

A Morning Psalm
Psalm 5
ABC 6/18/25

This Wednesday is the 1st day of summer. As we've done the last 2 years, we're going to spend this summer in the Psalms. If you have a favorite psalm that we haven't yet looked at, let me know & we'll try to get to it. Today open to Ps 5. This psalm of David consists of 5 stanzas. In the 1st, 3rd, & 5th he's standing face-to-face before God. In the 2nd & 4th he glances at the wicked & develops contrasts between God & the wicked (stanza 2) & the righteous & the wicked (stanza 4).¹ Let's read it & then get after it. **Ps 5**

David is passionate about being heard by God. He was a man of prayer. In Ps 3:4 he says, **I was crying to the LORD with my voice.** In Ps 4:1 he writes, **Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! ... Be gracious to me & hear my prayer.** David wasn't a perfect man but he was a passionate man who sought God's heart. In Ps 5 we see this again.

1. David's Contrition² It opens with an appeal for God to listen to David's prayer. **1-2**

David's personal involvement is underscored by the repetition of **my 7x: my words, my groaning, my cry, my King, my God, my voice, & my prayer.** There's no confusion here; David is all in. We hear him pray & he means business. He begins with repeated pleadings, **Give ear to my words, consider my groaning, heed the sound of my cry...** Emotion pours from David's heart as he begs God for a hearing. These aren't the words of someone who thinks they have it all figured out. They're the words of a man in great need written possibly during Absalom's rebellion. But as the anointed king of Israel, David understood that God is King over all. David calls out to the **LORD** (1-2), *Yahweh*, the personal covenant name of God. He also addresses God as **my King & my God** (2). Even though David was king, he knew he served under a far greater King, One he knew personally as **my King & my God**. Prayer is a must if you want a personal, intimate relationship with God. You must come before Him as your King. You must know Him as your Lord & Savior, who invites you to come into His presence through the blood of Jesus. **3**

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1-41*, p 44

² Outline taken from Steven Lawson, *Psalms 1-75*, pp 38-40

Twice David says he'll pray **in the morning** (3). The idea is that David's 1st thought on waking was about the lies of his enemies (5-6). He immediately turned those thoughts into prayer. Whatever trials God sends into our lives are to cause us to turn to Him in prayer. David declared, **In the morning I will order *my prayer* to You**. Scholars have struggled to interpret this because the verb **order**, *prepare*, *lay*, or *present* has no direct object. The word is usually used in reference to laying wood on the altar for a sacrifice (Gen 22:9),³ the placing of the loaves of bread on the table in the tabernacle (Lev 24:8), & the setting of a meal before guests (Ps 23:5). David seems to be associating prayer requests with sacrificial offerings. Paul does something similar when immediately following his prayer of doxology (Rom 11:33–36), he urges those in Christ to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1). David sees prayer as just as real as the wood & the sacrifices laid on the altar. As David prayed, he also waited in expectation, believing that God would answer him. He'd pray & then **eagerly watch** for God's answer. It implies that when we pray, we should look for the answer. As our King, we can expect God to listen & respond to our needs as His subjects. When you're under attack, run to the Lord in prayer like David did.

2. David's Conviction The 2nd stanza is a reflection on the wicked, growing out of David's approach to God in vss 1–3. Each of the preceding psalms have spoken of the wicked, though differently each time. Ps 1 considers **the way of the wicked** as opposed to **the way of the righteous** (6). Ps 2 traces the rebellion of the wicked against God, mostly that of the kings & rulers of the earth (2). In Ps 3 David's been attacked by wicked people & asks God for protection from them (7). In Ps 4 the wicked have slandered him & he's asking God for vindication. Here David refers to wicked people as those in whom God has no pleasure but rather He hates & abhors them. **4-6**

The pressing need for deliverance causes David to make his appeal on the basis of God's holiness & righteousness. God rejects the arrogant, hates the wrongdoer, destroys the liar, condemns the violent, & detests the deceitful. God & David share a common enemy; God's enemies are his enemies. Evil brings a reaction from David, but it's a reaction free from revenge. *Getting even* isn't an option for the believer (Rom 12:19-21). Judgment is to remain in God's hands. God has no

³ Allen Ross, *Psalms*, 1:247 (Lev 6:5; Num 28:4)

pleasure in wickedness nor can He, the holy God, be neutral about sin. David seems to be distinguishing himself from evil persons, reminding himself he must be different if he wants to be heard by God. Another psalmist will say, **If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.** He then says, **But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer** (Ps 66:18–19). The truth is we all take sin too lightly. We sometimes think God is like a loving grandpa that sees the sin of His grandchildren as funny or no big deal. This isn't the God of the Bible. Too often our thoughts are, *How much sin can I get away with & still go to heaven?* The truth is you can't get away with any sin. The God of the Bible pays out the wage of death for sin, no matter how small that sin is. You must be holy, & the secret to being holy is to see sin as God Himself sees it & to draw close to Him. This is what David does here in 2 ways: 1st, he reviews the types of evildoers, moving from terms that are general to those that are stronger & more descriptive: those who do **wickedness** (4), **the boastful**, **all who do iniquity** (5), **those who speak falsehood** (6), & finally, men **of bloodshed & deceit** (6). He's growing in his awareness of how sinful sin is. 2nd, he reminds himself of how God views sin, & again the words grow in intensity. The 1st expression is a negative, pointing out that God doesn't take **pleasure in wickedness** (4). But this moves to the stronger expression **You hate all who do iniquity** (5) & to the even stronger words: **You destroy those who speak falsehood;** & **You abhor the man of bloodshed & deceit** (6). If you're drawing close to God, you'll become increasingly sensitive to sin, which is inevitable since the God you are approaching is a holy God. One commentator was thinking along these lines when he wrote, *Prayers of this kind may have more value than our age is inclined to admit.* He explains, *they are surely born out of a deep sense of the sinfulness of sin & out of the conviction that the only One who can stem the tide of sin is the Almighty.*⁴ David's reasoning is that since his enemies are wicked, surely God, who is righteous, will act on his behalf. What is at stake for him is the character of God, a God who can take no **pleasure in wickedness**. David remembers God's holiness & righteousness to encourage himself with the truth that God will right all wrongs. He knew God is infinitely holy, & He cannot approve of, tolerate, or fellowship with sin. Habakkuk says that God's **eyes are too pure to approve**

⁴ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p 75

evil (Hab 1:13; 1 Jn 1:5). Far from winking at sin or chuckling about it, God stands apart from it & His Word warns us repeatedly that He'll condemn all unrepentant sinners. If you think your good deeds will outweigh your bad deeds & get you into heaven, you're going to be terribly disappointed. Just a single sin bars you from heaven, unless you trust in Jesus as your substitute & Savior. Since God is perfectly holy, He must reject all sin & sinners. David declared, **The boastful or arrogant shall not stand before your eyes or in your presence** (5), meaning no sin would go undetected by God's eyes. Therefore, God hates **all who do iniquity**. This holy God must judge sinners as an expression of His holiness. Confidently, David stated, **You destroy those who speak falsehood** (6). This reference is to David's enemies who were lying about him & slandering his character. They would be confronted by God because God **abhors** or detests people who are bloodthirsty & deceitful. We often hear the cliché that *God loves the sinner, but hates the sin*. But David says that God not only hates the sin, He also hates **all who do iniquity** (5) & **abhors the man of bloodshed & deceit** (6). Jonathan Edwards probably had texts like this in mind when he preached his famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. He warns,

*The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, & is dreadfully provoked: His wrath towards you burns like fire... The bow of God's wrath is bent, & the arrow made ready to string & justice bends the arrow at your heart, & strains the bow, & it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, & that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.*⁵

That doesn't quite sound like, *God loves you & has a wonderful plan for your life*, does it? Does God love the sinner or hate him? Yes! God loves the world of lost sinners (Jn 3:16) & sent His only Son to be the Savior of the world (1 Jn 4:14, 1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pt 3:9). Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world (1 Jn 2:1-2), & His invitation to salvation is offered to all who will believe (Mt 11:28-30; Rev 22:17). This is all of God's grace & love (Eph 3:18-19). But the glorious truth of God's love doesn't change the fact that He hates sin & punishes sinners. He has no pleasure in them, & they can't dwell with Him (4) or stand before Him as they are (5; 1:5-6). He abhors murderers & liars & destroys them if they don't trust His Son (6). It isn't necessary to dilute the

⁵ www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/edwards_angry.pdf

word **hate** in vs 5 because we find it also in 11:5 & 45:7 (cf 7:11). In fact, God expects those who love Him to love what He loves & hate what He hates (97:10; 119:113; 139:21; Prov 6:16–17; Amos 5:15; Rom 12:9). God’s hatred of evil isn’t emotional but judicial, an expression of His holiness. John Calvin explains the apparent contradiction by saying that we need the vss about God’s hatred of sinners so we’ll be overwhelmed with how terrible & offensive our sin is to an absolutely holy God. Only then can we truly appreciate what He did for us in Jesus. He cites Augustine who explains that in a sense, God loved us even when He hated us. He hates us for our sin & rebellion, but He loves us in Christ before the foundation of the world.⁶ I think we often blunder when we’re quick to tell arrogant, unrepentant sinners that God loves them. They need to hear they’re objects of His terrible wrath 1st. If a person is broken by his sin & guilt, then yes, tell him of God’s love in Jesus. But otherwise, he needs to hear of the terrors of his sinfulness & the coming judgment of God. Here David rehearses God’s hatred of the unrepentant wicked to encourage himself with the fact that God will bring justice for His people.

3. David’s Consecration One of the complaints unbelievers make against Christians is that their understanding of sin makes them think of themselves as better than others. But that isn’t the case, or at least it shouldn’t be. It’s just the opposite. The next stanza shows what really happens. **7–8** When David wrote, **but as for me**, he contrasts himself with the wicked crowd that rebelled against God. But his boldness in naming evil & identifying the enemy isn’t based on his own righteousness. He makes no attempt here to prove his moral superiority. He depends completely on the **lovingkindness** of the Lord. This is the gift of God’s unmerited favor & saving grace freely given beyond anything deserved.⁷ Sinners find acceptance by & fellowship with God if they’ll come to him as David did, through God’s **abundant lovingkindness** (7). This is the 1st occurrence in the psalms of this word, *hesed*, of God’s steadfast love. This **lovingkindness** is God’s unconditional covenant love by which He receives sinners who repent & believe. How is this possible? How can a wretched sinner ever stand in the presence of a Holy God? Because of His **lovingkindness**. Jn 3:16

⁶ *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.2-4

⁷ Webster, p 54

says, **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** In Rom 5:8 we read, **God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** & John tells us, **By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him** (1 Jn 4:9). The **lovingkindness** of God is summed up in Jesus Christ. He is the only way by which we can enter into the house of our holy God. It's Jesus who is our refuge. He's the One who takes upon Himself the wrath we deserve; it's His blood that drips off the arrow of God's wrath. He's the One in whom we receive the righteousness we need to enter God's presence. As Paul says, **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (Rom 7:24-25a). David has approached God properly & has been led by that to reflect on the sinfulness of sin. If the objection of unbelievers were true, we'd expect David to be saying: *But I'm different from the evildoers. I'm a good man, & it's because I've lived a good life that I ask You to hear me.* That's not what he does. Instead of pleading his own righteousness as grounds for coming to God, he pleads God's **lovingkindness**. Paul echoes Ps 5 when he describes the human condition: **you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world ... indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, & were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest** (Eph 2:1, 3). Then he quickly turns to the powerful, positive message of the gospel. His emphasis on God's love is emphatic: **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)** (4-5). This bold transition from being dead in our sins to being alive in Christ isn't based on anything we've done. Neither Ps 5 nor Eph 2 offers any method for us to obtain God's great love. Repentance for sin & belief in God's redemptive power is assumed, but it's only God's action that's declared. Our role is passive. We're the recipients of the gift of God's grace & mercy.⁸ Knowing how unworthy he was, David wrote, **At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You** (7). Not claiming any self-righteousness, he recognized that he approached God solely on the basis of God's grace. David

⁸ Webster, pp 54-55

didn't trust in his own righteousness to approach God. He had none & neither do we. We can only come into His presence by His grace as we trust in Jesus. As he thought on God's absolute hatred of sin & His holiness, David realized he could never approach God on the basis of his own righteousness. He knew the only way he can enter God's house is by God's **abundant lovingkindness**. The only way anyone can draw near to God is through His abundant grace as shown to us in Jesus. Remember the story of the Pharisee & the tax collector? The Pharisee was a seemingly *righteous* man. He prayed, **God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get** (Lk 18:11–12). The tax collector, who was standing at a distance, didn't consider himself worthy even to look up to heaven but only prayed, **God, be merciful to me, the sinner!** (13). Jesus said, **I tell you, this man, the tax collector, went to his house justified rather than the other, the Pharisee; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted** (14). *Though evil persons are excluded from God's presence because of their sin, it doesn't follow that David is admitted by virtue of his own goodness. His entrance into God's house would be based only upon the abundance of God's lovingkindness; that is to say, it was only God's grace & covenant love toward His people which made entrance into His presence possible.*⁹ Vs 8 contains the 1st petition in the psalm & it's simply for guidance, that God would **lead** him in God's **righteousness** & make his **way straight before him**. When David's under attack, he takes refuge in the Lord through prayer; he appeals to God as the righteous Judge; & he draws near to God by His grace. **O Lord, lead me in Your righteousness...** God will never lead people into sin but only down paths of **righteousness**. David asked that the way of God's guidance would be level & smooth: **Make Your way straight before me**. He's painfully aware of the tendency we all have when under attack, to respond to our attackers in a sinful manner. When someone sins against you, it's hard to follow the command of 1 Pt 3:9, **not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead**. So David prays to be led into God's **righteousness**. His prayer isn't just that God would protect him *from* the wicked, but also that God would protect him from *becoming like* the wicked. For

⁹ Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, p 87

believers to enter into the presence of God to worship & pray, it cost Jesus His life (Heb 10:19–20), & to treat this privilege lightly is to cheapen that sacrifice. David knew he needed guidance from God. Do we realize we need it as well? Do we pray for it as David did?

4. David's Condemnation David now turns to the wicked again & describes them in terms of their wicked speech & words. **9–10**

He again highlights their deceitfulness in a way that suggests he's been a recipient of their lies. But it isn't only what they say that's evil because their words are a reflection of their hearts (Prov 16:23; 18:4). These weren't constructive critics who were trying to help David do a better job. They were trying to destroy him. David asks God to judge them not just because they opposed David, but because **they are rebellious against You** (10). Their mouths were wicked because their hearts were filled with **destruction**. Jesus said that a destructive tongue speaks from a destructive heart (Mt 12:35–37; 15:18–19). If you're walking with the Lord & doing His work & someone attacks you, it may be they're in rebellion against God. Don't take it personally. You're just God's messenger. The critic is only angry with you because you represent God to him. Let God take care of him. Even worse, **their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue**. With a burst of holy indignation, David called out, **Hold them guilty, O God; By their own devices let them fall** (10). Far from a selfish request, this prayer was spoken with holy zeal. He wanted God to make right the wrongs he'd suffered. Thus, David appealed, **In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out**, banish them, or force them out. Why? Because **they are rebellious against You** (10). The driving issue in David's heart wasn't his enemies' opposition against him, but their rebellion against God. Paul quotes Ps 5:9 when he describes the wicked in Rom 3:13, **Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving**. Paul used this text, along with others (Ps 14:1–3; 140:3; 10:7; Is 59:7; Ps 36:1) to make the case that all have sinned & fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). We find ourselves included in this description because we're all sinners. His point is that the human race is utterly & incurably wicked: **there is none who does good, there is not even one** (Rom 3:12). Paul applied this to humanity as a whole & to each of us personally. David's enemies symbolize all people without God. But like David we're welcomed by the steadfast love of the Lord. It is true, we

all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), & it's also true, as Paul emphasized we're **justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus** (Rom 3:24).

Vs 10 contains the 2nd petition of the psalm & is an imprecatory prayer, a prayer asking for judgment on the wicked, praying evil against them, or calling for a curse on them. Prayers like this present a difficulty for many people & always raise questions. Many psalms call on God for help as the faithful are threatened by enemies. In a number of places, the requested help is that God would punish these enemies. With the NT teaching & example of Jesus to forgive & turn the other cheek (Mt 5:38–48; Lk 23:34; 1 Pt 2:19–23), we may wonder how it can be right for God's people to pray like this. Some general principles help in understanding these types of passages.

1st, the people being cursed aren't enemies over trivial matters; they're people who hate the faithful because of their faith; they mock God & use ruthless & deceitful means to suppress the godly (Ps 5:4–6, 9–10; 10:15; 42:3; 94:2–7). 2nd, remember that these curses are in poetic form & can use exaggerated expressions. 3rd, these curses are expressions of moral indignation, not of personal vengeance. They're prayers for God to vindicate Himself, displaying His righteousness for all the world to see (Ps 10:17–18). 4th, the OT forbids personal vengeance (Lev 19:17–18; Prov 24:17; 25:21–22), which the NT repeats (Rom 12:19–21). We must always keep as our deepest desire, even for those who mean us harm, that they would come to faith in Jesus & come to love His people (Lk 23:34; Rom 9:1–3; 10:1; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pt 3:9).

Here David describes the evil of his attackers & asks God to judge them. As with the earlier tension of whether God hates the wicked or loves them, there's a tension here as well: Should we ask God to judge our attackers or to forgive them? Before you quickly conclude that the NT way is to forgive our enemies, you need to remember that the NT also says, **For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you** (2 Thes 1:6). Paul goes on to say that these wicked people **will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord & from the glory of His power** (1:9). Even the Lord's Prayer, that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven, includes His judgment of the wicked. Here in Ps 5, please realize that David's anger with the wicked isn't personal. Few people in the Bible were more forgiving in response to personal attacks than

David. His concern is that they've rebelled against God, & his request is for God's condemnation of their sin. It's the kind of prayer we should be able to pray when we see the effects of evil in our fallen world.¹⁰

5. David's Celebration David broadens the application from himself to all of God's people who may be under attack in vss **11-12**.

David's high view of God led him to praise Him. He concludes this psalm by calling on all the righteous to be glad in the Lord. He overflowed with excitement in God: **let all who take refuge in You be glad; Let them ever sing for joy** (11). True joy comes from those who **take refuge in God**. This means to trust in the One who is faithful & true. Those who trust in the Lord are to shout for joy because they are **surrounded** or *covered* by the living God. He is the One who protects them from their enemies. True joy comes from God's faithfulness & protection, all summed up in God's name. His name reveals His character, His nature. To love God's **name** is to love the fullness of all He is. Those who truly know Him, love Him & **exult** or **rejoice** in Him with hearts that overflow with wonder & praise. David also asks God to **surround them with favor**, to **shelter them**, which he is certain God will do. Like a mother bird would spread her wings of protection over her young, David called for God's protecting love to be shown toward all who'd stood with him during this turbulent time. He concludes by affirming the supreme goodness of the Lord toward all His saints: **It is You who blesses the righteous man, O Lord** (12). He had every reason to rejoice in the Lord, no matter how bad his trials had been. God's protective care not only overshadows His people, but He also surrounds them with His favor so they're eternally safe from their enemies. This divine blessing is like a **shield** forming an impenetrable wall around His people. This **shield** isn't the small, round shield of Ps 3:3 but a much larger, rectangular shield which gave protection to the whole body. God graciously protects or shields those who take refuge in Him. David has taken refuge in God & is so overflowing with joy in the Lord that he bursts forth in singing. Being glad & joyful in the Lord is our duty, because glorifying God is our duty. As John Piper says, *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*. & when we're satisfied in Him we can't help but be glad & joyful. God

¹⁰ Boice, p 49

uses those who are consumed with a holy passion for Him. It's in being overshadowed by the greatness & holiness of God that we know our own helplessness & inadequacies. This drives us to seek Him with urgency & reckless abandon. As long as a person thinks he can succeed by his own efforts, he'll never pursue God. Only in our weakness will God's strength be made full in us (2 Cor 12:9). Everything in life must be viewed from the perspective of the high & lofty character of God. Even when circumstances are bleak, the outlook of faith always remains triumphant. David's example inspires our courage in the face of opposition. When you're under attack, take refuge in the Lord through prayer. Appeal to Him as the righteous Judge. Draw near to Him by His grace, rejoicing in Him as your defender. Paul & Silas knew that joy when they sang praises to God from the Philippian jail after being wrongly accused & beaten (Acts 16). Hudson Taylor knew that joy even in the midst of trials & tribulations. He knew the truth of the hymn which states, *Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art. I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.*¹¹ Taylor claimed this as his life song. Those around him said seldom a day went by without him singing, humming, or whistling it. One day, after hearing dreadful news about missionaries being held hostage, he began to whistle this tune. He was angrily questioned about how he could whistle during such terrible times. Taylor patiently responded, *Would you have me anxious & troubled? That would not help them, & would certainly incapacitate me for my work. I have just to roll the burden on the Lord.*¹² Do you know that peace & joy when you're under attack? It's found in God as your refuge & righteous defender. Run to His loving arms. As Paul told the church in Rome,

In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:37–39).

When Martin Luther was making his way to appear before the Roman Catholics to answer for his *heretical* ideas, one of the Cardinal's servants taunted him, asking, *Where will you find shelter if your patron ... should desert you?* Luther answered, *Under the shelter of heaven.* That was the psalmist's shelter. It should be yours as well.

¹¹ *Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting*, Jean Sophia Pigott (1876)

¹² <https://enjoyingthejourney.org/hymn-history-jesus-i-am-resting-resting/>