

Pleading for the Present, Planning for the Future Psalm 17:1-15

Sometimes we can get so stuck in the present when we are facing overwhelming circumstances that we fail to see beyond them to what is going to be better.

Running a marathon had always been a goal of mine since college. When I turned 40 I decided that was year to accomplish that dream. I picked out a training program and followed it as best I could. I did intervals and long runs and speed runs. I challenged myself in some races to check my progress. There were days when I felt like not running, days when in the middle of a run I wanted to slow down or stop short, days when my muscle soreness wanted to convince me that it wasn't worth giving up a little extra sleep or a spot on a soft sofa. Had I only looked at each individual day, I probably would have given up and just settled with easy runs and shorter distances, but I chose to look beyond each day and each workout to the end goal of reaching the marathon finish line.

That's where we find David. If you have titles or headings in your Bible for the Psalms, yours may simply say "A prayer of David." There are three other psalms that have this title with a fourth attributed to Moses.

There are over a dozen different words in the Hebrew language for prayer. The word in this title means to intervene. From the Cambridge dictionary an intervention is the action of becoming intentionally involved in a difficult situation in order to improve or prevent it from getting worse.

We talk about medical intervention, which may be preventative or therapeutic. Preventative interventions prevent disease from occurring and in so doing reduce the possibility of new cases. During COVID, the CDC recommended preventative measures such as social distancing, closing schools and non-essential businesses, getting vaccines and wearing masks. Independently, other businesses allowed office personnel to work from home.

Therapeutic interventions are those treatments that

postpone the effects of a disease. Medications may not eradicate the disease, but it can slow down the progress of the disease.

Last week the news showed another kind of intervention. A young man walked into a Subway restaurant where a customer was assaulting an employee. He intervened by tackling the guy with a wrestling move and pinning him until the police could arrive.

David is pleading with God to intervene on his behalf. From the context of the psalm, it's unclear as to the specific occasion to which David is referring. What is clear is that he is in big trouble, and he needs God's immediate intervention. A physical enemy was pressing in around him and he was calling for help.

A number of commentaries I read believe it's when Saul was fiercely pursuing David and had him boxed in with nowhere to go recorded in I Samuel 23. David was told that the Philistines had raided a town. He asked the Lord if he should go and attack to free the city. The Lord told him to go, but his men were afraid because they could end up fighting two enemies: the Philistines and the forces of Saul who had been after them. David again asked the Lord for guidance and the Lord responded the same way that they should go and attack the Philistines and save the people.

They went and were victorious, but word reached Saul where David was. He rallied his troops to march against David because they were in a town with gates and bars. In other words, they were locked in with no seeming way of escape. David heard that Saul was on his way and asked the Lord if the townsfolk would surrender him to Saul if he stayed. The Lord said they would, so he left with his men and went into the desert. The Ziphites went and told Saul where David was and would help capture him. The end of the chapter says that Saul was closing in fast on David, but word came that the Philistines were raiding Israel so he called off the pursuit in order to defend the nation.

The truth is, it could have been any number of times when David was hard pressed by his enemies when he cried out to God to intervene.

Now, we aren't generally in danger of facing a physical enemy like what David was facing. Our enemies are unseen. John tells us our enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil. (**I John 2:15-16**) Of course, we know that the devil is always out to tempt and attack the believer through all kinds of wily tricks. The flesh refers to the natural desires of the sin nature like anger, lust, addictions, and so on. The world speaks of cultural or societal beliefs and values that are opposed to the Lord. They can be materialism and a desire for instant gratification. We can call all these spiritual enemies.

Let's look at David's plea and see what we can glean from it that can be applied to the enemies that we face.

David first pleads from his integrity.

I. DAVID PLEADS FROM HIS INTEGRITY – vv. 1-9

In **verses 1-5** there is the plea from His life.

A. The Plea From His Life – vv. 1-5

In the opening verse we see the intensity and the urgency of his petition.

“Hear, O Lord, my righteous plea”

“Listen to my cry”

Give ear to my prayer”

Charles Spurgeon remarked: **“The troubled heart craves for the ear of God...If our God could not or would not hear us, our state would be deplorable indeed.”**

David knew where to go when he was in trouble. He is in imminent danger, and he called out to the Lord. David was conscious of his integrity, that he had obeyed the Lord. He even stated that his urgent plea was a righteous plea or a just plea because it was not coming from deceitful or hypocritical lips. What he had to say wasn't made up or embellished in any way. He was telling the truth. His plea was genuine, sincere, and without pretense.

Listen to what John Phillips refers to as something important when it comes to prayer when we bring

our petitions to God. **“The first indispensable condition of real prayer is a good conscience.”**
Psalm 66:18 “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

Proverbs 16:29 (Amplified) “The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the [consistently] righteous (the upright, in right standing with Him).”

Isaiah 1:15 “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.”

John 9:31 “We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will.”

James 4:3 “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

If we want God to hear and answer, we need to spend time in confession so that we have a good conscience with God. David had a just or right plea he could bring to God about his circumstances because he lived with integrity. It came from someone whose life was right with God.

Now don't confuse being righteous with being sinless. To be righteous means to live in accordance with God's law. In other words, he was doing his best to be obedient to God. Simply put, a righteous person does what is right, and in this case, what is right in God's sight. There is an important distinction to be made here because there is a self-righteousness that is established by an individual or a society where behaviors and attitudes can be deemed appropriate or right that are not what God or His Word would deem to be morally or divinely right. David's standard of righteousness doesn't come from within himself and neither does his standard of righteousness come from society or from culture. Just because culture says it's legal doesn't make it right. We have a moral relativism in our nation today that is far from what would be considered godly or biblical righteousness as outlined in Scripture.

God's Word and His holy character are the measuring line for our righteous standard. David could compare his conduct with the conduct of the wicked and say that his pleas were just because his life was right with God.

In this divine courtroom as David makes his case before God, he explains two areas of his life that are right with God. The first is in regard to his words.

1. His words were right – vv. 1-3

As David closed **Psalm 139**, he asked God to search his heart and see if there was any wicked way in him. **Is there any wrong motive that would come out in wrong words?**

Luke 6:45 “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

Ephesians 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their need.”

Instead of lying to others or slandering them, our words are to be spoken with grace.

David invited God to look in his heart and see that He wouldn't find anything because he had determined not to sin with his mouth. In **verse 3** David told God to look at him from every angle and He would not find anything because there was nothing to condemn him, and therefore God should defend him.

Sometimes God uses trials to purify us. A goldsmith will heat up gold to extreme temperatures to separate the gold from any impurities. This process is to purify the gold. After that, the gold is taken to an assayer. He also subjects the gold to extreme heat. His purpose isn't to purify it further, but to prove its value. God does the same with us. There are fires of testing that purify us and there are fires that prove us. They first removes the impurities in our life and then test the value of our life.

David told God to test him, and it would prove his integrity and that his plea was just.

Walvoord and Zuck suggest that if we are going to

live right before God, we need to resolve in our heart to obey Him in our words. We shouldn't be cutting or critical or condemning others in our words. One author suggested that we sin more with our words than in our actions.

Our words can be an enemy that encircles us and press in on us. As the song goes that we learned in Sunday School “oh, be careful little mouth what you say.” A lot of hurt, resentment, bitterness, anger and malice can be avoided if we watched our words.

Is it our intention not to sin with our lips? If we invited God to search our heart, what would He find? David's words were with integrity. Are ours?

David not only said his words had integrity, so did his walk.

2. His walk was right – vv. 4-5

An upright walk is to live or maintain a life that is guided by right principles with the right end in mind. Wardlaw states: He “walks uprightly who lives with the fear of God as his principle, the Word of God as his rule, and the glory of God as his end.” **Psalm 119:105** “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.” As I like to say, *‘God's Word guides our steps and guards our path.’*

Genesis 5:24 tells us that Enoch walked with God.

Genesis 6:9 describes Noah as a righteous man.

Job 1:1 says that Job was blameless and upright, someone who feared God and shunned evil.

Galatians 5:16 says that we are to walk in the Spirit.

The person whose walk or conduct is upright is someone who obeys God's commands and stands strong against temptation and sin.

To walk with God means to obey His commands.

To walk with God means to spend time in His Word and in communication through prayer.

To walk with God means to let the Holy Spirit do His work in you to develop godly characteristics.

David had a lifestyle that was pleasing to God, because he wanted to please God in all he did. He walked in the ways of the Lord, avoiding the path of the wicked so that his steps didn't slip.

Psalm 1:1-2

Job 23:10-12

How is our walk? Can we plead with God regarding our trials based on the integrity of our walk?

Again, from our Sunday School song: “oh, be careful little feet where you go, or hands what you do.”

David could plead his cause based on the integrity of his life. We then see the plea to his Lord.

B. The Plea to His Lord – vv. 6-9

In **verse 6** we again see the urgency of his plea. Tony Evans states that “sometimes God lets you hit rock bottom so that you will discover that He is the Rock at the bottom.”

There are times when we try everything in our power to get through a trial before we turn to God. I try to dig my way through in my own power. I try to buy my way through it with what’s in the bank.

I try to get others to help me out of my mess. I try every physical way to get through the trial and the last resort is to call out to God when He wants us to come to Him first for help.

David learned early in life that his help was in the Lord so when he was in trouble he cried out to Him. **Psalm 34:6 “This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles.”**

In **verses 6-7** there is the plea for compassion

1. The plea for compassion – vv. 6-7

Compassion is a deep empathy for someone in need. But it’s more than just a feeling. If it’s just a feeling, that’s sympathy. Compassion goes a step further and puts some feet to the feeling and moves the person to do something to relieve the suffering. We could say it means to suffer together. Another word is empathy. **Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.”**

Jonah 4:2 describes God as “gracious and compassionate.” (see also **Psalm 86:15; 111:4**)

Because God is compassionate, He is very aware of our suffering and enters it with us. In His compassion,

He hears the cries of those who seek His help.

Psalm 40:1-2, 11-12 “I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock...Do not withhold Your mercy from me, may Your love and Your truth always protect me. For troubles without number surround me.”

Isaiah 49:13 “the Lord comforts His people and will have compassion on His afflicted ones.”

Isaiah continues by comparing the compassion God has for His people with the compassion a mother has for her nursing child.

Jeremiah reminds us that we are not consumed because of God’s mercies because His compassions never fail on account of God’s faithfulness. (**Lamentations 3:22-23**) David pleads with his Lord based on His compassion.

When you are in trouble as David was, do plead with God based on His compassion?

David then pleaded with the Lord for protection.

2. The plea for protection – vv. 8-9

This is a prayer to be kept under God’s watchful eye. The eye refers to one’s sight. The apple of the eye refers to the pupil which is the most delicate part of the eye. In the Hebrew it means the little man of the eye. When something comes towards our eye, we instinctively try to protect it. We close our eyes, we turn away, we raise an arm to deflect what might be coming. David is asking God to protect him as someone dearly loved.

He also wanted to be sheltered under the shadow of the Lord’s wings. Some believe that David is referring to how a hen protects its chicks by gathering them under its wings. Jesus used this same analogy when He looked at Jerusalem.

Matthew 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

Others view this as a reference to the wings of the

cherubim in the Holy of Holies located in the tabernacle over the Ark of the Covenant seated above the presence of God.

In either case, both speak about God's protection. David uses two vivid analogies related to his need for the Lord's protection as the apple of His eye and the shelter he found in the protection of His wings.

When you cry out to God as you face your spiritual enemies, is it a plea from His compassion and for His protection?

Remember that He is an ever-present help in time of trouble. (**Psalm 46:1**) David said his cause was just and pled from his integrity. God could search him.

Second, David pleads about his enemy.

II. DAVID PLEADS ABOUT HIS ENEMY – vv. 10-12

Have you ever had a conversation about someone who is out to get you? You are their number one enemy, and you have no idea why they feel that way. David's enemy was pressing in on him. If it was Saul, there are several times where David asks the king what he had done wrong that would so enrage him so much that he wanted to kill him. He even asked Johnathan what he had done. So he took the matter up with God. In **verse 10** we see the plea from their character.

A. The Plea From Their Character – v. 10

The first thing about their character that he mentions is that their will was calloused.

1. Their will was calloused – v. 10a

The Amplified says **“they have shut up their hearts to pity.”**

The Message reads **“Their hearts are hard as nails.”**

We all know what a callous is. It's that hard piece of skin that develops. Those pressing in on David had callouses over their heart. They don't care about your suffering or need. We might think of it as being indifferent. Pride can make a person's heart hard and calloused. David couldn't appeal to them because their will was shut up, they were set in their

ways and nothing was going to change their mind.

Because the kitchen floor was uneven, the contractor had to pour a self-leveling compound so when the new floor goes in, it won't crack. He had to prepare several buckets at a time because it hardened very quickly. Once it was poured and started to set it couldn't be troweled out.

That's the calloused heart of his foes. Their hearts were hardened. Their mind and will had been made up. They certainly weren't going to listen to his pleas for help. After all, they were the reason David was crying out to God in the first place.

In addition to their will being calloused, David said their words were conceited.

2. Their words were conceited – v. 10b

He said they spoke arrogantly with their tongue. Arrogance and its affiliated words like pride, boasting, and haughtiness are mentioned some 200 times in the Bible. Arrogance is an attitude of superiority manifested in an overbearing manner or in presumptuous claims or assumptions.

The Bible says the Lord hates arrogance.

I Peter 5:5 God opposes the proud.

Proverbs 16:5 **“The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure they will not go unpunished.”**

A proud look is among the seven things listed in **Proverbs 6:16-19** that God hates.

In **Mark 7:20-23** Jesus lists arrogance alongside of sexual immorality and murder.

The Greek uses two words for arrogance that essentially mean the same. One word means swelling or extravagant and the other means to puff up the soul. It is nothing more than exaggerating your self-importance. An arrogant person says 'it's all about me.' It is a characteristic that will be prevalent in the days before the return of Jesus, and we are seeing that characteristic grow today.

David pleads with God about the wrong character of his enemy. Their will was calloused and their words were conceited. And then in **verses 11-12** their ways were cruel.

3. Their ways were cruel – vv. 11-12

You can sense from David that the enemy is closing in on him. We might say they were breathing down his neck ready to throw him to the ground. **Verse 12** describes it as a lion ready to pounce on its prey.

Both Peter and Paul give us some advice on how to be prepared for the spiritual enemies that are lurking around ready to devour us.

I Peter 5:8-9 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

Be aware and self-controlled. When I sit in a restaurant, I don't like to have my back to the door or exit. I want to see who is coming.

When the enemy does come in we are to resist him. Don't just give in, do all you can to fight back and stand strong in your faith. The stronger the faith, the more readily you are able to resist the devil.

Another piece of advice that Peter gives to stand strong in our faith is to remember other believers who are going through the same thing and how they are standing strong.

In **Hebrews 12:1-3**, the author says to remember the great cloud of witnesses who went before us and stood strong in their faith. He then says to persevere in our race of faith fixing our eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith, remembering as well all that He had to endure as a way of helping us not grow weary or lose heart.

Paul then tells us in **Ephesians 6:10-18** what weapons we have at our disposal to stand strong in the Lord. Each piece of armor is essential for our victory over the enemy.

Like David, we face an enemy that is calloused and conceited whose conduct toward us is cruel. But we have been given the necessary tools to stand strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

David pleads for one more thing in his cry to God.

David pleads for his rescue.

III. DAVID PLEADS FOR HIS RESCUE – vv. 13-15

In **verses 13-14** he wants to be rescued from the evil rebels.

A. David Pleads For Rescue From Evil Rebels – vv. 13-14

He's quite specific in his request – “take them out.” “Defeat them.” “They deserve to be punished for all their attack on me, when they have no just cause.” Because they have a calloused heart, repentance doesn't seem very likely so punishment seems like the only recourse and David leaves it up to God as to how that might happen.

But it seems from **verse 14** that God was storing up future judgment for his enemies. It may seem like those who are opposing us are getting away with a lot and we wonder why God hasn't acted right away to vindicate us, but remember that God is storing up their judgment. The only thing David says they have to look forward to is some pleasure right now. But even their heirs will inherit the consequences of God's punishment unless they turn from rebellion. Because his enemy didn't pursue God, the only thing they could look forward to was some pleasure now.

David wanted rescue from the evil rebels and ended by pleading rescue to his eternal reward.

B. David Pleads For Rescue To His Eternal Reward – v. 15

This is a reference to David's future knowing that one day he would be in God's presence and that was worth all the trouble he had encountered from his enemies.

II Corinthians 4:17 “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

David saw a greater blessing ahead that he looked forward to, a future of seeing God's face and sharing in God's likeness, a confident expectation that only the righteous will experience as they stand in God's presence for eternity. David had that confidence. **Do you look forward to waking in God's presence?**