

# Learning to Pray the Bible Way

Psalm 5

1

**Main idea:** Knowing God is the key to prayer.

For the past 2000 years, the book of Psalms (The Psalter) has been *the definitive worship book of the church*. Indeed, it has informed believers on *who their God is* and *how they are to relate to Him*. Someone has said that because the modern church has not preached the Psalms, the church has lost its ability to pray rightly. If this is true, and if we want to know how to worship or pray the Bible way, then we must look at The Psalter. In this prayer, David models and provides us with a "prayer tutorial."

For the choir director; for flute accompaniment. A Psalm of David.

Give ear to my words, O LORD,  
Consider my groaning.

<sup>2</sup> Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God,  
For to You I pray.

<sup>3</sup> In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice;  
In the morning I will order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly* watch.

<sup>4</sup> For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;  
No evil dwells with You.

<sup>5</sup> The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes;  
You hate all who do iniquity.

<sup>6</sup> You destroy those who speak falsehood;  
The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

<sup>7</sup> But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house,  
At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You.

<sup>8</sup> O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes;  
Make Your way straight before me.

<sup>9</sup> There is nothing reliable in what they say;  
Their inward part is destruction *itself*.

Their throat is an open grave;  
They flatter with their tongue.

<sup>10</sup> Hold them guilty, O God;  
By their own devices let them fall!  
In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out,  
For they are rebellious against You.

<sup>11</sup> But let all who take refuge in You be glad,  
Let them ever sing for joy;  
And may You shelter them,  
That those who love Your name may exult in You.

<sup>12</sup> For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD,  
You surround him with favor as with a shield.

## Outline:

How do we pray the Bible way? There are four stanzas and four points. The question David answers for us is: what is prayer?

- A. Prayer addresses God. (vv.1-3)
- B. Prayer adores God. (vv.4-7)
- C. Prayer petitions God. (vv.8-10)
- D. Prayer transforms us. (vv.11-12)

## Introduction:

I want to begin by asking you a personal question: Do you struggle with prayer? By struggle, I mean do you find prayer challenging and laborious? Do you find that sometimes *your heart is reluctant, your mind wanders, and your zeal is lagging* when it comes to the issue of prayer? Are you tired of dead, cold, lifeless prayer? If so, there is good news! 1) *You're not alone*, and 2) God has given us direction here in Psalm 5.

Richard Phillips once said, "Prayer is our greatest privilege on this side of heaven." I would place it right alongside the task of evangelism. Prayer is not only the *greatest privilege*, it is also the *focal point* of the most heated battle in spiritual warfare. Since prayer is the highest and most intimate expression of our relationship with God, then it's no surprise that some of the greatest obstacles we face are met in prayer. Let us thank God for the entire Bible and especially *The Psalter*, for in the "songbook of prayers," we learn *how to pray*. The Holy Spirit teaches us, through King David's prayer for help, four key features in learning to pray the Bible way.

## Exposition:

### A. Prayer addresses God. (vv.1-3)

- For the choir director; for flute accompaniment. A Psalm of David.  
Give ear to my words, O LORD,  
Consider my groaning.  
<sup>2</sup> Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God,  
For to You I pray.  
<sup>3</sup> In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice;  
In the morning I will order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly* watch.

Notice, first how David **defines prayer**. Prayer is not *the soul speaking within itself*. Prayer is not *mapping the inner contours of one's own heart*. Prayer has a *recipient*, and that recipient is *God Himself*. Seven times in the space of three verses, the Psalmist addresses God. "*Give ear...O Yahweh...Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God...for to You I pray...in the morning, O Yahweh, You will hear...I will order my prayer to You...*"

David is not praying to a distant stranger. He is speaking to *Yahweh*—the covenant making and covenant keeping God of Israel who *sees, understands, knows, and hears* the prayers of His called-out people. Listen, prayer is not *praying to your kids* in God's hearing or *speaking to your brothers or sisters in Christ* in God's presence. Prayer is not *witnessing to your friend* as you pretend to pray to God. No, no! Prayer is first and foremost *coming to and addressing* God Himself.

- Someone has said, "Prayer is something more than asking God to run errands for us."
- John Blanchard said, "Effective prayer is a quartet—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Christian."
- John Bunyan once defined prayer this way: "*Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised.*"

Therefore, prayer is not a grim duty, dear friends; it is gaining an audience with *the Most High God*—*personally, worshipfully, and submissively*—*through Jesus Christ*.

What explains the lack of prayer in the church? What alibi do we use for our prayerlessness? Is there an audience greater than God? What being is higher and more powerful than God? What privilege is more honorable than being able to speak with God Himself? If we desire to keep a good blood flow of life in our spiritual veins, then we must prime the heart-pump with prayer.

You say, "I agree, but how? How do we pray the Bible way, David?" Notice how David not only *defines* prayer, but he also **describes prayer**. In the Hebrew, "*my words*" appear first, so that it literally reads, "*My words—give them a hearing, Yahweh. Discern my meditation.*" That is, *get right to the heart of what I am feeling and saying* because it is *urgent*. One of the characteristics of prayer is that it is *urgent*.

"**Give ear...consider...heed,**" are all imperative verbs that stress David's urgency. He is making a *passionate appeal* or a plea with intense emotion and energy. David is *serious* because *prayer is serious*. The puritans described prayer as "suing" God, because they were intent on gaining some benefit from Him. Is there an urgency in your prayer life? God's office is never closed, and His ear is inclined to hear our prayer.

Not only is prayer *urgent*, but it is also *persistent*. In verse 3, the repeated phrase "**in the morning**" appears.

- <sup>3</sup> In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice;  
In the morning I will order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly* watch.

The phrase carries with it the idea of "*as soon as it is morning and every morning.*" Spurgeon said, "Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night." The reference to "*morning*" could be understood as the time when judicial decisions were made in ancient Israel (*Jer.21:12; Ps.101:8*) or simply taken as the universal symbol of a renewal of hope. When the sun rises there is a rebirth of hope.

In Psalm 130:5-6, this same repetition is found as if to remind us that *an integral part of faith is learning to pray persistently, wait expectantly, and trust completely.*

- <sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait,  
And in His word do I hope.  
<sup>6</sup> My soul *waits* for the Lord  
More than the watchmen for the morning;  
*Indeed, more than* the watchmen for the morning.

Sentinels often stood guard at the city walls during times of war, watching in the darkness for danger and waiting expectantly for the safety that daylight brought. When we pray, we can wait expectantly for God to answer because Christ has ingratiated God's favor for us. This idea of *praying persistently, waiting expectantly, and trusting completely is heard* in two other places in minor prophets.

- **Habakkuk 2:1**—I will stand on my guard post  
And station myself on the rampart;  
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,  
And how I may reply when I am reprov'd.
- **Micah 7:7**—But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD;  
I will wait for the God of my salvation.  
My God will hear me.

**Illustrated:** Prayer is *urgent* and *persistent*. This past Wednesday I spoke about *Johann George Ferdinand Mueller* (we know him as *George Mueller*) who founded great orphanages in Bristol England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He distributed almost 300,000 Bibles and over 1 million New Testaments. He was known for experiencing some great answers to prayer, but some of the answers to his prayers were *delayed*.

When he was a young man, he began to pray for two of his friends. He prayed for them every day for more than *sixty years*! One was converted just before Mueller's death at the last service that he preached in. The other was converted within a year of Mueller's passing. Mueller was simply following the words of Christ in Luke 18:1, that at all times, we "*ought to pray and not lose heart.*"

Now have you ever stopped praying because you didn't know if you were approaching God rightly? If so, then you will find help as the ancient King gives us five ways that we are to come to God.

1. **We come with spoken words**—"*Give ear to my words, O LORD...*" (v.1a) "**Words**" express clear thoughts with well-reasoned terminology. When we pray, God is honored when we *think* about what we are saying and express ourselves with proper words.
2. **We come with broken words**— "*...Consider my groaning.*"(v.1b) The word "**groaning**" (*hagig*) is translated "*meditation*" in Psalm 104:34 and "*musings*" in Psalm 39:3. It speaks of those *non-verbal sighs* or *distraught concerns* that cannot be formulated into words. "God understands the language of sighs," one commentator said. When we lack the capacity to articulate or vocalize our situation, God knows the silent words spoken within our hearts! David says in essence, "*Yahweh, understand what I am trying to say, but I don't have words for.*" When all you can do is sigh or groan, God understands and hears the *inexpressible desires* of your soul, my brethren.
3. **We come with desperate words**—"*Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to You I pray.*" (v.2). The desperation is seen in the word "**cry**"—"*...heed the sound of my cry for help.*" In Psalm 34:6, David said, "*This poor man cried, and the Lord heard Him.*" Crying prayer prevails. David knows that God is a Romans 8:26 kind of God—"*In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness,*" that is, He takes our burden upon Himself, "*for we do not know how to pray as we should*" (sometimes we don't know the manner or the content in which to pray), "*but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*"

As parents, we know the nature of our children's request by the tone of their cry, don't we? When our kids are just calling out to us because they are too lazy to walk into the room where we are, that's one kind of tone. But when they are in trouble, the timber of their voice is not calm and sedated or casual, but it is *elevated* and is filled with *danger*—"Mom!" "Dad!" Instincts kick in right away, and we come running. This is where David is. He is surrounded by trouble, and He calls out to God in desperation! "Lord, You hear the desperation in my voice, don't You? Help me!"

4. **We come with prepared words**—"*In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to You*" (v.3a). The verb "**I will order...**" or "*lay my request*" (NIV), "*direct my prayer*" (KJV), is properly translated "*prepare a sacrifice*" (ESV). The verb (*arak*) means to "*set out in order,*" to "*arrange or to set in rows.*"
  - It is used in Genesis 22:19, where Abraham "prepares/lays out" the wood for the sacrifice.

- In Leviticus 1:7-8, it is used of the *priest arranging the wood on the altar fire* and *arranging the chunks of the sacrificial animal on the altar*.
- In Leviticus 24:8, it is used of *arranging the showbread* in two rows of six loaves each on the tabernacle table.
- In Samuel 17:8, it is used of a *line of battle*.
- In Isaiah 44:7, it is used of giving *an orderly account to God* of the blessings afforded to Israel.

As David thinks of his prayers, he says, just as the priest sets the morning sacrifice in order, I will *set in order* and *prepare* my prayers to God. Now, what does David mean?

**Application:** David models for us that there ought to be thoughtful order in our prayers, not just a rattling off of Christian clichés and religious-sounding words that we really don't give any thought to. "We just want to thank you Lord for being here, thank you for the church, the country, the food...blah, blah, blah..." and the truth is, sometimes our words are just "filler" words, with no real thought or order in them.

Now let me be quick to say that David is not speaking against *spontaneous* prayer; neither is he promoting *eloquent* prayer. David is not against reading from *written* prayers nor merely saying "wooden" prayers. The point is, he is showing us by *example* and by *instruction* that our prayer life should be more prepared than our breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Even the prodigal son carefully thought about the words what he would say before returning home. Then after his father ran to him, he said, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son*" (Luke 15:18-19, 21). Prayer is coming to God with *spoken words, broken words, desperate words, and prepared words*—"In the morning I will prepare my sacrifice of prayer to you."

5. **We come with believing words**—"... In the morning I will order my prayer to You and **eagerly watch**" (v.3b). In other words, I will keep on the lookout for the answer, Lord (Cf. James 1:5-7).

What gives David the confidence to come to God in these ways? How does he know that God will hear Him? David answers in verse 2.

- Verse 2—Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God,  
For to You I pray.

The key to David's confidence and ours is a warm, *personal, saving, and covenant relationship* with God. Notice, David did not simply say, "*Hear my cry for help, O King...or God...*" but rather, "*...my King and My God.*" Like Thomas who had an acquaintance with Christ, without the exercise of saving faith, it is possible to be around Christian people and even Christian teaching and not embrace Christ from the heart. But once Thomas was lovingly confronted with the reality of the living Savior, he cried, "*My Lord and My God*" (John 20:28).

Now how can you say this and know for yourself that God is "*your God and your King?*"

The first stanza is a primer or tutorial on *coming to God in prayer*. The second stanza shows us that the chief matter of prayer is *the adoration of God*.

## B. Prayer adores God. (vv.4-7)

- <sup>4</sup> For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;  
No evil dwells with You.
- <sup>5</sup> The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes;  
You hate all who do iniquity.
- <sup>6</sup> You destroy those who speak falsehood;  
The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.
- <sup>7</sup> But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house,  
At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You.

The word “**for**” at the beginning of verse 4 is an important connecting word because it supplies the *reason* or the *basis* for David’s expectancy in prayer. In other words, what David is saying is, “Lord I am coming to you with these *spoken, broken, desperate, prepared, and believing words*—BECAUSE I KNOW WHO YOU ARE and WHAT YOU ARE LIKE!

Notice carefully that David makes no request in these words. He does not ask God FOR anything. He simply *adores* God. Adoring God serves two purposes in prayer.

- It *stimulates* reverence—so that in light of His character many of our complaints just melt away.
- It *formulates* confidence—as to why God should answer prayer.

Theodorus, speaking of Luther, once said, “I overheard him in prayer, but, good God, with what life and spirit did he pray! It was with so much reverence as if he were speaking to God, yet with so much confidence, as if he had been speaking to his friend.” Prayer both *stimulates reverence* and formulates confidence with God.

What does David know about God, and what should we know about God as we pray? In verses 4-5, David tells us *how God views sin*. In verse 6, David tells us *what God’s attitude is toward sinners*.

In verse 4, the word “EL” is used for **God** and it signifies *the strong One, the mighty One*—it means *God Almighty*. Occurring some 240 times in the Old Testament as the exclusive name for God, David would have us to know that *this God hates sin*.

As he describes God’s nature, he reminds himself and us of how God views sin, and the words grow in intensity. He starts with a negative—“*You are not a God who **takes pleasure** in wickedness,*” but then it moves to a stronger expression in verse 5, “*You **hate** all who do iniquity,*” and then even stronger in verse 6, “*You **destroy** those who speak falsehood...*” with the last expression even stronger still, “*The Lord **abhors** the man of bloodshed and deceit.*” The same growing description is seen with the types of sinners: “*the wicked*” (v.4), “*the boastful*” (v.5a), “*all who do iniquity*” (v.5b), “*those who speak falsehood*” (v.6a), and “*the man of bloodshed and deceit.*” (v.6b)

Like waves crashing against the coastline of our carnal thinking, David lifts us into the presence of God by showing us that God is unlike anyone we know. Yet David adores God. Four characteristics of God are revealed.

1. **God's transcendence possesses no affinity to sin.**—*For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; (v.4a)*

The God of heaven and earth is never pleased with sin. In Hebrews 11:25, we are told that for men, there is a "passing pleasure of sin." There is a sweet taste of sin for us, but all sweet sin turns into bitterness sooner or later. Just as the prodigal son enjoyed the parties and riotous living for a moment, soon he found out that it left him empty and bankrupt in the pigpen of want. Can we admit that there is an attractiveness in sin for us? There IS a delight in sin, or we would NEVER be tempted by it. But for GOD there is NO ATTRACTION whatsoever. In all the oceans of sin, there is not "one drop of sweetness" in it to God's taste. He has no fleeting attraction. He has no momentary pleasurable thought which flashes into His mind or passes over His holy heart.

God is not like a man. He is perfectly pure. He is altogether holy. There is nothing sweet or attractive or pleasurable or pleasant in sin in God's eyes. He is altogether opposed to wickedness—"For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness."

- **Psalm 11:5**— The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked,  
And the one who loves violence His soul hates.
- **Psalm 34:16**— The face of the LORD is against evildoers,  
To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

2. **God's immutability bars all evil from His presence.**—"No evil dwells with You." (v.4b)

The Almighty God *will never* and *has never* consented to allow iniquity to dwell in His house or dwell in His presence. Evil will never find "room and board" with Him. It will never be an "overnight guest" in His house. We entertain sin in our hearts (*Ps.66:18*), but God never entertains it in His. Evil can never be a "house guest" of God (*Ps.15*). It can never take up temporary residence or seek asylum in His presence. As long as sin is *cherished* in the basement of our hearts or the closet of our minds, His fellowship and intimacy will not be there.

- **Psalm 92:15**— To declare that the LORD is upright;  
*He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*
- **1 John 1:5**—This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

There is no dark side to God. His unflinching purity bars any evil from His presence.

3. **God's righteousness permits no arrogance to stand with His approval.**—"The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes;" (v.5a)

We ran into the word "**stand**" in the first psalm (1:5). It means that *the boastful will not be accepted or approved in God's presence*. Like chaff, which is blown away by the wind, the boastful will be *blown away* by God's winds of judgment. Who are the boastful? The "**boastful**" (*holelim*) speaks of the person who is proud of himself. He says, "Look what I have done," and yet his heart is both arrogant and hollow, senseless and unthinking, wild and without thought for safety. Do you hear the prophet Jeremiah admonishing us from long ago?

- **Jeremiah 9:23-24**—Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.
4. **God’s holiness opposes both sin and the sinner.**—“*You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.*” (vv.5b-6)

These verses blow up the worldly myth that “*God hates the sin but loves the sinner.*” These verses reveal that God does not merely *hate* the evil done, but the evildoer. He doesn’t *detest* or *dislike* intensely the man who has *no respect for life*, but He finds repugnant the deceitful person who has *no respect for truth*.

This is something we can all understand. Take, for example, a murderer who has been arrested and brought before a judge. All the evidence is clear. All the circumstances are examined. All the jury is certain that this man is murderer, and they return a verdict of guilty. Now, what if the judge says, “I accept your verdict. And because God hates sin but loves the sinner, we will send the murder to prison and let the murderer go free. We will punish murder, but not the murderer.”

What would you say? There would be a protest outside the courthouse for weeks! That is ludicrous! You can’t have *murder* without a *murderer*. You can’t have *lies* without a *liar*. You can’t have *blasphemy* without a *blasphemer*. You can’t have *crime* without a *criminal*. And you can’t have *sin* without a *sinner*!

There is no such thing as being against sin in the *abstract*. You cannot punish *murder* without the *murderer*, and you cannot judge *sin* without judging the *sinner*. God does not send *sin* to hell, but *sinners*. This is why we all stand in need of Christ. If God would not even spare His Son when He stood in the places of sinners, how can He spare sin and all who remain married to it?

In a Messianic reference to Jesus, we read of the character of the Son in this way:

- **Psalm 45:7**—You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You  
With the oil of joy above Your fellows.

What is David getting at? We do not pray to a *vague, unfeeling, detached, superficial, universal Spirit*. Yahweh has a certain holy character. And if we do not *love what He loves and hate what He hates*, our prayers will not be filled with praise, wonder, and awe.

*Prayer comes to God and adores God*. David understands *who God is and what God’s character, nature, and attributes* are. Unless our minds are impressed with God’s holiness, we cannot and will not pray aright.

However, before David turns the page on this instruction, he explains why he is allowed into God’s presence.

- <sup>7</sup> But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house,  
At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You.

Okay, David, you have just testified that *Yahweh hates evildoers and detest men who have no regard for life and no respect for truth*, but what about you David? You are *guilty of murder, lust, deceit, and adultery*...what gives you the right to enter God's house?

He answers, "**...by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house.**" Literally, *in the abundance of Your unfailing love*. David does not come on the basis of His *religiosity, talents, skills, position, or privileges*, but by grace alone (Cf. *Ps.69:13; Is.55:6-7*).

LOOK—there are two men going to church to pray (*Luke 18:9-14*). One is a *Pharisee*—one of the most respected men of the day. The other is one of *the most despised...the most hated...the most vilified people in Israel*...he often strong-armed money out of people with the use of thugs. He is one of the most despicable, vile, unprincipled scoundrels of Jewish society. He has been banned from the temple and not allowed even to testify in court. He is an extortioner, a collaborator with Rome, and a flat-out, hard-core thief! The Pharisee is not an *atheist, a fool, irreligious, or immoral*. He is a *giver, a disciplined man, and a "good" man* as far as people are concerned.

LOOK at them both praying! One stood *praying to himself*, and the other was *unwilling to lift up his eyes to God in prayer*. The Pharisee is *rejected and condemned*, but the repentant tax collector is *humbled and justified*. Why? Not because he is *special*, but because he is given a *special grace*—through the merits of Christ.

David comes *by grace* into God's presence, but He also comes *in fear*—At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You (Cf. *Ps.138:2; Ps.115:11, 13*). Here is the combination of quality worship—grace and fear.

**Illustrated:** Andrew Bonar tells the story about the Grecian painter who had produced a remarkable painting of a boy carrying grapes on his head. It was so true to life, so realistic, that when the painting was displayed in the public forum, the birds descended upon it and pecked the grapes, thinking they were real. His friends praised the painter, but he was displeased. "I should have done a great deal more. I should have painted the boy so true to life that the birds would not have dared to come near!" In short, he should have attracted them and repelled them all at the same time. This is what we see here: David is *lured by grace yet sobered by fear*—it is just the right combination for true worship!

How do we pray the Bible way? Prayer addresses *God*. Prayer *adores God*. Prayer also...

### C. Prayer petitions God. (*vv.8-10*)

- <sup>8</sup> O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes;  
Make Your way straight before me.  
<sup>9</sup> There is nothing reliable in what they say;  
Their inward part is destruction *itself*.  
Their throat is an open grave;  
They flatter with their tongue.  
<sup>10</sup> Hold them guilty, O God;  
By their own devices let them fall!  
In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out,  
For they are rebellious against You.

Note that the *primary petition* of David does not come until we are more than half-way through the Psalm. The order is a good pattern to follow. He *comes to God* first, then he *adores God*, and after the *grace and fear* of God has "guard-railed" his approach, then he makes his request—"Yahweh, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; make Your way straight before me."

What is David praying for? It is simple and brief.

1. **Protect me**—from my enemies.

- because of my foes;

These enemies were bent on his destruction, and they would use deceit laced with honey and sugar to get it done (v.9). His enemies had their eyes on David, and your enemies have their eyes on you. So do the angels (*Heb.1:14*) and so does God. We need protection. He also prays...

2. **Direct me**—in my steps.

- <sup>8</sup> O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; Make Your way straight before me.

What does David mean by "...lead me in Your righteousness...make Your way straight before me?"

He means, "Show me what You require of me." In the next line of parallelism, he speaks of "Your way," which is *a way of conduct he is to follow*. There is a subtle implication that, in this mess, *walking in righteousness is even more critical than walking in safety*. David needs to see the next steps because of the messiness of his situation and the deceit of his enemies. So do you, dear friends. So, he prays, "Lord protect and guide so that I may do what is right and please You."

By the way, Jesus taught us to pray this way in Matthew 6:13 when He said,—"*do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"

**Application:** There are situations into which you will find yourself, and you WILL NOT know all the particular pitfalls, dangers, and precautions. Sometimes the road ahead looks like it's been demolished in a flash flood of trouble. But there is no need for us to fear because we can petition God in prayer!

In Arizona, a law was passed with a hefty fine attached for motorists who sought to cross a flash-flood area and ended up getting stuck. It is called the "stupid motorist law." The lawmakers were not seeking to be offensive in tagging the bill with this name; they were just reminding citizens of how foolish it is to try to turn a car into boat. It's better to wait and call for help. David reminds us of the same. When you face one of those "what-must-I-do-now" situations...pray—"Yahweh, lead me in Your righteousness, make Your way straight before me."

Now let's not oversimplify the matter. What if the situation is not a flash-flood emergency, but an active shooter on the loose? How do we pray when a thief is breaking in houses or a lunatic lacing baby-food with poison? We are instructed to pray—protect me, direct me, and...

### 3. Convict them.

Notice that David models for us that it is appropriate to pray against evil.

- <sup>10</sup> Hold them guilty, O God;  
By their own devices let them fall!  
In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out,  
For they are rebellious against You.

Does it make you uneasy to pray like that? We may want prayer to be all “sweet” and “courteous,” but God’s book of prayer shows us that sometimes prayer has a *hard, sharp edge* to it! Biblical piety or true godliness has a “ruggedness” to it sometimes. For righteousness to be enjoyed, *sin* or *evil* must be dealt with. We call these “imprecatory” prayers within the psalms. Someone has compared them to embarrassing relatives for the church. They are the kinds of prayers that we don’t want our guest at church to hear. But as one author said, “the cosmic party cannot begin until God puts things right” (*Cf. Ps. 98:7-9*). Security cannot be enjoyed without safety, and the truth is, we cannot rest easy unless some evils are taken out of the way—and God has already promised that He will deal with those who rebel against His moral order.

What is the point? Petitioning God to deal with those who rebel against Him finds agreement in heaven (*Rev. 16:6-7*). It is biblical to pray this way, though it ought to make us feel a little squeamish. It is biblical, but as we pray this way, may a tear be found in our eyes and a burden for souls in our hearts like our Savior.

Prayer *addresses* God. Prayer *adores* God. Prayer *petitions* God. Finally,

### D. Prayer transforms us. (*vv. 11-12*)

- <sup>11</sup> But let all who take refuge in You be glad,  
Let them ever sing for joy;  
And may You shelter them,  
That those who love Your name may exult in You.  
<sup>12</sup> For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD,  
You surround him with favor as with a shield.

David ends on a happy note because when we pray the Bible way, prayer changes and transforms us. David is not just thinking of his own troubles and needs, but now he encourages all God’s people to “**take refuge**,” “**be glad**,” and “**sing for joy**.” Two metaphors are used which explain how God transforms us in prayer.

#### 1. Remember, God is a refuge. (*v. 11*)

- <sup>11</sup> But let all who take refuge in You be glad,  
Let them ever sing for joy;  
And may You shelter them,  
That those who love Your name may exult in You.

The terms “take refuge” and “shelter” convey the word picture of the way a mother hen spreads her wings atop the heads of her chicks, so that they can no longer see the source of danger, but all they can see is her calming presence. Jesus uses this metaphor in Matthew 23:37.

Here is the good news for the Christian today: when we pray, we are to pray *knowing that God is not only greater than our trials*, but more so, *God is to have such a bigger view in our eyes than the dangers we face (Rom.8:30)*.

## 2. Remember, God is a shield. (v.12)

<sup>12</sup>For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD,  
You surround him with favor as with a shield.

In ancient warfare “**shields**” tended to be both *tall* and *wide*. They covered the entire body so that no weapon could penetrate and harm. And David says this is what God does for the “**righteous**” (that is, those who look to Him in faith for salvation through Jesus Christ). God’s people are surrounded (defended) by His unfailing love and favor as with a shield. Nothing can reach us except that which He permits for “*our good*” and His glory (*Rom.8:28*).

One of the old saints said there are only three things that can happen to you if you know the truth and you know God. 1. *God can bless you so that you don't go through the trial.* 2. *God can permit the trial and then use it for good in your life.* 3. *You can die and go to heaven.* All three are good, but we can only have this assurance when peace if we *address, adore, petition, and trust* God.

## Conclusion:

In 1536 a young man in his twenties wrote a book, and in the first paragraph of the first chapter of the book is one of the most important, profound, brilliant, wise, and astute paragraphs in any book. Most men have to live to be sixty or eighty years old before they could come up with this conclusion. But young 20 something-year-old John Calvin saw it at the beginning of his life. This is what he said,

“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and [the knowledge] of ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

These are just two things, and when you know these two things you pretty much have all the wisdom you need—when you *know God* and *know yourself*. You can't *know yourself* unless you *know God*, and you can't know God without knowing yourself and coming to Christ. The two are inextricably bound.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes*

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