

### ***“Lessons in Prayer—David and His Psalms”***

Today we continue a series on prayer by looking at the life of biblical figures and their prayer lives. The goal is for us to grow deeper in our own prayer lives. The largest United Methodist Church in the world is in South Korea. It has over 100,000 members who meet to worship primarily in people's homes. One of the things the people in this church are known for is how they pray, the time they spend in prayer, and their dedication to praying. In fact, at 5 a.m. most of those people gather at various places around the city of Seoul to begin each day with prayer. This is not 5 or 10 or 15 people gathering. It's a majority of their people taking the first hour of their day to connect to the God who made them.

Now, in this series I'm not asking you to get up at 4 every morning so you can gather to pray for an hour at 5 every day. But what I am asking you to do is to take more time than you are right now and have a richer and deeper prayer life every day. I'm asking: Would you be intentional about wanting to grow in your conversation with God so that you could experience God's power like never before?

Today we're going to look at another major character in the Bible, King David. He's a great person to look to because David composed, or has attributed to him, 73 chapters in the book of Psalms. The Psalms are songs, or prayers set to poetry and music. But men, don't think that since David wrote songs and poetry he was some kind of wimpy, timid, coward. He was also known as one of the greatest warriors, one of the smartest generals, ever to walk the planet. And big part of this man's prayer life is recorded for us to see and he's definitely got something he can teach us about prayer. We're going to learn from his life and his example. Study Guide reminder...

Let's start by looking at the Psalms and what they are and how they might help us in our prayer lives. By the way, the Psalms are the easiest part of the Bible to find. If you open your Bible to the very middle, you will find yourself in the book of Psalms. They are the heart and the soul of the Bible. They are the prayers of God's people in all kinds of places and stages of life. These prayers are not sugar-coated, they're not syrupy sweet prayers that you only pray if your life is perfect. These are prayers that express the raw emotions of human life. The stuff of your life is in here.

The Psalms were the prayer book and song book of the ancient Israelites and the early Christians. The Psalms were a huge part of Jesus' prayer life and if we don't know how to use them in our prayer lives, we are missing out.

Last week as I was praying with our 4 year old daughter one evening at bedtime and she looked up and me and said, "Daddy, you say the same prayer every time." I got a little bit defensive, because I'd like for my prayers to be creative and fresh, and from my heart. And what business does a 4 year old have in correcting her pastor father?! But she's right. For a lot of us our prayers begin to get very routine, we say the same things in the same way every time. We get into a rut that's dry. Now, some routines are very important and life-giving. But when our prayer lives get into a rut, we've got resources right here in the Psalms that can give new life to our prayers. Using the Psalms can expand your prayer vocabulary.

One theologian and scholar (Walter Brueggemann) says that there are three movements of life that are reflected in the Psalms. Write this down on your program. The first movement is the season of orientation. These are the times of life when things are going well. Not necessarily great, but things are good. In times of orientation you feel like God is walking with you. And during these times of orientation, we want to sing songs of praise.

My dad gave me a telescope last year and looking at the stars brings up Psalms like this one. **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1)**. When you're in times of orientation you look up at the stars and say things like that. "Wow, isn't that awesome! Isn't God good?! Even the heavens declare God's glory." Pretty much everything is good in times of orientation.

But here's what you need to know about the times of orientation in your life—they don't last forever. There will be seasons when you slip out of those good times. In times of orientation you can forget to pray,

you can forget to go to church, maybe forget to read the Bible, maybe forget you need God. Because everything is going pretty well. And when you slip away that leads to a time of disorientation.

In times of disorientation it feels like the wheels are falling off your life. Sometimes you go into periods of disorientation because things just happen in life—nothing you did wrong, it just happens. It may be that the doctor has just told you that you have cancer and you're reeling from that—that's a time of disorientation. It may be that you lost your job. It may be long periods of depression where you wonder if it will ever get any better. It may be the death of somebody you love. It could be a million other things. And during these periods of disorientation you cry out to God. You say, "Please, God help me, I need help!"

Sometimes disorientation happens because you have sinned. You recognize that you faltered and you say, "God, please forgive me, I'm so sorry for what I've done and I've slipped from your path." But if you don't see help coming right away you find yourself more and more disappointed with God and eventually you find yourself angry with God. The Psalms reflect times of disorientation because they are a part of the cycle of our lives. Like Psalm 13, **"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O LORD my God..." (Psalm 13:1-3).**

Some people are surprised when they read these and say, "This is actually in the Bible?!" Yes, it's in the Bible because God is giving you permission to be angry sometimes. God is giving you permission to be disappointed. God giving you permission to admit that you don't understand and you can vent that towards God.

Now, when you look at the Psalms of disorientation, all but one of them end with something like, "Yet I will trust in your unfailing love. For you are my God, my refuge and my fortress in whom I trust." Even that Psalm I just read to ends that way.

But look, times of disorientation don't last forever either. They lead into times of reorientation. It works like this: We're in a time of disorientation and we eventually hit bottom. Then we find ourselves coming out the other side. And when you do, how do you feel? I mean, when you lost your job and looked for a new one for a year and finally found a new one, how do you feel? You feel like shouting songs of joy! You feel like telling all your friends, "Praise God! I was in the pit and now I'm not!"

Or that illness you've been battling, you finally overcome it. And you just want to call everybody you know and praise God with joy and life because you were in the pit and you've been delivered. This is Psalm 30: **"I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths...O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. O LORD, you brought me up from the grave...Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name" (Psalm 30:1-4).** That is a Psalm of reorientation.

But an interesting thing happens. After a period of reorientation, you don't feel that ecstasy forever. After a while you move into a period of orientation—those times when things just feel good, things are going well. And then stuff happens and you find yourself disoriented, you cry out to God for help and find yourself in reorientation, then orientation, then...it's the cycle of our lives. And there is a Psalm for every season of your life. So I want you to put an X where you are in this cycle. And as you think about that, look for those Psalms that reflect where you are in your life.

Now, a good question is, "How do I go about praying the Psalms?" When you go to pray the Psalms you will find yourself drawn to certain Psalms during certain seasons. So as you begin reading them, if one doesn't ring in your mind, then move on to another one until the words begin to jump out at you. So you take that Psalm and you read it out loud. That's how they were meant to be used. When we say the words out loud it empowers them somehow. I don't know how this works, I just know that it does. Now don't feel like you have to pray the entire Psalm. Just take the parts that resonate with you. That's what Jesus did when he prayed the Psalms.

Take for example Psalm 62. Maybe you find the first couple of verses are very helpful. **"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken" (62:1-2).** Notice that this is not a prayer to God but a statement about God.

So you read those verses out loud and they remind you that your soul finds rest in God alone. That God is the solid rock that you can stand on. And then once you speak them aloud you move into praying those words.

It might look like this, "Lord, help me to rest in you..." then you might pause and imagine yourself resting in the arms of God. And then maybe you say, "God you've saved me a million times in the past from myself, and my stupidity, and my sins. Save me again. You are the most solid thing in my world. Help me to put my life on you and trust you." You take the words and use them in your vocabulary, and your ideas, and pray them. Do you see how doing this can open up new and deeper ways to pray. We can do this!

Now, 73 of the Psalms are attributed to a man named David. Let's talk about him. King David was born in the town of Bethlehem, just like Jesus, except many generations before Jesus. And King David didn't start off as a king. He was a poor shepherd boy, the 7<sup>th</sup> son of Jesse. But when he was around 8 years old, Samuel, the great prophet, came to Jesse and said, "God has revealed to me that one of your sons is to be the future king of Israel." Jesse brings out his 6 oldest sons one at a time for the prophet Samuel to see. He's sure that God will pick the oldest, the best looking, the most successful of his sons. But no, God says, "You look at the outward appearances. I look at the heart." God chooses David, the smallest son, the youngest, the weakest, the unproven one. He's anointed to be the future king.

He doesn't become king immediately. He spends his childhood, the next 6 years, in the fields watching over the flocks of sheep. Maybe it's as a kid while he's taking care of that flock that words start to come to him, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want..."

Fast forward to a time when he's around 14 years old. His people, the Israelites are at war with the Philistines. On the battle front there is a warrior, a giant of the Philistines, named Goliath. He taunts the Israelite soldiers. "Let's do this one on one. If one of you beats me, we'll become your slaves. If I beat you, you become our slaves. Who is man enough to take me on?" Nobody from the Israelite army volunteers! Goliath is terrifying! He's 9 feet tall.

David is running supplies to his brothers and he hears Goliath taunting the Israelite troops. Not only is he taunting the troops but he is demeaning God. He's saying things like, "Has your God wandered off? Maybe even your God is afraid of me! Maybe he doesn't exist!" Fourteen year old David hears this and says, "Why isn't anybody stepping out there to shut him up? You are the warriors of the Lord. Somebody get out there and put him down!" They all just ignore him. Finally David says, "If you're not going to do it, I'll do it." They're all like, "OK, it's your neck; your funeral." They offer him a sword and heavy armor, but he can't swing the sword and the armor is way too heavy for him to move. Instead he says, "I'm going to go out there with what I know. My sling, five smooth stones, and my faith in God."

He goes out and faces off with Goliath. What do you think he's doing at that point? I'm pretty sure he's praying. Goliath says to him, "They sent a boy to do a man's job. Doesn't matter to me. I'm going to tear you apart, limb from limb and then let the wild animals eat your carcass." I think David is praying at that point. He may be praying Psalm 27:1. **"The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1)** That's a Psalm of orientation, a prayer of confident hope, as he goes into battle.

He turns to Goliath and says, **"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head" (1 Samuel 17:45-46).** David runs at Goliath, takes his sling, shoots a rock that hits right in the middle of his forehead. It says that the stone sank into his forehead and he fell over dead. Just like that. All the warriors in the Philistine army simultaneously wet their pants and then scatter. What a great story!

I have a small tray that I use every morning during my prayer time. It's got my Bible, my journal, the book I'm reading, a pen and a small leather bag. It has five smooth stones in it. And when I feel overwhelmed, that reminds me that God can give strength where there is none, that God can do miracles through a seemingly insignificant but faithful person. In those moments of our need when we're facing our own giants we can turn to God and remember the great affirmations of faith that are in the book of Psalms and we are able to pray that God will be our stronghold—we don't need to be afraid.

Let's fast forward a couple of decades. David is chosen to be the next king, but the current king, Saul, doesn't want to give up the throne that easily. He tries to kill David and for a time David has to run and hide in the wilderness. What kind of Psalms and prayers is he writing and praying then? Psalms of disorientation. He's asking God, "Why are my enemies so set on killing me? I did the right thing and bad things are happening. Why?" Psalms of disorientation.

But finally David becomes the king. And he shouts Psalms of praise and joy, Psalms of reorientation. "Thank you God for delivering me! Thank you for keeping me safe and leading me through the dark times and places. Thank you! Praise you!"

After he's been king for a little while his prayers become those of orientation. "How majestic is your name. When I see the beauty of the earth, the stars in the heavens, I see your glory."

But when he's been king for a long while he begins to slip off the path. One Spring, instead of going into battle with his troops, he stays home. He's kind of gotten used to his time of orientation and the comfortable life in the palace. That's a sign that something is not right. While all the troops are out fighting he has an affair with the wife of one of his men. Her name is Bathsheba. She gets pregnant. David tries to cover it up and can't. He ends up secretly having Bathsheba's husband killed in battle. King David plays the hero and kindly welcomes the grieving widow into his home.

David thinks it's all going to be OK, but Nathan the prophet is sent by God to confront David. God says through the prophet, "Did you think I didn't see what you've done? Did you really think this was going to turn out OK? Am I not the one who chose you as king?" Suddenly the blinders come off of David's eyes and he is stricken with remorse. He's thinking, "How did I do this? What was I thinking? What have I done?" He falls on his face and prays this prayer, Psalm 51, "**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin...Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation...**" (Psalm 51:1-2, 10-12).

I've prayed that Psalm before, and when I pray it, I find God doing for me what he did for David. He restored David and gave him a second chance and continued to love him. Listen, David's story of failure with Bathsheba, and Psalm 51, is there to remind you and me that no matter what we may have done, God is the God of the second chance and willing to forgive when you call on him, and repent.

The rest of David's life is made up of moments of great joy and moments of great tragedy. At the end his life the Bible says that David lived a good life, a full life, with much joy. And then he breathed his last. I wonder, what was David praying when he breathed his last? Maybe he was praying that Psalm that had its beginning when he was just a simple shepherd boy. "**The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever**" (Psalm 23). Do you see the power of the Psalms?

Here's my challenge to you this week. This week, take the Psalms that you have in your Study Guide each day. Take the time to read the Psalm out loud. Take a couple of verses that ring in your heart and mind, and from them make your own prayer. And then at least twice a day, spent some quality time conversing with God and see if your life isn't changed by these encounters. Let's pray like David. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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