

# The Pure Words of God

Psalm 12

**Main idea:** Though the words of the wicked are untrustworthy and afflict God's people, the words of the Lord are perfect and assure His people of His salvation.



For the choir director; upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be,  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.  
<sup>2</sup> They speak falsehood to one another;  
With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.  
<sup>3</sup> May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,  
The tongue that speaks great things;  
<sup>4</sup> Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail;  
Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"  
<sup>5</sup> "Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy,  
Now I will arise," says the LORD; "I will set him in the safety for which he longs."  
  
<sup>6</sup> The words of the LORD are pure words;  
As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.  
<sup>7</sup> You, O LORD, will keep them;  
You will preserve him from this generation forever.  
<sup>8</sup> The wicked strut about on every side  
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

## Introduction:

As we have studied the last few psalms, you may have noticed that in each, certain questions are being asked and answered by the psalmists—either explicitly or implicitly. Psalm 10 opened with a very specific question—*"Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?"* And the psalmist went on to answer his own question as he spoke truth to himself. Though it feels like God is far off sometimes, the truth is, He is never far from His children. He is the sovereign King who never forgets His afflicted ones. He is always with you in times of trouble, carrying you through until the day when He will finally vindicate His people and judge the wicked. In Psalm 11, the question was asked, in times of crisis, *"What can the righteous do?"* And the answer given to us is that we stand firm in the Lord, running to Him alone for refuge.

Psalm 12 does not pose a question explicitly. However, it does implicitly pose a very important question to all of us. And that question is, whose word can we trust? Can we trust anyone in this world? We are forced to ask that question as we live and experience so much falsehood.

In our world, dishonesty, double-talk, gossip, slander, hypocrisy, etc. abound. We take it as a given that most politicians talk out of both sides of their mouth; we make jokes about lawyers, because we assume they are untrustworthy by nature; advertisers seem to have abandoned the idea of truth altogether in order to sell a product. Add to that our own personal experiences of betrayal by friends or family who didn't keep their

promise; our experiences of being taken in by a greedy company who promised something and delivered something else.

But we don't even have to look outside of ourselves, do we? How many times have we been that friend who flattered and then talked behind their back? How many times have we stretched the truth for our own gain? How many times have we played the liar, the flatterer, or the gossip? So, whose word can we really trust?

That is the question that Psalm 12 answers. The answer is, we can, and we must trust the words of God.



**Main idea:** Though the words of the wicked are untrustworthy and afflict God's people, the words of the Lord are perfect and assure His people of His salvation.

This truth is taught to us in Psalm 12 in three main parts:

- A. The prayer to the Lord (vv.1-4)
- B. The response of the Lord (v.5)
- C. The confidence in the Lord (vv.6-7)

This is another psalm composed by David. It is technically a lamentation psalm, though it really reads like a complaint about the deceitful and destructive speech of the wicked. That this is David's chief complaint is evident as verses 2-4 are filled with references to the wicked man's words: their speech, their lips, their tongue. It's a world filled with lies and cheap talk. But it's important to see that David doesn't stand up on his soapbox and complain about the ills of society to society. What good would that do? He brings the problem to God, and he does so because he knows that God cares and that only God has the power to guard and protect His people in the midst of such overwhelming deceit.

## Exposition:

### A. The prayer to the Lord—salvation from deceitful words (vv.1-4)

#### 1. The desperate cry of the godly (v.1)

- <sup>1</sup>Help, LORD

Right away, we know what this psalm is about. "*Help, LORD!*"—literally "Save, Yahweh!" This is a cry to the Lord for help, for deliverance, for salvation. There is no holding back of the emotion here. David is serious and desperate and expresses it right off the bat. One thing we know about David—and that is reflected in the psalm—is that he is not ashamed to express himself and his feelings for the Lord. Remember when David was having the ark of the covenant brought up to Jerusalem for the first time. What was he doing? He was dancing before the Lord with all his might (2 Sam.6:14).

In that case, he was not ashamed to reveal his joy in the Lord. Here, in this psalm, David is not ashamed to reveal his need for the Lord. With just two simple words, he expresses utter dependence upon God—"Help, Lord!; Save, Lord!"

Our prayers don't have to be complex theological tomes. Prayer that gets God's attention is simply prayer that comes from a heart that needs God—from the person who knows that God is their one and only Hope, their one and only Provider, their one and only Savior. Sometimes, we are weary or

desperate, and the only true prayer we can pray is, "Help, Lord! Save, Lord!" And God loves that prayer.

What stimulates this desperate prayer?

- <sup>1</sup> Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.

David looks around, and it appears to him that those faithful to God are dwindling. Their number is growing thin. He is being surrounded by unbelievers on every side—those with only selfish and ungodly motives. No one is speaking truth anymore.

Of course, David is using hyperbole. It is not as though there are no godly people left in the land. However, in whatever situation he is in, he feels like he is being left alone. He seeks companionship and counsel from fellow believers who trust in the Lord, but he is not finding any.

### **Illustration:**

Elijah, the prophet, felt this way (*1 Kings 18-19*). The wicked King Ahab of Israel and the wicked Queen Jezebel were hunting down Elijah. Jezebel had had many prophets of the Lord killed already. And now they wanted Elijah killed because he prophesied against their evil idolatries. So, Elijah was on the run alone and despairing of his situation and even of his life.

**1 Kings 19:9-10**—Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>10</sup> He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

And though Elijah felt like he was all alone, God goes on to tell him in verse 18 that, in fact, He has kept a remnant of 7,000 in Israel who are faithful to Him.

### **Thailand:**

When we were in Thailand this past March, we met a man who knows what it is like to be alone as a Christian. He is an older man who became a Christian a few years ago through the witness of others who lived in another town. He has had to travel to another town to meet with Christians in their small church because there was no church in his town; there were no other Christians in his town. He was literally the only believer in his home, on his street, in his town. And I think it's hard for us to understand how that really feels. Christians are meant to be corporate people. We are made, in a sense, for one another—to teach and encourage and serve and love and pray for one another. He didn't have that except when he traveled to meet others.

And that is why he asked missionary, Dr. Doug Derbyshire, to put on a medical clinic in his town; because he knew that the people at these clinics do not just hand out medicine for the body, but the life-giving power of the Gospel. He had a burden for the lost of his town and a need for fellowship with other believers. And that is why, when we had finished the clinic, and several people in the town had expressed an interest in Christ and hearing more about the Gospel, he could not hold back the tears of thankfulness to God and vowed to meet with each and every person after we left to teach them the truth of God. God made us to need one another in the Church.

**Application:**

And although most of us will never be literally in such a drastic spiritually lonely situation, we can still feel that way. It is not uncommon for Christians to feel alone. And it may be that most of the time you are surrounded by unbelievers at home, work, or school. It feels like no one else cares about God or about what He has said or commanded. And it can be so hard to constantly be in that situation. It can be such a burden that we sometimes feel like just giving up and giving in.

But we must remember the Lord. He is always with us, and as we will see as we go through the rest of this psalm, He will keep you, guard you, and preserve you, however alone you feel. And we must also remember one another. God has given us one another. When the burden is hard to bear, go to the Lord, and then go to a brother or sister—we are just a call, text, or visit away. You aren't alone in this; you're part of a family. Let us all, then, act like family and be there for one another.

But, to move on with David, we have to see what the problem is. What prompts David to feel like the faithful are disappearing? It is because of the abundance of the faithless—those who seem only to speak deceitfully.

**2. The deceitful words of the wicked (vv.2-4, 8)**

At the same time that David felt like the godly and the faithful have vanished, it felt like liars and schemers had multiplied and surrounded him at every side. And the focus here is on their words—their speech. What is wrong with their speech? What is wrong with their words? Three things:

**a. They speak false words. (v.2a)**

- <sup>2</sup> They speak falsehood to one another

The word for “**falsehood**” here is variously translated in the Old Testament as worthless, vanity, deceit, fraud, false testimony, lies. It's actually the same word used in the third of the Ten Commandments:

**Exodus 20:7**—You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

In other words, you shall not lie about God. You shall not speak about Him falsely, or in a way that twists or perverts the truth of who He is.

And here in Psalm 12, David says that this how the wicked speak. They twist and pervert the truth for selfish gain. Even to one another, they speak lies—they can't be honest even amongst themselves; how then will they treat the godly?

**b. They speak flattering words. (vv.2b-3)**

- <sup>2</sup> With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak. <sup>3</sup> May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things.

This word for flattery literally means “to make smooth.” We have something similar in English when we say that someone is a “smooth-talker.” They use words to manipulate others.

**Psalm 55:21**—His speech was smoother than butter, But his heart was war; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords.

What's so bad about flattery?

- **Proverbs 26:28**—A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.
- **Proverbs 29:5**—A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.
- **Proverbs 5:3-4**—For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, And smoother than oil is her speech; <sup>4</sup> But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.

Flattery is dangerous because its goal is selfish-gain at someone else's expense. Flattery is part of the **"falsehood"** they speak. They tell people the things they want to hear, but they speak with a double-heart (lit. with a "heart and a heart"). They say one thing, but mean another in their heart. They are hypocrites. And they are deceptive.

**c. They speak prideful words. (vv.4, 8)**

- <sup>4</sup> Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"...<sup>8</sup> The wicked strut about on every side When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

They are arrogant. The word for **"prevail"** literally means "to be strong." They think that their clever and deceptive words give them power.

They boast of their own plans and schemes, making themselves out to be great and wise. They revel in their ability to use words for their own gain, no matter how they hurt others in the process. And they speak as if there is no authority over them. And so, they ask, "Who is lord over us?" And the implied answer for them is "No one." They think that they answer to no one and they boast in that. "I am my own boss; the captain of my own life and soul; I decide what's best for me."

This is what David sees, feels, and hears all around him—false words, flattering words, and prideful words. And it's painful to him. He sees the affliction and devastation that their deception, flattery, and pride are causing, especially to the godly. He sees that vileness is exalted in society instead of godliness and goodness (v.8).

And so, David prays in verse 3,

- <sup>3</sup> May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things.

He is saying, "Please, Lord put an end to their evil and the havoc they are causing with their words so that righteousness can thrive." It is as if righteousness, honesty, and truth are trying to be snuffed out by the sheer weight of the abundance of falsehood, deceit, hypocrisy, and manipulation. And David is crying out to God to break through that fog of deceit and disperse it.

Remember where these kinds of words—this kind of speech—originated. In the Garden of Eden, perfect honesty, integrity, and truthfulness existed between Adam and Eve, and between them and God. But in came Satan, in the guise of a serpent, and what did he do (*Gen.3:1-6*)? He

"smooth-talked" Eve and Adam. He twisted the words of God—"Did God really say?" He manipulated them and tempted them with pride—"You won't die; you will become like God." He is the father of lies, and he has been doing it ever since. And so, when others, or when we engage in deception or manipulation or double-talk, we are acting like him. We are being Satan-like. We are being like the wicked described in this psalm. And as we are clearly shown here, God is seriously opposed to such talk. He will not tolerate it.

Therefore, before we complain to God about others lying to us, gossiping about us, or hurting us with their words, we need to first examine our own words. Have I been engaging in any of these things? Have I twisted words, hidden truth, or told lies (even little white lies) at someone else's expense? Do I need to repent of any of these things?

But after examining ourselves, we have to face the reality that this is the way of the world. And anyone who seeks to live godly and honestly in this world is going to suffer from it, especially those who are more vulnerable. But whoever we are, and in whatever position we are in, we are all targets. What do we do? We do what we were told in Psalm 11—we take refuge in the Lord, and we cry out to Him.

This is what David is doing here, and verse 5 shows us that God hears his cry.

## **B. The response of the Lord—I will arise and save. (v.5)**

- <sup>5</sup> Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, Now I will arise," says the LORD; "I will set him in the safety for which he longs.

Verse 5 is the focal point of this whole psalm. It is the peak and apex. It is God responding to the cry of His afflicted.

Notice what the deceitful, flattering, prideful words of the wicked do to God's people—they devastate the afflicted, and they make the needy groan. Words are powerful and influential and can be extremely hurtful. Their words do violence to the needy. And David knows, and we should know that God has a special heart for the afflicted and needy. And, therefore, He says *"Now, I will arise."* Because of what they have done with their hurtful words, God rises to take action. He rises up to defend His children. He will *"set him in the safety for which he longs."*

Are you being bombarded by the deceitful, hurtful words of others? Are you being devastated by what others are saying? Are you being cheated by others through manipulative words? Are you groaning under the weight? Do you long for safety from all of this? Take courage; the Lord will arise and set you in the safety for which you long.

But, you might ask, "How can I be sure He will do this?" "How can I trust what God says?" We can trust Him because His words are pure.

## **C. The confidence in the Lord—Trust in His pure words. (vv.6-7)**

David draws a dramatic contrast between the words of the wicked and the words of God. Their words are deceitful, flattering, and prideful, but the words of the Lord are pure.

This word “**pure**” is most often used in the language of the temple and sacrifices and food laws. It’s used all over Exodus and Leviticus to describe the ceremonially clean people, animals, and objects. Clean and unblemished.

When the word is used to describe the “words” of God, then, it is speaking of perfection. God’s words are perfect; they are unblemished words; they are holy words. They are the opposite of the words of the wicked, which are tainted with sin—those are defiled words; God’s words are pure.

How pure are they? They are like silver refined seven times in a furnace. The number seven in the Bible is the number of completion and perfection. This is the purest of silver. Perfect silver. Silver without defect or blemish. So are all of God’s words. His words are without spot, without blemish, without deceit, without flattery, without false motive, without error. His words are perfection. All that God has said is true, trustworthy, right, good, holy, and purposeful (see Psalm 19:7-11; 119:89).

Therefore, we should have confidence in His words—in His promises. They are without deceit; they cannot fail. So, when God says that He will arise at the cry of His afflicted and needy people and that He will “*set him in the safety for which he longs,*” we can be sure that He will do just that.

Because His Word is pure, the Lord is able to keep and guard His people (v.7).

<sup>7</sup>You, O LORD, will keep them; You will preserve him from this generation forever.

He does not say that God will remove the problem immediately, but He will preserve His people through it.<sup>1</sup>

Why doesn’t He immediately remove the problem? Because, it is through trials that our faith is tested and that our faith grows. As James says,

- **James 1:2-4**—Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

However bad things get, God’s people can be assured of His protection. He will always guard us. Jesus applied this promise to Himself:

- **John 6:37-40**—All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

## Conclusion:

In contrast to the wicked, whose words are full of deceit for the purpose of self-gain, the Word of God is perfect, pure, true, and transparent. But God’s Word is also revealing. It reveals who we are. It is like a mirror, as James says, that shows us what we are truly like. It shows us that we are created in God’s image, and

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, Vol.1: 1-41* (Kregel Exegetical Library)

therefore, honor is due to all people. But it also shows us how far short we fall of the glory of God because of our sin. God's Word reveals our pride, selfishness, dishonesty, immorality, faithlessness, idolatry, and unbelief. But God's Word is also self-revelatory. His Word primarily reveals who He is. His Word shows us His nature, His character, His attributes, His glory. His perfect Word teaches us about His greatness, majesty, power, authority, holiness, justice, grace, mercy, love, kindness, goodness, gentleness, patience, and beauty. God has revealed all of this and more in the words of Scripture.

But, more than that, God has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus is called **"the Word."** The Word who was with God in the beginning, the Word who is God (*John 1*). The Word who is equal in power and glory with the Father and the Spirit. The Word through whom all things were made. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us and showed us who God is. The Word who said, *"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father"* (*John 14:6-9*).

Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. He is truth incarnate. And, because He is God, His words are pure words; perfect words; flawless words. His words are always honest, true, good, and right. His words more than counter the weight and burden of all the lies, deceptions, hypocrisies, gossips, slanders, and manipulations that fill the world and that fill the hearts of men. *His* words can be trusted; they can be leaned upon. Whoever believes in Him and His words *"will not be disappointed"* (*Rom.10:11*).

And for those who do trust in Him and His words, we must *"let the word of Christ richly dwell within us"* (*Col. 3:16*). He expects us to imitate Him. Our words should reflect His words—our speech should be characterized by purity and honesty. We have to guard ourselves against a double-heart, against hypocrisy. We cannot put selfish-gain above honesty, deceiving ourselves into the argument that the ends justify the means. We must follow Christ in how we live and how we talk, though it may cost us financially or socially, for Christians are people who have died to self, so that we might now live to God. So, may we strive, now, to honor Him in our lives and in our words.

Amen.

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