

August 24, 2025

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS: PSALM 5:1-12

Introductory Activity Option 1 (Adapted from ETB LG, 133)

Prepare: Hang Pack Item 2 (Poster: Types of Psalms) on a focal wall.

Introduce: To start the session, find a recording of “Reveille” and play it.

Ask: What was your first thought when you woke up this morning? (PSG, p. 113)

Read: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 113 of the PSG. [Waking up in the morning and contemplating the day's challenges can be overwhelming, especially when yesterday's burdens are still a reality today. Psalm 5 is a morning prayer David prayed when he woke up with a heavy sigh and longed for God's help as he contemplated another day of contending with his enemies. He recognized he needed God's help for that day. David's prayer provides encouragement to believers as they wake up to similar mornings. (PSG, p. 113)"]

Ask: [On a scale of 1-5, how would you answer the question,] Is it easy or difficult for you to acknowledge you need help? (PSG, p. 113)

Discuss: Talk about what makes it hard to ask for help—both from other people and from God.

Transition: Psalm 5 is a psalm of lament. It is a morning prayer. As David looks forward to the day, he presents his problems to God, and he waits with expectation for God to act. We, too, can present our problems to God, and we “can live with hope knowing that God will always do what is right and just.” (ETB PSG, 113)

1. THE SOURCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (PSALM 5:1-6)

Read or have someone read Psalm 5:1-6.

Explain: As we said before, Psalm 5 is a lament. David is bringing his problems to the Lord. The superscription of Psalm 3 says it was written during the rebellion of his son Absalom. It is probable that Psalms 3-7 are all related to that time in David's life. Regardless of the historical context, the psalm can teach us about bringing our problems to the Lord. We do that, like David, through prayer. Verses 1-6 provide us with an introduction to the prayer. In these 6 verses, we can learn about the hows and whys of David's prayer. David's prayer is a plea; it is personal, it is a priority, and it is predicated on God's character. Let's look at each of those.

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Psalms Vol 1* (Preaching Vol 1)
- *Preaching the Word: Psalms Vol 2* (Preaching Vol 2)
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1-50* (Exalting 1-50)
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 101-150* (Exalting 101-150)
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 119* (Exalting 119)
- *Two Horizons OT Commentary: Psalms* (Two Horizons)
- *New American Commentary: Psalms 73-150* (NAC)

Teachers Note: Commentators outline the psalm into 5 sections. See the content under “Understand the Context” on page 114 of the Personal Study Guide.

- David's prayer is a plea: (Reread verses 1-2b: "¹Listen to my words, Lord; consider my sighing. ²Pay attention to the sound of my cry.") David's prayer is not a rote matter. He is crying out to the sovereign King of the universe for help. His request for God to hear him and to pay attention to his cry is not simply a request for audience with the King. Instead, they are a plea for the King to act. It is as if he is saying, "Please, God, do something about this matter." But in a lot of ways, David can't vocalize what he wants to say. While he will write out the prayer as a song, he begins with a sigh.

- **Discuss:** Has there ever been a time when all you could do was sigh to the Lord? (Allow a time for group members to share)

Sometimes in life, we just do not know what to do or say. There might be something weighing on your heart and mind, but you just don't know how to pray. That is okay. Prayer is not a performance for the Lord. James Boice says, "God hears all kinds of prayer." (Exalting, 38) Paul spoke of this when he wrote of the power of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:26, he wrote, "²⁶In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings."

One commentator opines, "People who don't know God well think they have to pray with special words... But if you know God, you can come to him without putting on your makeup." (Preaching, 63) David's prayer was a plea, but it was also personal.

- David's prayer is personal: (Reread verse 2b: "my King and my God, for I pray to you.") While David was the king of Israel, he had a King to whom he was responsible. Like a good earthly king, the King of the universe wants to hear the concerns and needs of His people. David comes to Him and calls Him "*my* King and *my* God" (emphases added). David had a personal relationship with the King and spoke to Him as such. As believers and followers of Christ, we too have a personal relationship with the King, and He wants to hear our concerns and our needs.
- David's prayer is a priority: (Reread verse 3: "In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you and watch expectantly.") Taking his concerns to God was the first thing David did in his day. If something is troubling you to the point where it is the first thing you think about, should it not be the first thing you pray about? In life, our concerns become a priority—fix this, deal with that, what about that person? If something is a priority of our mind and heart, it should be a priority of our prayer.
 - **Discuss:** What are some habits you can form that will help you make prayer a priority?David does not simply say, "God, deal with this problem." Instead, he sets aside time and pleads his case to God. "The Hebrew term translated 'plead my case' means to direct, arrange, or set in order. This Hebrew word is used to describe how the altars and their sacrifices were arranged (Gen. 2:29; Num 23:4). (ETBC, 124) In other words, David arranges his case (and his cares) before the Lord. We, too, should "just lay it all out there for God." We will not surprise Him with our feelings or our anxieties. Speak to the Lord who personally cares for you and hears you. David does this because he knows the character of God.

Notes:

- David's prayer is predicated on God's character. (Reread verses 4-6: see notes box) David is concerned with his enemies. Therefore, he appeals to God's righteousness. Sometimes in life, we find ourselves in a similar situation. In those situations, we too can appeal to God's righteous character. David makes some strong statements, and they can help us understand more about God's righteousness. First, we see that God does not delight in wickedness. In our world, sinful behavior has become a source of laughter. Sinful shenanigans are a plot point of comedic movies and TV shows. It is the premise of many reality TV shows that fill our screens. It is the background for many comedians we pay to entertain us. "God does not think sin is fun or funny." (Preaching, 65) Nor should we. Moreover, it is dangerous. "Sin will desensitize you if it entertains you." (Preaching, 65) Second, we see that God cannot be in the presence of evil. David says, "evil cannot dwell with you." "The Hebrew term for dwell with is the same word used elsewhere in the Old Testament in association with a 'sojourner' or an 'alien' ('resides,' Ex. 12:48, 49)... Evil cannot dwell with you is another way of saying that 'evil cannot be your guest.'" (ETBC, 124) Sometimes, we hear stories about people traveling across the country on a bike. They hit the road with a bike, a tent, and their gear. Often, these bike adventurers will seek permission to pitch a tent in the yard of a towns person instead of getting a hotel or Air B&B. That is the image that arises when I consider David's words. God is so opposed to evil that it cannot even pitch its tent in His front yard for the night. Third, we see that God hates and abhors sin and sinful people. We should stop and consider this. Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes, "These words take my breath away. The God who loved the world (John 3:16) hates." That is a shocking realization and might be confusing. Dr. Akin goes on to explain, "In their essence and essential being as imagers of God, the Lord loves his human creation. But when they function as workers of evil and wickedness, God has nothing but wrath, righteous anger, for them." (Exalting, 40) (**Teacher's note:** We are going to discuss the good news that emanates from God's feelings toward sin in verse 7) David is basing his plea for God to deal with his enemies on God's character. It's like he is saying, "God, I know how you feel about these people. Please act righteously on my behalf."

Summarize Transition: Before we move on, let's return to one statement that we skipped over. After David pleads his case in verse 3, he says that he now watches expectantly for God's actions. This reveals two things about prayer. First, we are to give our concerns to God and let Him handle them. As we live righteously and do our part in whatever the situation may be, we can let Him do His part. Second, we can give our concerns to God and know that He will handle them. God wants to answer our prayers. Sometimes, He might do so in ways that we do not understand (Remember, David's son Absalom passed away while advancing his evil actions to overthrow God's anointed king, and that grieved David). Nevertheless, we can be sure that God will act justly based on His righteous character. In the next passage, we will see the reason David can pray to the Lord as well as the way God will deal with the evil faced by the king.

Notes:

Psalm 5:4-6

⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil cannot dwell with you. ⁵ The boastful cannot stand in your sight; you hate all evildoers. ⁶ You destroy those who tell lies; the Lord abhors violent and treacherous people.

"David's hope is grounded in the character of God... there is nothing more solid than the unchanging, unwavering, unshifting, unshakable character of God." (Preaching, 64)

"This is the first of three instances in the Hebrew where a negative begins the clause: 'not God' (v. 4); 'cannot stand' (v. 5); and 'nothing reliable' (v. 9). These three negative clauses separate what God is not from what God is." (ETC, 124)

Danny Akin says, "Evil will never be welcome or at home with God." (Exalting, 39)

Gerald Wilson writes, "God is so incompatible with sin that even the most temporary coexistence is utterly impossible." (Preaching, 65)

"God infinitely loves everything good; he infinitely hates everything that goes against it." (Preaching, 64)

"the grammar tells us that an evildoer is someone who sins as a way of life." (Preaching, 66)

2. THE BENEFIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (PSALM 5:7-10)

Read (or have someone read) Psalm 5:7-10

Explain: We can break this passage into two parts: The Rightness of David's Prayer and the Righteousness of David's Request.

The Rightness of David's Prayer: Verse 7 flows out of the assertion made in verse 6. In that verse, David states God's aversion to evil and evildoers. Verse 7 asserts the opposite. While God abhors the wicked, David is welcomed into the Lord's house. David, though, is clear about the reason he can come before the Lord. It is not because of his own righteousness or good acts. Instead, he enters "by the abundance of [the LORD's] faithful love." The rightness of David's prayer is possible only because of the righteous love of God. In this, we can see the good news of the gospel.

When reading about the evildoer, we might inadvertently have feelings of pride. We might think, "I am not like them. I am welcomed by the Lord." David reminds us that we are only welcomed by the Lord because of his faithful love exhibited in His covenant. His covenant with the New Testament believer was initiated by the blood of Christ shed for sinners. David's "reverential awe" manifests because he knows that he, too, can be and has been an evildoer. Our worship and awe of the Lord should be marked by the same realization. Paul reminds us in Romans 5:28 that "God proves his own love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:28 emphasis added) And in 2 Corinthians 5:21 he reminds us of the great exchange made possible by Christ, "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In light of God's intense feelings toward the wicked, this is shockingly good news. "If you think it was no big deal for God to save you because you were already a pretty good person, then the gospel will be ho-hum. The good news is not good unless you understand that God is furious against each and every sinner." (Preaching, 67) David has the "right" to pray only because of the righteousness of God. We have the "right" to ask of God only because the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through faith in Him.

Discuss: How can we practically respond to God's great mercy and grace shown through the gospel?

Explain: David responded in "reverential awe." That should be our starting place as well. We should never let the gospel become ho-hum. The business of life and the complicated nature of relationships in life and the church can sometimes take our eyes from the great mystery of salvation. Let's preach the gospel to ourselves and worship the Lord daily. Reverential awe should be our starting place, and revived awakening should be our next step. Revival is the supernatural experience of God's Spirit in our lives. A revival of this sort should empower and embolden us

"Sin will keep you out of God's presence, but obedience will not get you in. The only way for a sinner to come before God is through his lovingkindness, his undeserved covenant love, his *chessed*." (Preaching, 69)

to not only preach the gospel to ourselves but those around us. A ho-hum expression of the gospel in our lives will result in a diminishing of our gospel witness. We respond to God's great mercy by declaring it to others.

The Righteousness of David's Request: Verses 9 and 10 might be a little shocking for the modern believer. Verse 9 is not so hard to grasp. David describes the wicked people seeking to hurt him. Here he focuses on their words. They are liars, and they are lying about him. Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse as, "Every word they speak is a land mine; their lungs breathe out poison gas. Their throats are gaping graves, their tongues slick as mudslides." Anyone who has dealt with enemies can commiserate with David. Reading verse 10, though, might make the New Testament Christian raise his eyebrows. This verse is what we call an "imprecatory prayer." The Explore the Bible Commentary explains, "The word 'imprecate' means 'to pray evil against' or 'to invoke disaster upon.'" (ETBC, 122)

We are discussing the righteousness of David's request. His request doesn't seem very righteous. Didn't Jesus tell us to pray for our enemies (Matt 5:44ff)? When we encounter something that makes us raise our eyebrows, we should take a moment and dig a little deeper. The conclusion of verse 10 reveals the Reason Behind David's Prayer. (**Reread verse 10**) These evildoers and liars are rebelling against the Lord. Yes, they are opposing David, but in their opposition to God's anointed king, they are rebelling against God. David is not asking the Lord to "get them" because they were rude to him in the grocery store or because they opposed his idea at the local board meeting. These people are seeking to overthrow God's plans. We should also note the Reality Behind David's Prayer. He asks the Lord to "Punish them" and "let them fall by their own schemes." David is asking the "Lord to convict them of their crimes" (ETB LG, 136) and let their evil schemes come back to bite them. David's prayer was righteous because he called on the Righteous Judge to convict those in rebellion against Him.

Discuss: How can we apply Christ's command to pray for our neighbors and the words of David to our lives?

Explain: First, we should make sure we are right with God. That is, are we living, thinking, and feeling in a righteous manner that is consistent with the gospel? Second, are we praying with righteous motives? If both of those are true can assess the situation and realize that our real enemy is not flesh in blood but the evil forces of Satan (Eph 6:12). That being true, we should pray for our "enemies," and ask the Lord to convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8) leading to salvation. We can also request the Lord's protection from those who seek to harm us. Sometimes this will result in their own schemes coming back to bite them.

Summarize and Transition: It is important to remember that David's prayer is not the only guide we have in the Bible related to enemies. Jesus reminds us that the gospel agenda is bigger than our own, and our prayer and

The ETB LG summarizes the content from page 119 of the Personal Study Guide: "First, we must recognize who our true enemies are. The apostle Paul indicated that our ultimate struggle is against the devil and his forces (Eph. 6:12). Second, we must understand that people who are opposed to Christ and His Church are darkened in their understanding of the gospel "because of the hardness of their hearts" (4:18). They are blinded by Satan from "seeing the light of the gospel" (2 Cor. 4:4). Third, the Lord has instructed believers to pray for unbelievers (Matt. 5:44-48; Luke 6:27-38) and share the gospel with them so that their eyes will be opened. Jesus came for this purpose (Isa. 42:6-7; Acts 26:17-18)."

actions should seek the salvation of others. Moreover, let us remember that God is the righteous judge, not us. David's words remind us that he is putting the onus on God as the righteous judge, not taking matters into his own hands (cf. ETBC, 122). In the next passage, David turns his prayers toward God's people.

3. GOD'S BLESSING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (PSALM 5:11-12)

Read or have someone read Psalm 5:11-12

Explain: While David calls on the Lord to punish the wicked, he calls on the people of God to rejoice. They rejoice because instead of being a target for God's conviction, they are the recipients of His refuge. "To take refuge is to seek protection from someone you trust. The Hebrew word for shelter means to cover, conceal, or shield." (ETBC, 128) The Lord is trustworthy because He has the desire and ability to protect His people. While they rejoice in this, David asks the Lord to continue to shelter them. As a result, they can boast in His name. This should draw our minds back to verse 5. There, David says, "The boastful cannot stand in your sight." Those who boast in their sin and lies cannot stand before the righteous God. Conversely, the righteous do not boast in themselves. They boast in the Lord, and specifically in David's context, they boast in the Lord's protection. And the Lord's protection is no small thing. In verse 12, David asserts that the Lord "surround[s them] with favor like a shield." There are many types of shields, and they all provide a form of protection. The shield mentioned here is "a large shield that covered the entire body and which a soldier could get behind for protection." (ETBC, 129) But let's be honest, whether the shield is small or large, when it is held by the Lord Almighty, it will protect us.

Summarize and Transition: "David began the psalm crying out to the Lord and pleading with Him for protection. He appealed to God's righteousness and faithful love for guidance. In the end, David was able to offer praise and joy for the blessings he had received. We can follow his example by calling out to God and expressing our gratitude to Him for all He has done for us." (ETB LG, 1139)

CONCLUDE

David was clearly facing some hard times. They were the first thing on his mind when he woke. Instead of fretting over them. He took his enemies to the Lord. He did so because of the righteous character of God. He knew God would deal justly with them because their sin was ultimately a sin against Him. Moreover, David knew that he was able to come to God not because of his personal righteousness but because of God's unfailing love. Like David, we should come to the Lord with our problems. We should trust that He cares for us and wants to provide refuge from life's difficulties.

Guide and Challenge: All of God's actions are predicated on His holiness and character. Let us consider the character of God as we face life's difficulties and life's difficult people this week. The second question on page 121 of the Personal Study Guide asks us to consider "How can recognizing God's loving and righteous character change the way you respond to life's difficulties? How does it change the way you pray?"

Conclude and Pray: Ask the group to consider that question this week. Pray for the group and specifically ask the Lord to help them bring their troubles to Him instead of trying to handle them alone.