ 25 : 58 ] Destroy your enemies Lord he's saying. May they be caught in their own schemes let them fall by their own counsels.

So is that the what that we should pray? Can we pray that? Let me give you three thoughts on that question. First of all David's not just trying to get rid of his personal rivals.

The application of praying this kind of thing is not if you're in school probably not many of you are in school at the moment but when you're in school this is not a mandate to pray that the Lord would remove your rival in the football team or the person who can run that bit faster than you do or that really annoying person with a neat handwriting or the person who scores more than you do it's not about personal rivalry it's not in the workplace Lord get that person out of my way so I can climb the ladder faster that's not what David's praying here David is praying against the enemies of not David

but the enemies of God so this psalm mandates praying against the Lord's enemies who sometimes are our enemies somebody could be your enemy not because you're the Lord's but just because you're annoying that's not what's in view here this is about where we are opposed because of people's enmity to God so there's a great restriction upon this therefore it's not just about getting rid of your own rivals it's about the

Lord's enemies that's quite clear from the end of verse 10 isn't it they have rebelled against you that's the problem secondly I think it is possible to pray these words of verse 10 while praying for the salvation of your enemies because we can pray the most blood curdling imprecatory psalm cursing psalm mindful of the fact that one of the ways that God kills his enemies is by crucifying them with Christ when he converts them and killing the old self and so we can always be thinking when we pray that the Lord would destroy one of his enemies that he would do that precisely by killing that rebel and turning him into a son and then thirdly of course we know don't we that one day the day of judgment God will do exactly this he will punish all of his enemies as they deserve and so in a sense in praying that the

Lord would bring down his enemies we are praying for the return of Christ we are praying come Lord Jesus every time we pray come Lord Jesus this is an implication of it with those understandings in place it seems to me that we must pray this it seems to me that Jesus himself prayed this psalm and we must pray it in him so what kind of things are we thinking of here then well I take it that the enemies of God are the enemies of his people and that a principal application of this psalm for us is to pray that the Lord would destroy the enemies of his people in northern Nigeria in North Korea in China and all the other places of the world where they are opposed that he would do that by killing them in conversion and if not that he would do that by simply removing them in a way every time we pray the Lord's prayer I think we're praying psalm 5 your kingdom come is praying that

[ 29 : 34 ] God's rule would be established over the nations and that involves the kinds of things that David prays for here it has of course more local application for us at those points where we are opposed for being the Lord's people as I said it's not where we're opposed because we've just behaved badly in the office and annoyed people it is where we are facing opposition because we are the Lord's because of the name of the Lord being upon us and at that point certainly we can take this psalm on our lips and pray it so the when we'll there's absolutely nothing wrong with praying in a crisis the why don't just pray because God cares because he gives peace but pray because he hates pray because he is holy pray because he is implacably opposed to evildoers pray because evil is real the scriptures are frank about that and as you sense the horror of evil let that turn you to prayer and pray because

God blesses the righteous supremely the righteous one his son the Lord Jesus Christ but also us his people in him in Christ and what should you pray well pray that the Lord would keep you keep us would make his way straight before us and pray that he would indeed destroy the enemies of his own kingdom I hope that Psalm 5 will help you to pray for the advance of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ for his honor and glory in our day let's pray together