



Title: Story and Song – Psalm 5

Text: Psalm 5

Date: July 10, 2022

Main Idea: As we cry out to Our King, God, we can trust that He hears us and covers us with His favor.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXTS: PSALM 5

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What active words are mentioned in this text?

2. What is the setting or occasion of this text? What words help you understand the tone of this psalm?

3. Did you read any words, phrases, or ideas that were familiar to you? Any that were unfamiliar to you?

4. Did these passages remind you of any other passages you have read or studied before? Write those down.

5. Is there a verse, phrase, or idea that stood out to you, convicted you, or spoke to your life experience? Write that down.

6. Do you notice any contrasting ideas or groups of people in this psalm?

Explain – What does this mean?

*Note: These introductory notes to the psalms will help as you study these first 8 psalms this summer.

The psalms can generally be divided into 3 categories:

God	King David	Wicked	Righteous (“those who take refuge in you”)

3. In Psalm 5, King David reveals the essence of prayer and specific actions of prayer. Using his words, answer these questions:

- What is prayer?

- When should we pray? Why? Where?

- What emotions are involved in prayer? How does God respond to prayer?

4. Read these verses for affirmation and elaboration on King David’s understanding and practice of prayer. How do they help explain prayer and its purpose?

- Psalm 19:14

- 2 Sam. 7:18-29

- Psalm 51

- 1 Chron. 29:10-20

Apply – How does this change me?

1. In verse 2 King David addresses God with 2 titles, my King and my God. What is significant about the separation or delineation of these for him? Consider your own views and worship of God. Is God your King? How does your life show this to be true? Is He your God, your only God? How does your moment by moment living reflect this?

2. Psalm 4 ends with King David praying as he goes to sleep at night (4:8). In Psalm 5 King David cries out to his King and God in the morning (5:3). What is the last thing you think of at night? What is your bedtime routine? What is the first thing you think of in the morning when you wake up? What is your morning routine?

3. In verses 11-12 King David portrays God as actively being the source of joy and protection for those who "take refuge" in Him. As a child you may have sung a church song, "His Banner over me is Love" taken from the Song of Solomon 2:4 (written by King David's son). The image of covering and spreading over is repeated in the Psalms and throughout the Old and New Testaments (see Psalm 91:4, Ruth 2:12 for examples). The image is of branches or wings which denotes nurturing and is one Jesus uses to describe his feelings for the people in Jerusalem in Matt. 23:26. How has God been a safe place for you? How has he "covered you with favor as a shield"?

4. Look back at the table in the Explain section. How does this compare and contrast help give perspective to what David is experiencing? How does it help give perspective to what you experience when suffering and evil is all around you?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. The Psalms are considered the song books of the Jewish people and central to their corporate worship, the “mini-Bible” according to Martin Luther, and the words/book of Bible “that Jesus quoted most”, according to Tim Keller. How could you use the gift of the book of Psalms in your personal worship or relationship with God?

2. Psalm 5 has 5 stanzas or declarations that center around specific pronouns:
 0. You (God) and me in verses 1-3
 1. You (God) in verses 4-6
 2. I in verses 7-8
 3. They (wicked) in verses 9-10
 4. They (righteous) in verses 11-12

Using this same format, write a personal prayer to God one morning this week and say it or sing it aloud to Him in a time of worship.

3. Some scholars believe King David wrote this prayer/song in the wilderness while he was running from his son, Absalom, who was

seeking his life and throne. Read King David's request in 2 Sam. 18:5. What or who are you lamenting, groaning, or crying over right now? How can you turn this sorrow or pain to God and 'watch' (verse 1-3)?

4. Take time this week to "cover" your family and class members using verses 11-12 as your prayer.

Commentary: Taken from “The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life” by Dale Ralph Davis

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PRAYER TUTORIAL

PSALM 5

For the music leader. To nehiloth. A psalm of David.

- 1 Give ear to my words, O Yahweh,
understand my murmuring.
- 2 Pay attention to the voice of my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for it is to **you** that I pray.
- 3 O Yahweh, in the morning you will hear my voice,
in the morning I will set in order (my requests) to you
and watch expectantly.
- 4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil can never be a guest of yours.
- 5 Arrogant men will never hold their ground in your presence;
you hate all evildoers.
- 6 You cause those who speak lies to perish;
Yahweh detests bloodthirsty and deceitful men.
- 7 But **I**, in your overflowing and faithful love.
will enter your house;
I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you.
- 8 Yahweh, lead me in your righteousness
because of those lurking for me;
make your way straight before me.
- 9 For there is nothing reliable in their mouths,
their heart is destruction,
their throat is an open grave;
with their tongues they speak smooth talk.
- 10 Hold them guilty, O God!
Let them fall because of their schemes;
banish them for their many rebellious deeds,
for they have revolted against you.
- 11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice,
let them shout for joy forever;

and may you be their shelter,
and may those who love your name exult in you!
12 For **you** will bless the righteous one, Yahweh;
you will wrap him round with favor like a shield.

Moody Stuart once asked John ('Rabbi') Duncan to preach for him. Rabbi Duncan replied, 'I'll be glad to preach, if you'll take the prayers; I'm not able to pray at present, but I can preach a bit, and would like it.' We may be unsure how to take Rabbi Duncan. He assumed preaching was easier than praying (I think he's right). I don't know what was behind his 'not (being) able to pray.' But his attitude is far ahead of one that assumes all one needs is a reservoir of pious lingo and turns of phrase. The best posture for praying is to realize that we need help for praying. We begin prayer by praying, 'Lord, teach us to pray' (Luke 11:1), and mature believers find themselves praying that petition again and again. And I have a suspicion that in the Holy Spirit's filing cabinet there is a folder marked 'instruction in prayer' and inside, among others, is a copy of Psalm 5. In this psalm David teaches us how to pray when we are in dangerous and lousy circumstances. In his own prayer he models prayer for us and provides us with a prayer tutorial, so that, as he himself prays, he seems to leave behind directions for our prayers. Let's look at these.

Prepare your prayer

First he says: prepare your prayer (vv. 1–3). Note that David does not pray to a distant stranger. He is speaking to Yahweh, 'my King and my God' (v. 2). Yahweh is the redeeming God who is there for his people (Exod. 3:1–15) and he has brought David into a personal bond with himself. On this basis prayer can begin.

Note how he describes his prayer. It consists of spoken words ('my words,' 1a) but also of broken words ('my murmuring,' 1b). 'Murmuring' may mean groaning or sighing; in Psalm 39:3 it seems to indicate a disturbed sort of 'musing' that is non-verbal. The murmuring here may be like that—distraught concerns that cannot be formulated in words—and he asks Yahweh to 'understand' it! As if he already knows a Romans 8:26 kind of God! And he comes with desperate words, for he speaks of 'the voice of my cry for help' (2a). His prayer is not calm and sedate but is driven by the urgency of his dangerous situation.

Yet for all this tension he comes with prepared words: 'in the morning I will set in order my requests.' The verb means to set out in order, to arrange, to set in rows. It is used in Leviticus 1:7–8, of the priests arranging the wood on the altar fire and arranging the chunks of the sacrificial animal on the altar; it is used of arranging the showbread in two rows of six loaves each on the tabernacle table (Lev. 24:8). It's an orderly verb! It does not have an explicit object here in verse 3, but I think David is thinking of his prayer, his requests. The priests may be setting the morning sacrifice in order but David is getting together and ordering his prayer. He is *preparing* his prayer.

We find too little of this in the church. We don't order our prayers; we simply start in with our religious rattling and easy Christian clichés. 'We just want to thank you, Lord; we're just really glad to be here; we ask you, Lord, to just give us a really good time in your presence; just help us to worship you in Spirit and in truth [How many ponder what that means in John 4? Has it perhaps become an empty phrase that simply makes excellent 'filler'?] tonight and we'll be careful to give you all the honor

and glory ... blah, blah, blah.' Then if we need to pad the prayer or to boost its 'earnestness,' we can always insert 'Father' or 'Lord' every third or fourth word—go ahead; surely God's not too interested in our keeping the third commandment anymore. I suppose some might call this 'free prayer.' It's certainly free, I doubt if it's prayer. Sometimes we may need to revert to using the written prayers of others to get back on track. Like praying the psalms themselves as our prayers. Or using the *Book of Common Prayer* (gulp for some) or the Puritan prayers collected in *The Valley of Vision* or chunks out of Matthew Henry's *Method for Prayer*. There is a difference between prayer and drivel. I do not want to advocate eloquence in prayer, but I want to reject thoughtlessness in prayer. 'In the morning I will set in order my requests to you.' Prepare your prayer.

Know your God

David seems to give a second direction: know your God (vv. 4–6). Be sure to note the connection in the first of verse 4, 'For you are not ...' The NIV exasperatingly omits the 'For.' But it is important. These verses are giving the reason or supplying the basis for David's expectancy in verses 1–3. Why is David watching expectantly (3c)? Because ('For,' 4a) he knows what God is like; he knows his character.

But what a character God is! He is not a God who delights in wickedness (4a); evil can never be a house guest of God's (4b); arrogant men will not stand in his presence (5a). Well, yes; that's probably the way we want a holy God to be. But it gets more surprising; at least David seems a bit shocking to a sentimentalized twenty-first century mind-set: Yahweh hates all evildoers; will cause those who speak lies to perish; and detests bloodthirsty and deceitful men (5b–6). No tame God here! How vigorous God is in his righteousness! Verses 5b and 6b sort of blow up the myth about God 'hating sin yet loving the sinner.' He does not hate the evil done but evildoers (5b); he doesn't detest merely bloodthirsty deeds but bloodthirsty men (6b). What holy, praise-worthy hatred! You do not pray to a bland blob. Yahweh has a certain *character*. And because David knows that character, knows what Yahweh loves and what he hates, he has real hope that he will come to his rescue.

How does this instruct us in our prayers? For one thing, it infects our prayers with praise. Look back over these verses (i.e., vv. 4–6). David is declaring Yahweh's character but, in doing that, he is at the same time praising Yahweh for the way he is. Sometimes I like to have our congregation begin a worship service with a confession of faith—like Article One of the *Belgic Confession*:

We all believe with the heart
and confess with the mouth
that there is only one God,
who is a simple and spiritual Being;
he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable,
infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good,
and the overflowing fountain of all good.

Now you may think you are *only* confessing your faith with those words. But of course that is not the case. You *are* confessing your faith but you are also oozing into praise. You can't say those words and mean them without at the same time declaring both

your belief and praising the God you believe in. That is the way in David's prayer: he rehearses Yahweh's character and in so doing he 'slips' into praise!

Then there is another bit of instruction: we must know what God is like before (or as) we pray. The character of God is the basis and springboard of our prayer. Some years ago while I was serving in academia I remember how a faculty associate was to meet with an administrator to argue his case about making certain changes in a departmental academic program. He was a bit worried that this administrator would be a 'tough nut to crack.' The faculty member, however, knew of an autobiographical memoir the administrator had written. So he got himself a copy of it and read it. He wanted to know everything he could about this administrative 'animal' so that he could press his case to the greatest possible advantage. And that is the case in prayer. Because Yahweh is the sort of God he is (vv. 4–6), David can make particular kinds of petitions (for example, vv. 10–11). After all, why should you pray for some of the world's governments or leaders to be overthrown unless you know that your God hates oppression? Why pray for suffering Christians in hostile environments to be delivered unless you know a God who has said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people'? Know your God.

Make your request

Thirdly, the time comes to make your request (vv. 7–9). David prepares to make his request (1) on the basis of grace, 7a; and (2) in an attitude of reverence, 7b.

The pronoun ('But I ...') in 7a is emphatic. David has just testified that Yahweh hates evildoers and detests bloodthirsty and deceitful men (vv. 5–6), so we might expect him to contrast his own superior resume and morality. But there is nothing of the kind. 'But I ...,' he says, can enter your house only by 'your overflowing and faithful love' (lit., 'in the abundance of your unfailing love'). David does not come on the basis of his religiosity or his deserts but only by grace.

And he comes by fear. 'I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you' (7b). What a combination we have here (as in all quality worship). In 7a we meet the welcome, friendship, and acceptance grace extends, and yet 7b reflects the majesty, kingship, and trembling that fear knows. Glad welcome and trembling reverence together. This reminds me of Andrew Bonar's story about the Grecian painter who had produced a remarkable painting of a boy carrying a basket of grapes on his head. It was so true to life, so realistic, that when the painting was displayed in the Forum, the birds 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 one blow. So here; David is both lured by grace yet sobered by fear—just the right packaging for worship!

Now for the petition. It is the primary petition—and we get half-way into the psalm before we get to it. 'Yahweh, lead me in your righteousness because of those lurking for me; make your way straight before me' (v. 8). His danger—'those lurking for me'—clearly drives his prayer; these enemies are bent on his destruction and will use deceit, even with its honey and sugar, to get it done (v. 9). So, he prays, 'lead me in your righteousness.'

But what does that mean? I take him to mean in this context 'the righteousness that you require of me,' the 'right way you want me to go.' In the next line he speaks

of 'your way,' apparently a way of conduct he is to follow. Perhaps there's a subtle implication that, in this mess, walking in righteousness is even more critical than walking in safety. In any case, in view of the danger and deceit of his enemies, he needs to see the next step, the clear way in the muck of his circumstances, one that pleases Yahweh.

It's a simple and brief petition. One might say that its New Testament equivalent is Matthew 6:13 ('Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'). Sometimes we may not be fully aware of all the details—not know all the particular dangers or various pitfalls, nor even the precautions required. Sometimes it looks like there are no roads in what's ahead of us. But we can pray verse 8. Here's a lovely young wife. A servant of Jesus. Cancer. One day at the surgery ward and all of life has tumbled in on this young couple. In the sadness and tears and what-must-we-do-nows, how can I pray for them? How can they themselves pray? What prayer makes more sense in such anguish than: 'Yahweh, lead me in your righteousness ... make your way straight before me'?

Declare your confidence

And then we might say that David's fourth direction would be: declare your confidence (vv. 10–12). He continues his prayer but gains confidence as he goes. Verses 10–11 contain his two-pronged petition: prayer *against* his and Yahweh's enemies in verse 10, and prayer *for* God's people, for their joy and protection, in verse 11. Would you pray as David does in verse 10? *Hold them guilty, O God! Let them fall because of their schemes; banish them for their many rebellious deeds.* Does it make you uneasy to pray like that? But you haven't any choice, for the petition of verse 11 cannot be answered unless that of verse 10 is answered; that is, God's people cannot enjoy security and safety (v. 11) unless—at some point—their enemies are taken out of the way (v. 10). What community can rest easy so long as a rampaging murderer-rapist has not been apprehended and punished? The New Testament carries the same testimony. Paul says to the battered Thessalonian saints that they will receive rest when—at Jesus' coming—God deals out affliction to those who are afflicting them (2 Thess. 1:6–7).

We may wish prayer could be all courtesy and finesse. If so, we've no business messing with the Psalms. Prayer must often have a hard edge about it, because it has to deal with evil. There's a *ruggedness* about true biblical piety. Why is the psalmist so ecstatic over Yahweh's coming to *judge the earth*? Because it means that at that time he will *put things right* ('he will judge the world with righteousness'); and only when that happens can the cosmic party begin (see Psalm 98:7–9).

In verse 12 David sets down the confident assurance on which his two-fold petition rests: 'For you will bless the righteous one, Yahweh; you will wrap him round with favor like a shield.' (This assurance is very similar to Psalm 1:6.) David does not know precisely when or how this will be done, but he knows who will see to it—the 'You' is emphatic; 'You will bless the righteous one.' This security extends to the individual ('righteous' is singular here, not plural) and is complete (the word for shield, *sinna*, refers not to the hand-held but large, body-sized shield) and close (Yahweh 'wraps him round'). Derek Kidner refers to the other occurrence of this verb I have translated 'wrap round.' It appears near the end of 1 Samuel 23 when Saul almost has his meat hooks on David and his men. Saul on one side of a hill, David & Co. on the other side. David and his

men are hurrying to get away from Saul, and Saul and his men 'were closing in' on David and his men to nail them (v. 26). He had surrounded David, was ready to wrap him up. Oddly enough, just at that moment a breathless messenger caught up with Saul with the news of a Philistine invasion—Saul had to let David go and go himself to defend his country. Saul had been closing in, but Yahweh was closer. The enemy cannot wrap us up when Yahweh has already wrapped us round with his favor.

In his autobiography German theologian Helmut Thielicke tells an incident from his earlier school days, when about ten years of age. He and his classmates had taken an intense dislike to another lad in their class. Hans exuded a kind of lackadaisical attitude toward studies and yet, when asked a question in class, he could spout off everything one might know about the matter. For this and other quirks Hans earned the ire of Thielicke and his friends. Hence they decided that the whole bunch of them needed to give Hans a thrashing. But on the morning set for the ambush, a strange thing happened. Hans' father was walking with his son that day to school. His father was one of the most highly respected men in town. The 'gang' noticed what happened when Hans and his father parted in front of the school. They saw how Hans' father stroked his son's hair and patted his cheek as they parted; then, several times as they both began to go their separate ways, father and son would turn and wave at each other. Thielicke said that he and his cohorts were very touched by this scene. It was as if they came to a collective, if unstated, conclusion: 'Whoever was loved by such a father stood under a protective taboo and could not be molested.' They were gripped by an unexpressed awe. And so Hans was spared. One might say he was wrapped round with favor as a shield!

So David ends his prayer with the confidence that nothing can finally hurt the righteous, for Yahweh's favor will always surround him. But what are we to do in the meantime, when we are living in an arrogant, deceitful, lying world, facing one pitfall after another? Keep praying the prayer the Lord has taught us to pray: *Yahweh, lead me in your righteousness because of those lurking for me; make your way straight before me.*¹

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, [Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life: Psalms 1–12](#) (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 61–70.