

1. A PURE HEART

Create in me a clean heart, O God (Psalm 51:10)

The ancient caption above this psalm may or may not be factual, but it sure sounds right. However, it fits any occasion when sin has marred a person's relationship to God. Central to the psalm is this prayer in verse 10.

1. The Psalmist locates sin in the right place.

He points to his own heart as the source of the wrong he has done, and not to anyone or anything else. He doesn't even plead, "The devil made me do it."

We will never be delivered from sin until we accept ownership for it. Our sins are rooted in our hearts, not in other persons and not in external situations.

Blaming your peers, your parents, your ancestors, your neighborhood or your work environment will effectively block forgiveness and cleansing.

Sin is a personal choice; influenced, yes, but coerced, no.

2. The Psalmist expects help from the right person.

He doesn't seek his deliverance from an educator or a psychiatrist or a social engineer. He doesn't rely upon a priest or a pastor. People may counsel, even wisely counsel, but good advice doesn't save from sin. People may sympathize but human compassion has no authority over sin. Our hearts are beyond the reach of others or ourselves. Only God can radically change our hearts.

3. The Psalmist submits himself to the right power.

He petitions God to “create” within him a clean heart. Of the two Hebrew words for create this one always has God for its subject and usually the original creation as its reference.

One word refers to refashioning through use of appropriate resources--to fabricate from existing materials--something people often do. The other refers to creation from nothing--to a power that clothed divine thought with a visible, tangible universe--something only God can do. There can be no greater power, and only that power is adequate for the cleansing of our hearts from sin.

The Psalmist pledges praise and service when prayer is answered and the heart is purified. Anything more is impossible; anything less is ungrateful.

2. A TREE, A TRUST, A TRIBUTE

I am like an olive tree... I trust in God's unfailing love... I will praise you forever... (Psalm 52:8, 9).

"A *maskil* of David," reads the caption over this Psalm. Then a footnote tells me that *maskil* is "Probably a literary or musical term." Well, I don't get much help from probablies; what I need are certainties. Those I have, not in captions but in the text of Scripture--the written word of God.

1. A tree: "I am like an olive tree..."

The olive tree was vital to Israel's economy and valued highly for its various uses--oil, food and medicine, to name a few of the more obvious ones.

To be like an olive tree flourishing in the temple area was to be fruitful and useful, a person blessed of God and a blessing to others. This is a figure of speech any pious Jew would immediately grasp and approve.

In contrast to the wicked and wealthy man who "grew strong by destroying others," the psalmist was a man whom God had made strong to serve and help others.

2. A trust: "I trust in God's unfailing love..."

The character of God's blessed man is formed by trusting in God's loyal love. It was not the product of human genius but of divine gifts. God confers upon us, as we trust in him, a power to live as we ought.

Whoever and whatever we trust changes us. Trust always strengthens good or evil, depending upon the object of our trust. Only God is good, only God is eternal, therefore. The man who trusts

in wealth will be snatched up and brought down “to everlasting ruin” (vv. 5-7).

3. A tribute. “I will praise you forever for what you have done...”

The person who trusts in God will live forever to praise him. “In the presence of your saints” suggests a thanksgiving service. In this world and in the next, God’s people will pay tribute to him for unfailing love and never-ending mercy.

The olive tree endured for decades, even centuries. When the trunk is damaged the olive tree will put down shoots that allow it continued existence. It is, therefore, a rich symbol of life forever--life from God, with God and for God.

3. WHEN GOD LOOKS DOWN

God looks down from heaven on the sons of men... (Psalm 53:2).

God is above us but not aloof toward us. He cares for us. He is an actor not a spectator. He gets involved with us at great depth.

When God looks down at us, what does he see?

1. God sees many looking away.

To the Psalmist it seemed like “no one” did good. Evil is so rampant that we sometimes find it easy to wonder if there is any good happening.

To the psalmist it seemed like “everyone” had turned away. Paul was once on trial when no one stood by him or for him. The disciples “all forsook” Jesus when he was arrested. We probably all go through times of trouble when it seems, as it did to Jeremiah, “No man cared for my soul.”

2. God sees some looking up.

The psalmist makes himself an exception. He calls the enemies of God “them,” never “us.” There is danger of spiritual pride when we make sweeping judgments upon others, for we nearly always exclude ourselves.

The truth is, where there is one there is more than one. Elijah once thought he was the only person in Israel faithful to God. God reminded him of several thousand others.

3. God sees some looking ahead.

Salvation was expected for God’s people (v. 6). God would restore the fortunes of his people and those who were mourning would again rejoice.

The present hope was based on past experience (v. 5). The Lord had “scattered the bones” of those who attacked him. What he once did he could and would do again. His resources are infinite. He is never out of idea or out of ammunition. The future belonged to him as he had proved in the past.

Are you passing through hard times and tempted to despair? Look up to the One who is looking down on you. The Son of God is a refuge for “the sons [and daughters] of men.”

4. THE HEARING, HELPING GOD

Hear my prayer, O God.... Surely God is my help... (Psalm 54:1, 4).

The editorial caption over the psalm identifies an historical event, a time when David desperately needed divine help for “ruthless men” were seeking his life.

1. God is a hearing God. “Hear my prayer, O God...”

God will “listen to the words of my mouth” if I live by the words of his mouth. He has given us great and gracious promises to sustain us when we are almost goners. He never abandons those whom he has saved and adopted.

When “ruthless men” attack, our defense is a righteous God.

2. God is a helping God: “Surely God is my help...”

He is the God who saves (v. 1). The psalmist prays, “Save me, O God, by your name...by your might.”

He is the God who sustains (v. 4). “The Lord is the one who sustains me.” That’s as much help as anyone can have; as much as anyone could need.

He delivers from trouble (v. 7). The psalmist declares that “he has delivered me from all my troubles.” Trouble is always plural; God is always greater. “Troubles” are not detailed here, which makes it possible to fit my own troubles into the prayer and into the praise.

He delivers from people (vv. 3, 5, 7). Most trouble arrives in human form. The psalmist was opposed by strangers by slanderers and by warriors. They lied about him and fought with him, but God’s truth was greater than their lies and God’s strength was greater than their assaults.

The psalm begins with prayer and end with praise. We who are saved by the name of the Lord will praise that name forever.

5. A DESPERATE PLEA

I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice... (Psalm 55:17).

The psalm is attributed to David. That may or may not be factual. The psalm is applicable to all, and that is factual.

1. The prayer of a troubled man: “Listen to my prayer.... I am distraught...”

He was troubled by what men were doing. His “enemies” were “bloodthirsty and deceitful men.” They brought down suffering upon him.

He was troubled by what God was not doing. He seemed to be ignoring the desperate cries of the psalmist,

2. The prayer of a trapped man: “I would flee far away...”

Fright naturally desires flight. The psalmist longed for wings to fly into the desert and be sheltered “far from the tempest and storm.” We often think that distance would solve our problems, but new locations bring new complications.

Some troubles must be faced, not fled, and those who serve God need never face them alone.

3. The prayer of a betrayed man: “But it is you... my close friend...”

His foe was once his friend. The opposing warrior was once a fellow worshiper. They had enjoyed “sweet fellowship” as part of “the throng” who came to “the house of God.” In the previous psalm his foe was a stranger; here the foe is a once “close companion.” That is harder to understand, harder to endure.

4. The prayer of a believing man: “the Lord saves... he will sustain...”

The psalmist was confident of being heard and answered. He was confident of being delivered and sustained. “I call to God,” he affirms, and he does this “evening, morning and noon.”

God “hears” and “ransoms.” He upholds the righteous and brings down the wicked. He saves the few from the many.

“I trust in you,” the psalmist says, and he finds that those who trust will triumph.

6. RUNNING FROM MEN; RUNNING TO GOD

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me (Psalm 56:1).

This psalm has been attributed to David when the Philistines nabbed him. Scholars find that possible but unlikely. One thing is sure, however, the psalm is the cry of a desperate man.

He was chased: “men hotly pursue me...”

Those who pursued him were persistent. He accents their relentless pursuit by using the phrase “all day long” three times. All day long they press their attack. All day long they slander their victim. All day long they twist his words. They were determined and deceitful.

2. He was confident: “When I am afraid I will trust in you.”

His faith triumphed over fear. He declares, “in God I trust, I will not be afraid...” Faith stronger than fear prompts him to twice deliver a bold challenge: “What can mortal man do to me?” He trusted the immortal God to deliver him from mortal men.

His faith triumphed over foes. He is confident that his enemies “will turn back when I call for help...” They do not fear his prayers, but they fear the wrath of the one to whom he prays.

3. He was committed: “I am under vows to you, O God...”

His deliverance inspired his gratitude: “I will present my thank offerings to you,” he pledged, “For you have delivered me from death.” Our deliverance from sin and death should issue in lifelong praise to the deliverer.

His deliverance changed his behavior: “I may walk before God in the light of life...” The Lord had kept his feet “from stumbling.” He

would consequently use his feet to walk in the light of God's word and will for him." If our walk does not change our faith is not real.

All the Philistines aren't dead! People who defy God and harass his people are still in abundant supply. They are no match for the living God. His word is still a force for their defeat and our conquest.

7. THE SONG OF THE SAVED

I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed (Psalm 57: 1).

The original life-situation, according to the caption, was David's flight from Saul's murderous jealousy. However, we can easily "democratize" the psalm to fit our own life's needs. An outstanding feature of the psalm is its abundant references to God--eight by nouns, twelve by pronouns.

1. The refuge: "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge" (v. 1).

The "disaster" faced by the psalmist was "hot pursuit" by enemies who were like "ravenous beasts" or persistent hunters seeking prey.

The protection found by the psalmist was "God most high" whose "love" and "faithfulness" overflowed earth and heaven.

2. The rescue: "He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me" (v. 3).

God's rescue was prompted by love. It was not motivated by the merits of the psalmist or the mischief of his foes. The reason for the rescue was found in the very being of God, God who is love, God who is just.

God's rescue was invoked by prayer. "I cry out to God Most High." The psalmist believed that God's "purpose" for him included the "distress" he was experiencing. That did not make him an idle fatalist, however. He also believed that answered prayer was part of God's purpose and did not hesitate to "cry out" for rescue and relief. It came as a divine answer to a human appeal.

3. The response: “I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations” (v. 9).

He praises God from a steadfast heart. “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.” The KJV reads “fixed.” His heart was fixed on praising God for the mercy that rebuked his pursuers and rescued him. We would have more praiseworthy moments if we fixed our hearts on a prayer-hearing God.

He praises God as a singing witness. “I will sing of you among the peoples.” Those gifted as musicians and singers should employ their gifts to tell of God’s love and mercy. The rest of us may be content with speaking his praise and sharing the gospel.

The psalm closes with a response to God that all may share for all have received his blessings: “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.” Personal experience leads to global desires. We want everyone to know who God is and what he has done to save us.

8. A GOD WHO JUDGES

Then men will say, “Surely the righteous are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth” (Psalm 58:11).

The psalm speaks in violent language. God is petitioned to break the teeth and rip out the fangs of wicked men. Those are rough requests!

The psalm speaks from a sensitive conscience. The psalmist is weary of miscarried justice and merciless rulers. He is concerned for the helpless poor who are defenseless victims of violence.

1. The psalm speaks of an unmasking.

The true character of unjust rulers is revealed. Their hearts devise injustice and their hands dole violence. They pose as champions of truth and justice but they favor the wealthy who buy desired laws and verdicts with bribes.

Vivid figures of speech from the animal kingdom are used. The psalmist likens wicked rulers to venomous snakes, to devouring lions and to slimy slugs. I sometimes think we should apologize to animals for such comparisons, for they act from natural instincts while wicked people “devise injustice.” They scheme to exploit their prey. Holding positions of power they escape the justice they deserve in human courts.

2. The psalm speaks of an unmasking.

God is asked to avenge society’s victims and to punish their tormentors. He has denied to individuals the right to exact vengeance, saying, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay.” This he can do without bias or error for he knows the hearts and minds of all

persons. We are not to pray for special permits to exact vengeance upon our enemies.

3. The psalm speaks of an untasking.

The judgment of wicked rulers is left to God. Their judgment is not our task. When you have lived through most of a century, as I have, you are aware of God's justice upon the unjust who tyrannize his people. You often think, "How the mighty have fallen."

The psalmist believed that God will swiftly set things right. Quicker than a pot can heat over a fire of burning thorns "the wicked will be swept away." Our faith is tested by the long spans of bloodied history that persist before God brings the curtain down.

The psalm affirms moral distinctions. "The wicked" and "the righteous" are set in contrast. True, "all have sinned," but not all have remained in sin. Some have repented, found forgiveness, and live for God. Others have refused mercy and placed their names on God's hit list.

The psalm celebrates divine judgments. It does not question the rough justice of God as an argument against his love. When their enemies are defeated and dethroned, the righteous are avenged and rewarded. They "bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked"--a metaphor for total victory--and they are glad. Who would want the reign of the unjust to last forever?

9. THE SCOFFING GOD

But you, O Lord, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations (Psalm 59:8).

The caption has confused interpreters. It helps to remember that the captions are not scriptures. They are editorial additions to scriptures.

The psalm includes individual and national elements. It can be used to challenge and comfort both a country and its citizens.

1. The snarling men: “snarling like dogs...” (v. 6).

We have a better feeling towards dogs than did the psalmists. Today they are domesticated pets, “man’s best friends.” In the psalmist’s day they were half wild beasts who roamed in packs that foraged for food and were a threat to the lives of people.

The psalmist uses snarling dogs as a metaphor for humanity shrunk to bestiality. Such persons were selfish, brutish and dangerous. They still are.

2. The scoffing Lord: “But you, O Lord...scoff...” (v. 8).

God’s laughter is not that of a person amused. He doesn’t make sin a matter of entertainment as television and movie producers do, as foolish audiences do. Sin is no joking matter, for “the wages of sin is death”--that death which is eternal separation from God.

God’s laughter is that of one who is invincible. The wicked imagine that none can bring them to justice; none can terminate their reigns of terror. God can visit wrath upon them at any time he chooses. He is completely in charge and will judge them while their snarls turn to whimpers.

3. The singing psalmist: “I will sing of your strength...your love...” (v. 16).

The psalmist is confident that God is just. The wicked will answer for their lives of greed and cruelty. As sure as God is, he is holy and righteous and spares no rebellion against him, no persecution of his people. He sometimes allows what he does not approve, but he will judge all that he approved and that he allowed. His power means the ultimate end of all evil powers.

The psalmist is also confident that God is love. He calls God “my loving God” and declares that he will sing of God’s love as his “refuge in times of trouble.” God love is not mushy sentiment. It can be as hard as steel, as rough as stones. He saves in love, but he also punishes in love.

“God rules over Jacob,” the psalmist declared, and that rule mingled the blessings and curses of God’s covenant with his chosen people.

His new covenant is with all persons, all nations, and they will serve him and be rewarded or reject him and be ruined. He wants to save all. He will judge all.

10. FROM COMPLAINT TO CONFIDENCE

You have rejected us, O God.... With God we will gain the victory.... (Psalm 60:1, 12).

This psalm reflects a long-ago situation in Israel, when battles had been fought and lost. Chastened by defeat, the people cry out to God for deliverance.

The psalm has permissible application to us. We go through hard times as God shames us for our sins and shapes us to his likeness.

1. A beating is described (vv. 1-3).

The beating was administered by God. He employed people as his agents, but he was the source of Israel's defeat. He showed his people some "desperate times," being angry with them for their disloyalty to him.

The beating was administered in love. The psalmist petitions the Lord to save "those you love." Love cares about character and behavior, cares too much to let rebellion and rejection go unpunished.

2. A banner is raised (vv. 4-8).

God "raised a banner" for those who feared him.

His banner was a rallying point for the scattered and a refuge point for the battered. It gave new heart and hope to those who expected his love to exceed their sin. He was petitioned to "restore" whom he had "rejected" and to "mend" the fractured land that he had "shaken" and "torn open." Those he had justly punished he is now asked to save. The boom had been lowered. Now the banner will be raised.

3. A boast (vv. 9-12).

God's rejection of his people was temporary. He will now give them "aid against the enemy." God was not the enemy; his withdrawn protection was not a permanent punishment.

God's rescue of his people was certain. "With God," the psalmist boasted, "we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies." Because "he will," the psalmist can say, "we will."

The psalm reminds us that disobedience leads to desperation.

The psalm also reminds us that confidence leads to conquest.

11. A KING'S PRAYER

From the ends of the earth I call to you.... For you have been my refuge.... Then will I ever sing praise to your name... (Psalm 61:2, 3, 8).

The author of the prayer was probably, though not certainly, David.

The adaptability of the prayer matters more than the author's identity. It has enduring value for what it tells us of God.

1. A great distance was felt: "...From the ends of the earth I call to you."

God seemed far away to a man in deep trouble.

The distance as mileage was an illusion. He really knew that God was not at the other end of the earth, for he is talking to the God who hears his vows and prayers. One within earshot is not "the ends of the earth" away.

The distance as metaphor is a common experience. Who hasn't felt at times that God was far off and unconcerned about his little life and big grief?

2. A great refuge was desired: "...For you have been my refuge..."

Only when we are at risk do we need or seek a refuge. To have refuge in God is to occupy the safest place in the world.

The psalmist used four figures of speech to describe God as a refuge, all of them familiar parts of his environment and experience.

God is a high rock. He towers above the puny foe, and he cannot be shaken by natural disasters or human assaults.

God is a strong tower. He is a secure fortress against the wiles and the weapons of opposing forces. In him we are safe.

God is a hospitable tent. To dwell in the tent of a powerful sheik was to find maximum refuge while enjoying maximum pleasure.

God is a powerful bird. Under his wings one is snug and safe from all that threatens. He protects and defends as a mother hen does her chicks.

3. A great praise was promised: “Then will I ever sing praise to your name...”

Continual praise is pledged. Continual mercies are expected. As another psalm puts it, God’s goodness and love follows us all the days of our lives. Thus he deserves our praise “ever.”

Continual vows are fulfilled. “Day after day” the psalmist will fulfill his vows to offer the sacrifices of praise for the refuge the Lord provides.

If you haven’t needed this prayer you will. A need for refuge will drive you to your knees to pray as does the psalmist here.

When you do, the prayer will be answered and the refuge will be granted.

12. BATTERED BUT NOT BEATEN

...he is my fortress, I will never be shaken... (Psalm 62:2).

The translation is inadequate. The psalmist isn't saying that nothing can shake him up or keep him from trembling. He is saying that nothing can bring him to ruin for God secures him as his savior.

The translation may be inadequate, but the salvation of God is adequate. It secures us from ultimate destruction for eternity.

1. An uncontrollable assault (vv. 3-4).

The psalmist was under attack and could not control the events.

We can't control the strength of the enemy. We cannot keep from being outnumbered and outmatched. We are a "leaning wall" and a "tottering fence" compared to the enemies who assault us.

We can't control the length of the attack. The enemy was determined to "topple" him, and the psalmist cries, "How long?" The answer can only be, "As long as God allows."

2. An unshakable refuge (vv. 1-2, 7-10).

Here is an amazing truth: Under assault, on the battlefield, we may "find rest." An inner calmness can exist during outward tumults.

This inner rest is found in God. "My soul finds rest in God alone." Twice he says, "He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress..." The source and force of this rest is divine, not human.

This inner rest is found through trust. The psalmist exhorts others to share his confidence in God: "Trust in him at all times, O people." Trusting in human wisdom or material wealth will not bring rest. God is our refuge.

This inner rest is found through prayer. The psalmist exhorts, "Pour out your hearts to him."

The psalmist declares that “God has spoken” and “I have heard.” God has affirmed his love and his strength. It is this word from God that inspires prayer and builds faith. Rest does not come magically. It comes as God’s response to our request.

13. A SATISFIED SOUL

My soul will be satisfied... (Psalm 63:5).

This is a psalm for desert times, for times when our journey takes us through “a dry and weary land where there is no water.” If you haven’t been there you will be.

The psalm builds trust for better times. It looks forward to satisfaction and to song. Make it your personal psalm.

1. Seek what the psalmist sought: “O God...earnestly I seek you...”

He sought God because only God could satisfy his thirst. “My soul thirsts for you.” God is the answer to our deepest hungers and thirsts. He made us for communion with him and apart from that we cannot find satisfaction in anything we possess or experience.

Only personal communion with God can satisfy our spiritual thirst. It is not enough to say “God” or even “O God.” We must be able to say “my God...”

2. See what the psalmist saw: “I have seen you...your power and glory.”

The place of vision was “the sanctuary...” As one of a community of worshipers, the psalmist saw the Lord.

The power envisioned was the Lord’s “power and glory...” You can join a crowd that screams and swoons before a celebrity, but that will not satisfy your soul. Only God’s power and glory will make you truly and fully human.

His power is a delivering power. “You are my help,” the psalmist affirms, and adds “your right hand upholds me...” Until God’s power changes our lives we remain helplessly mired in sin.

His power is also a destroying power. “They who seek my life will be destroyed...” God delivers those who trust in him; he destroys those who reject his salvation.

3. Sing what the psalmist sang. “With singing lips my mouth will praise you.” He also says, “Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

His songs of praise were continual. “I will praise you as long as I live.” Since we will live forever; our praises will never cease.

His songs of praise were consequential. They were sung “because” of the Lord’s love and “because” of the Lord’s help. The love never fails; the help never ends; let the songs, therefore, abound.

Are you thirsty for God? Seek.

Are you satisfied with God? Sing.

14. COMMONPLACES OF FAITH

Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him

(Psalm 64:10).

The psalms belong to what is called “wisdom” literature.

They vary in many ways but have common factors of that literature.

1. A common contrast.

Wisdom literature contrasts “the wicked” and “the righteous.” The wicked are those who deny or defy the claims of God upon human life as creator and savior. The righteous are the “upright in heart” who live in communion with God, which is made possible by his gracious forgiveness of sins. This psalm refers to both groups and reminds us that we live in a wicked and warring world.

2. A common complaint.

The wicked arrogantly “ambush” and exploit the “innocent.” They “plot injustice” and brazenly carry out their schemes, boasting of “perfect plans” and “hidden snares.” They evidence no fear of God and no pity for victims.

The psalmist has been the target of their slander and their threats. He takes “the noisy crowd of evildoers” seriously and prays to be protected from them.

3. A common confidence.

A motif in wisdom literature is the confidence that wickedness cannot finally win. God, the righteous judge, “will shoot them” and “bring them to ruin.”

Until that happens the righteous “take refuge” in the Lord and “rejoice in the Lord.”

Wisdom literature affirms that God will protect the righteous and punish the wicked. The psalmist says, “They shoot from ambush;” he also says, “God will shoot them...”

The triumph of justice is ultimate.

The response of faith is praise.

15. A HYMN OF PRAYER AND PRAISE

Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come (Psalm 65:1-2).

The setting of this psalm is worship that centers in the courts of the Lord's house.

The contents of the psalm are petition and praise; petition because God is needed; praise because God is merciful.

1. God hears prayer.

"O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come" (v. 2).

A prayer-hearing God is accessible to all people. He has chosen Israel to come near and live in his courts, but he chose them in order to bring "hope" to "the ends of the earth."

A prayer-hearing God is responsible for all blessings. He delights to give to those who ask. He answers prayer with "awesome deeds of righteousness" by which he becomes "God our Savior."

2. God forgives sins.

"When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions" (v. 3),

He pardons sinners freely and fully, never on grounds of merit but always as expressions of grace.

He invites the pardoned to share "the good things" of his temple. These are not specified but they "call forth songs of joy."

3. God stills storms.

"... who stilled the roaring of the seas" (v. 7).

The Lord calms raging nature. He hushes the roaring of waves, just as Jesus later did on stormy Lake Galilee.

He calms warring nations. He stills “the turmoil of the nations.”
As the psalmist elsewhere writes, he makes wars to cease.

Personally and politically, we can have peace only when God exercises his calming power on our behalf.

4. God gives rain.

“You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly” (v. 9).

God softens the earth with showers that result in abundant fields of grain and flocks of cattle. His people are fed from his hand as he crowns the year with “his bounty.”

When overwhelmed we petition him.

When overjoyed we praise him.

16. WHAT GOD HAS DONE

***Come and see what God has done...in man's behalf....
Come and listen...let me tell you what he has done for me...
(Psalm 66:5, 16).***

The psalmist speaks of universal praise in which “all the earth” sings and shouts “the glory of his name” (vv. 1-4).

He speaks also of individual praise, saying “I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you” (vv. 13-15). Alone or with others, each of us should find God praiseworthy.

1. God does awesome works "in man's behalf" (vv. 5-12).

He works as a redeemer (v. 6). The Exodus is recalled, where God “turned the sea into dry land” so that his people might escape their slavery.

He works as a ruler (v. 7). “He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations.” His kingdom and reign are unending.

He works as a refiner (vv. 8-12). “For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.” He put his people “through fire and water” in order to purge them from idols and idolatry.

2. God does awesome works "for me" (vv. 16-20).

He works in answer to prayer (v. 17). The psalmist says, “I cried out to him...God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.”

He works on condition of repentance (vv. 18-19). “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Sin must be abandoned if prayer is to be answered.

He works to express covenant-love (v. 20). God is praised for not withholding his love from the individual who seeks his help by prayer.

We are persons-in-community. God's salvation is personal and corporate.

Let all the earth and each of us sing and shout praises to his name.

17. A BLESSED PEOPLE

May God be gracious to us and bless us... (Psalm 67:1).

The psalm functioned as a Jewish "doxology." It also forms a universal doxology, suited to "all the earth."

1. The source of blessing: "May God be gracious..."

God's saving grace is man's only hope. Strict justice would destroy us all as guilty sinners.

God's shining face is a metaphor for grace. When he beams kindly upon us we know he loves and forgives.

2. The content of blessing: "...your salvation.... its harvest..."

Spiritual blessing is petitioned. The psalmist wants God's salvation to be known "among all nations."

Material blessing is petitioned. The land will "yield its harvest" as an indication of God's blessing.

3. The influence of blessing: "that your ways may be known...among all nations."

Those who know become teachers. The light that has reached them is reflected to others as they bear witness to the one who delights in being gracious.

Those who learn become worshipers. They join with Israel in praising the gracious God who saved them all.

The blessing of God is communal. His salvation is for all nations.

The blessed of God are debtors. They owe God service to those who are not yet his worshipers.

18. OUR BURDEN BEARING GOD

Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens (Psalm 68:19).

The Lord is extolled in this psalm as ruler and redeemer.

His power and providence are exerted daily on behalf of his people.

1. He bears our burdens by leading us (vv. 5-7).

He goes before us as a warrior. God as warrior is a frequent theme in the Psalms. He does not send his troops into battle; he leads them on the battlefield. He scatters his enemies and frees their captives.

He goes with us as a father. “A father to the fatherless” is God. He is the protector and defender of the helpless. He not only leads troops into battle, “he sets the lonely in families.”

2. He bears our burdens by refreshing us (vv. 8-9).

As rain renews the earth, so God increases our strength. As he marched before his army “the heavens poured down rain.” “An army marches on its stomach,” said a military genius. God provides bread for his people and in this way, among others, “he gives power and strength” to them.

He gives “abundant showers,” not mere sprinkles. God is not stingy with his blessings.

3. He bears our burdens by provisioning us (v. 10).

He supplies the needs of the poor. “O God, you provided for the poor,” exclaimed the psalmist. God helps those who cannot help themselves.

He provides for his people from his “bounty,” and that bounty is never exhausted. God is never embarrassed by overdrawn accounts. His blessings are never forfeited for lack of funds.

Some burdens, by their nature, are non-transferable.

All burdens, by God’s grace, are bearable.

19. PRAYER BORN OF DESPERATION

...answer me quickly, for I am in trouble... (Psalm 69:17).

The psalm speaks of a common experience--being in trouble.

The psalm echoes a frequent prayer--help me quickly.

1. The prayer of a desperate man (vv. 1-22).

Listen to his description of the situation from which he prayed:

The water was closing over his head. The ground was slipping beneath his feet. It is the plight of a drowning man.

His only help was God and he needed that help immediately.

He was more than desirous of help; he was desperate for help.

2. The prayer of a connected man (vv. 23-29).

His suffering was both personal and communal. He suffered for being himself and for being an Israelite.

His prayer, therefore, was directed both to "my God" and the "God of Israel."

His connection to God was created by God's covenant with Israel. That is why he felt free to speak so harshly of his enemies. God's covenant included his judgment upon those who afflicted his people.

3. The prayer of a trusting man (vv. 30-37).

He expected to praise God for his deliverance. He believed that help was on the way.

He expected to please God by his praising. The divine helper appreciates acknowledgement of his help. Praising is pleasing to God because it recognizes who we are in our limitations, weakness and failure, and it recognizes who he is in his goodness and graciousness.

He expected others to share that praising. Corporate worship often proves that praise is contagious.

This depth of trouble comes to all. This strategy of prayer is available for all. This practice of praise is obligatory for all.

20. A PETITION THAT BEARS REPETITION

Hasten, O God, to save me (Psalm 70:1).

The editorial caption over this psalm attributes it to David, assigns it to the director of music, and labels it a petition.

The psalm must have had frequent utility; a desperate cry for immediate help is common to God's people.

1. A petition for deliverance (vv. 1-4).

The psalmist faced an unspecified threat. Our curiosity would cherish details, but the omission allows us to fit the psalm to our threats.

The threat was from an unnamed enemy. Again, the petition fits whoever the foe and whatever the crisis.

2. A confession of dependence (v. 5).

The psalmist knew **his** personal resources were inadequate for victory. He did not posture as sufficient, a mistake many make because of foolish pride.

God's resources were completely adequate. He is greater than all our enemies and competent for all our needs.

The prayer was made in an urgent situation (vv. 1, 5). Life was at risk and only God could deliver.

The prayer was made from a worthy motive (v. 4). The psalmist desired more than escape; he wanted an escape that would exalt the Lord.

21. UPDATING AN ANCIENT PSALM

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge... (Psalm 71:1).

We may update the psalm by personal application. It doesn't all fit us; it does fit us all, for we all need refuge. I gladly make it my own psalm today.

1. My refuge: (vv. 1-4). "In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge..."

Refuge implies storms. There are all kinds of storms that rage in the lives of God's people. None is insignificant; none is ultimate.

Storms require refuge. The only adequate refuge is God. To run to any other, to shelter in any other, is to invite disaster.

2. My reliance: (vv. 5-8). "From birth I have relied on you..."

The psalmist was unconsciously dependent upon God from birth. Childhood has its own kinds of storms.

He was consciously dependent upon God from the new birth. All who are born again soon realize that God is vital to a successful journey home.

3. My request: (vv. 9-18). "Do not cast me away when I am old..."

There is no needier time of life for God's help than old age. Age breaks the believer down and drains the believer's strength. As never before, oldsters value the tie that binds us to the Lord.

There is no worthier reason for added life than to praise God and bear witness to the younger generation that he is faithful forever.

4. My rejoicing: (vv. 20-23). "My lips will shout for joy..."

Praise is the Lord's due. He restores life and creates joy.

Praise is the soul's instinct. You cannot truly know the Lord without desiring to praise him, for his blessings outnumber and outweigh life's burdens.

“As for me,” the psalmist says. We cannot speak for others. We cannot compel their loyalty and praise. We can only set the right example.

“As for me,” the psalmist resolves, I will speak to others. They cannot be coerced to serve our Lord; they can be influenced.

22. A PRAYER FOR THE KING

All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him (Psalm 72:11).

The initial caption attributes this psalm to Solomon. The final caption identifies a collection of psalms as the prayers of David. Whoever wrote them, whoever collected them, we can adopt them for our own benefit.

1. No king in Israel's past fulfilled this prayer.

Some partially fulfilled it during good reigns. We think of such rulers as Asa, Josiah, Hezekiah and others.

Some totally mocked it by evil reigns and lost their thrones to the armies of nations they should have enlightened for God.

2. Only Jesus will fulfill the prayer.

His kingship is almost totally hidden now. He is sovereign, having "all authority in heaven and on earth," Most of the world denies or ignores this truth.

His kingship will be universally displayed later. At his return all knees will bend to him, all tongues will confess him as the Lord.

Let us confess him now though others reject him. Let us praise him now though others scorn him. Let us serve him now though others defy him.

Let us be shaped in the present by the future that he promises us!

23. HOLD ON, FOR YOU ARE BEING HELD

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny (Psalm 73:16, 17).

The psalmist's struggle is common to believers. We wonder why godless people prosper when God's people suffer.

The psalmist's victory is available to all believers. He found what answers are available in the house of the Lord.

1. A conclusion: "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart" (v. 1).

God is good in what he bestows. No one can deny that his gifts sometimes come roughly packaged, but he has been through what he allows us to endure.

God is good in what he withholds. This may be harder to believe but it is no less true. He is a wise, kind and mighty Father. If he withholds something from us it is for a good reason and will produce a good result.

2. A challenge: "I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (vv 2, 3).

Material prosperity is a deceptive ground for faith. Some preach and teach that God wants to enrich all his children. Sell that "prosperity gospel" to Paul with his frequent misfortunes and his head at last on a chopping block. Our faith is not in the quantity or the frequency of his material gifts, but in him.

Scriptural promises provide the right ground for life. Vain are the wishes of pleasure-seeking men; true are the promises of an all-knowing, all-loving God.

3. A course-correction: "I entered the sanctuary of God: then I understood their final destiny" (v. 17).

In the place of worship he gained a new awareness of God. God was ever-present and always active, upholding and guiding his confused children.

He formulated a new definition of good. Good was not grounded upon goods but upon fellowship with God, who is "the strength" of the wavering heart and the answer to its deepest desire. Good was being near God.

4. A commitment: "I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds" (v. 28).

God is the only adequate refuge in life's hard times. Wealth is perishing but God is everlasting.

God's refuge inspires our testimony. We find such joy in him that we want others to know what he does for those who trust in him.

24. THE PLEA OF THE DESTITUTE AND DESPERATE

Remember the people you purchased of old... (Psalm 74:2).

The psalmist speaks of a tragic and dangerous situation: he is a "dove" among "beasts" with his life at risk.

The psalmist found a triumphant solution: God arises on behalf of the fallen.

1. God is asked to remember.

"Remember" means more than recall. He is asking God to acknowledge his people, to view their situation and take action to deliver them lest they perish..

Enemies had destroyed the holy city and desecrated the holy temple. They had flaunted their idols and mocked the God of Israel as impotent to save his people. His helpless people look to him, for they have no prophets to answer their questions and forecast their future. Their one hope is God.

2. God is asked to revenge.

The psalmist urges God to destroy his enemies with a "right hand" blow. His revenge would be a matter of justice, for his people had been captured, his place had been burned, and his power had been scorned. The honor of his name was at stake in the ruins of a conquered and helpless nation. His name had been reviled; it must be revenged.

God's revenge would also be the means of his people's freedom. His "dove" would escape the "wild beast."

2. God is asked to rise.

"Rise up, O God, and defend your name." He is to rise as the one who created Israel by redeeming them from bondage when he

“split open the sea” by his power. He is to rise as the one who can restore them by redemption from their present captivity. His is to rise as the defender of his own covenant and the honor of his own name.

When in trouble we can request, but not demand. What God will do, and when and how he will do it, are his choices to make, not ours. When we pray we can plead promises but not obligations. God owes us nothing but gives us everything of value in our lives.

25. GIVE THANKS!

We give thanks to you, O God... (Psalm 75:1).

Scholars classify this as a victory psalm. If so, it follows well the petitions for deliverance from, and judgment upon, the “adversaries” of God whose evils are lamented in the previous psalm. And if so, a battle had ended but not the war. In this world the people of God engage the enemy until history’s curtain drops.

1. God is thanked for the past.

He is the God who acts. The psalmist gives thanks for men who proclaim God’s “wonderful deeds.”

God acts as creator and redeemer. He is sovereign over all the earth and makes it the venue of his interventions to save and secure his people. He holds firm the “pillars” of a quaking earth. Nature and nations are under his control.

2. God is thanked for the present.

He is the God who speaks. Mark the phrases “You say” and “I say.” God says, “I choose;” “I judge;” “I hold.”

His words comfort his troubled people. He lets them know that he knows what is going on in their lives and will defend them against their enemies.

His words discomfort his arrogant enemies. He tells them to cease their boasting, to end their rebellion, for their strength (“horns”) is useless against heaven.

3. God is thanked for the future.

He is the God who judges. He “brings down” and “exalts” rulers, deciding who they will be and when they will cease to be.

He is the God who delivers. He is "the God of Jacob," the God who binds himself to them in a covenant that demands and rewards their obedience and loyalty to him.

We are passing through troubling times. The psalm reminds us that we are in the hands of a God who will not abandon us to those who oppose us. Whoever may be against us, we can give thanks that God is with us!