

DAVID'S PRAYER

Worship, Bible study and prayer are the three engines that drive a Christian's life and his spiritual growth. Yet many Christians who regularly attend worship and Bible study, do very little praying. They keep "meaning to get to it," but they keep putting it off until they encounter something they can't handle by themselves: then they turn to prayer. That's not a bad time to pray, of course, because there is no bad time to pray. But a prayer life which consists only of resorting to prayer when everything else has failed leaves much to be desired. It effectively shuts God out of the rest of your life and keeps you from tapping into the power He can provide for living and growing in faith. Paul advised the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" because a life lived in continual communion with God is a life which will overflow with God's blessings.

Kind David seems to have led that kind of life. Despite his many serious failings, David was "a man after the Lord's own heart." He had lethal flaws but he knew where to go for help and he went there constantly. The psalms of David are prayers which he offered up to God in all kinds of circumstances. When David was about to be overcome by his enemies, he prayed to God for help. When God gave him victories, He praised and thanked God for them. When he was burdened with guilt, he prayed to God for mercy and forgiveness. After God had forgiven him he offered prayers of praise and thanks. David prayed when he felt close to God and when he felt far away from God. He prayed then things were going well and when they were going terribly wrong. He prayed without ceasing.

Today I'd like to examine one of David's prayers, *Psalms 19*, because it is a perfect model of what a prayer can and should be. The psalm is printed in your bulletin and I invite you to follow along as we look at it.

Psalm 19 A psalm of David.

¹The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. ³They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. ⁴Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. ⁵It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. ⁶It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

God gave Israelites different names by which they might worship Him: Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai and Yahweh are four of the names. David begins his prayer by addressing God as Elohim—a name which emphasized God’s creative power. A prayer to Elohim was a prayer to God the Creator. David praises God for revealing Himself to mankind through His creation. *“The skies proclaim the work of his hands,”* they *“pour forth speech,”* they *“display knowledge.”* As C. S. Lewis once said, *“Something doesn’t come out of nothing. Since there is something, someone had to have created it.”* Whether they know it or not, modern scientists are referring to this principle when they tell us that we live in a deterministic universe, where nothing “just happens” but everything has a cause. If something exists, something caused its existence; if change occurs, something caused the change; if nature displays order, something or someone created that order because nothing “just happens.” Despite the popular myth, a thousand monkeys pounding on the keys of a thousand typewriters for a million years will NOT produce *Hamlet*. Nor will a thousand monkeys throwing paint at a thousand canvases for a million years produce the *Mona Lisa*. *Hamlet* and the *Mona Lisa* are far more improbable than that. In the same way, creation itself, with all its majesty and grandeur and intricate order could not have just happened. To say so would violate the philosophical basis of science itself.

This is not rocket science, as they say; it is self-evident and man can understand it naturally. When primitive man looked at the stars he deduced that there must be a god or gods who created them. In the same way, David knew that the glory of creation was intended to reveal the glory of its Creator, so he begins his prayer by recounting how Elohim’s glory shines through all creation, from the heavens themselves to the sun that runs its course each day through the heavens. David’s praise is echoed in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a 20th-century American poet, who wrote; *“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”*

But we are inclined to take our Creator and His creation for granted. We become used not only to the wonders of nature, but to the miracle of life itself. St. Augustine wrote: *“Men go forth to wonder at the height of mountains, the huge waters of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vast compass of the ocean, and the causes of the stars: yet they pass by each other without wondering.”* To seriously consider the magnitude of the universe, the vast array of stars and the thermonuclear furnace of the sun is to confirm in your mind the simple truth that, *“Only the fool says in his heart, ‘There is no god.’”* Yet all these pale in comparison with the miracle of life itself. To confront the incredible complexity of a single biological cell, which is as structurally and functionally as complex as a factory the size of Detroit, is to confirm in your mind the simple truth that we are indeed, *“...fearfully and wonderfully made.”* So cultivating a sense of renewed fear and wonder is a good place to begin a prayer. It places us in a proper relationship with God by reminding us that He is God and we are not.

But if nature reveals Elohim the Creator-God to mankind, it is Scripture that reveals Yahweh our personal God to us. Just as the name Elohim is associated with God's creative power, Yahweh is the name associated with God's counsel and wisdom. Humbled by the power and majesty of God's creation, David pours forth his gratitude to God for giving us His *Torah*, His spiritual and moral instruction through which His children can gain wisdom and understanding. If Elohim shows us the power and majesty of God; Yahweh shows us His mind and heart—which is full of love for mankind.

⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. ¹¹By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹²But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

Through the *Torah* God confers six special blessings upon His children: refreshment for the soul, wisdom for the mind, joy for the heart, enlightenment for the spirit, purity for the conscience and truth and righteousness for the whole person. These rewards are to be desired above all other things, for they alone can give us the internal peace for which we all desperately yearn.

Finally, David turns from God the Creator and God the provider of truth and wisdom, to God the Forgiver, the source of grace and mercy to all who repent of their sins and long to be washed clean and justified in His sight.

¹³Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

When we learn to despise our sins and flee to God for forgiveness, He freely gives it—washing away our sins, creating clean hearts within us and giving us upright spirits. God forgives not only our conscious sins, the ones of which we are aware—He also forgives the sins of which we are not aware—the sins we commit every day and forget that we committed. That's not hard to do when you live in a society which no longer even calls them sins. Along with these are the sins which are so much a part of our personality that we no longer even think of them as things we "do"—they are just what we "are." It has been said that the last one to become aware of the water is the fish who swims in it: in the same way we "swim" in our sins and they are no longer apparent to us. Only the Holy

Spirit can show us the truth about them and we need to pray to Him to do just that because by nature we prefer the bliss of ignorance to knowledge of the stinking truth.

Finally, there are the habitual sins that plague us and torment us. These are sins that have the whip hand in our lives: lust, greed, anger, a critical spirit, gluttony, drunkenness, lying, cheating, coveting. Sins which enslave us, before whose power we feel helpless. God forgives these sins too. He took them all to the cross and died with them there, taking away their life with his death, their tyranny with his submission, their guilt with his innocence.

And when we finally begin to really and truly believe that our sins have perished with Jesus, that God has proclaimed them null and void, they begin to lose their power over us and we can begin to shed the burden of their guilt. Like a chrysalis emerges from its cocoon and rises up a beautiful butterfly, we shed our graveclothes and rise up as new creations who have been made fit to live in the Kingdom of God.

The more a Christian prays to God, the more God changes him into something more beautiful than he was. When we open ourselves up to God in prayer we make ourselves soft clay in His hands, allowing him to re-create us in His image.

There are four parts of David's prayer. First he acknowledges his own humility in the face of the majesty of God's creation. Next he praises God for giving us his divine instruction, in the *Torah*. Third, he acknowledges that he is a slave to sin and desperately needs for God to forgive him. Fourth, he rejoices in the newfound innocence and purity God has created within him by cleansing him of his sins. And finally he ends up with the words with which we began: *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, Be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."*

Amen.