



HELP! – My Distress, His Refuge
Psalm 25:16-22

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On average, 1,200 tornadoes touch down in the United States every year. But in April and May of 2011, in just two months, there were 1,084. It was called “the super outbreak.” On May 22, 2011, late that Sunday afternoon, an F5 tornado ravaged Joplin, Missouri. This is what it looked like. With winds in excess of 200 mph, F5s have been known to hurl garbage trucks through the air over 100 yards, rip up asphalt roads, and turn entire neighborhoods into rubble. So what do you do when you see that coming? You hide in a storm shelter. Most homes in tornado areas have some kind of storm shelter. Here is a woman coming out of her storm shelter after the tornado went through her Joplin neighborhood. This is what she and her neighbors saw. The mile-wide tornado caused \$2.8 billion of damage, injured 1,150 people, and left 158 dead.

Just as that tornado ripped through Joplin, storms can rip through our lives. And when the storm comes, we better have a place to go, a shelter from the storm. And that’s exactly how the Bible describes God, as “a shelter from the storm” (Isaiah 25:4). The Bible refers to God as our refuge, as both a person and a place of safety, comfort, and security. And that’s what we’ve been talking about in our series on HELP!

When we began this series, I asked you to write down your worry and your problem on a card. Some of you mentioned financial problems and medical problems. Some of you mentioned problems with doubt and depression. Some of you mentioned school and stress. One person made me laugh when they wrote on their card, “Refrigerator went out this morning.” That is a problem. But as you can imagine, there were more serious problems and worries.

- “Problems in our marriage.”
- “Frustration at work.”
- “Lost my job.”
- “Alcohol. Pornography. Sexual immorality.”
- “My financial circumstances have changed for the worse.”
- “I have doubts God is real.”
- “I can’t make friends.”
- “A divorce I did not want.”
- “Where is God? He says He is with us, but He’s not helping.”
- “I pray to die every day. I’m so tired. I’m so empty.”

The elders and the staff prayed over every one of your cards. It broke our hearts to hear what breaks your heart. And we put those cards in this vase, as a reminder of the promise in Psalm 56:8, which says, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle” (NLT). These are our tears. These are our hurts, our pains, our worries, our problems. And God knows about every one of them. Not only does He know what you’re going through, He promises to help.

God promises to be there when we need Him most. Psalm 46:1 is one of those promises. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” He promises His comfort when we’re hurting, His strength when we’re weak, His guidance when we’re confused, His help when we’re in trouble, and He always promises His love. So, whatever you’re going through, and whenever you cry out for help, you can know that ***God promises to be there when you need Him most.***

Psalm 25 is another entry in David’s personal prayer journal. This psalm reveals his great distress. As we read it, maybe it expresses what you’re feeling too. If so, then listen to how David pours out his heart to God.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. ¹⁷The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. ¹⁸Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. ¹⁹Look upon my enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with violent hatred. ²⁰Guard my soul and deliver me; do not let me be ashamed, for I take refuge in You. ²¹Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You. (Psalm 25:16-21, NAS).

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURE

This morning, we’re going to learn how to pray through Scripture, and David is going to teach us. The book of Psalms is David’s personal prayer journal; filled with prayers and poems and songs. It is also holy Scripture, inspired by God, authoritative over our lives, and given for our benefit. In the Psalms, we hear how David talked to God. He reminds us that we too have a personal relationship with God, with our Creator and with our Father. So, David is our role model on how to pray.

I have provided a bulletin insert for you, with the key verses we’ve been looking at during this series, verses promising God’s help. Again, God promises to be there when we need Him most. And praying these verses will give us strength and confidence when we cry out to Him for help.

- Praying Bible verses helps us express what’s really going on in our hearts. To hear David pour out his heart will help us pour out our hearts to God.
- Praying Bible verses gives us fresh words to pray. All of us experience times when our prayers are stale. So praying Bible verses gives us fresh words to pray. It also gives us words when we have no words, when we are so weary and so overwhelmed that we just don’t have any more words to pray.
- Praying Bible verses renews our mind with truth, truth about God and the truth of His promises.
- Praying Bible verses helps through various seasons of life. Moms with preschoolers don’t have the luxury of an hour-long devotional time and sipping on a second of coffee. But all of us can pray Bible verses as we go through our day, as we run errands or run from meeting to meeting.
- Praying Bible verses allows us to lean on the faith of others. When my faith is lacking, by praying through one of David’s prayers, I can lean on his faith.

So, as we walk through Psalm 25, may David be our teacher, as we listen to him pour out his heart to God.

PSALM 25

“Turn to me and be gracious to me” (Psalm 25:1, NAS). ***When you’re hurting, turn to God and He will turn to you.*** David is begging God to look at him. “Turn to me.” “Look at me.” And he prayed, “Be gracious to me.” “Oh Lord, have compassion on me. Look at my situation and take pity on me.” When we’ve got problems, when we’re in distress, why do we turn to God? Why do we cry out to God? Because we believe He is good and we believe He cares. We pray to God because He has told us He is our Father, and a father loves his children. This was not a casual prayer. David was pouring out his heart to God.

“For I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Look upon my affliction and my trouble” (Psalm 25:16-18, NAS). ***When you’re hurting, tell God how much you’re hurting.*** In other prayers, David said, “My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?” (Psalm 6:3, NIV). “Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble” (Psalm 69:17, NIV).

Notice the words David used. He said he was “lonely” and “afflicted.” He said, “The troubles of my heart are enlarged.” His problems were multiplying. It was bad and getting worse. He said he was overwhelmed by “troubles” and “distresses.” He used plural nouns. David didn’t have just one problem, he had a lot of problems. We know what that feels like. You’re dealing with one problem and something else happens, and you throw up your hands and say, “What else is going to go wrong this week?!”

We’re not talking about a flat tire or frustration at work. We are talking about “distresses.” The Hebrew word means “anguish” (NIV). Deep, internal anguish. It could be grief or fear or anxiety, but it’s something major. Distress and anguish suggest overwhelming emotion.

And why did David pour out his heart to God? Because he believed that God was good and that God cared. He poured out his heart to God because God had shown up in the past when he needed Him most. During another time in his life, David said, “In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears” (Psalm 18:6, NIV). Another psalmist wrote Psalm 107, a song with the repeated line, “They cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses” (Psalm 107:6, 13, 19, 28, NAS).

When you’re hurting, turn to God and He will turn to you. And when you’re hurting, tell God how much you’re hurting.

And in midst of the hurt, admit your sin and ask God for forgiveness. David poured out his heart to God, expressing his distress and crying out to God for help. But he also confessed his sin. “And forgive all my sins” (Psalm 25:18, NAS). David looked at his own heart, and so should we. Many of our problems are our own fault. A lot of our problems are the consequences of our own sin. If you have money problems due to undisciplined debt, then you’re suffering the consequences of your own sin.

David wanted to come clean before God. And we have to do that if we want God's help. Another psalm says, "If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18, NLT). We can't expect help from a holy God, if we are unwilling to come clean before a holy God. When you pray, take time to admit your sin and come clean before God.

Then *David prayed for relief from his enemies*. "Look upon my enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with violent hatred" (Psalm 25:19, NAS). David had enemies and we have enemies. Oh, none that are trying to kill us, but people that fight, attack, and treat us unfairly. So, we want to know if God is going to fight for us.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). But that's not how David prayed. David prayed that God would annihilate his enemies. "O God, shatter their teeth" (Psalm 58:6, NAS). "Pour out your fury on them; consume them with your burning anger" (Psalm 69:24, NLT). "O God, do not remain quiet; do not be silent and, O God, do not be still. For behold, Your enemies make an uproar, and those who hate You have exalted themselves ... Pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with Your storm. Fill their faces with dishonor ... Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, and let them be humiliated and perish, that they may know that You alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth" (Psalm 83:1-2, 15-18, NAS). Tell us how you really feel David.¹

Maybe you feel attacked and treated unfairly, and you feel the same way David felt. If you do, it's okay to pray for relief from your enemies. But remember what Jesus said. "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). I think David had room to grow in this area! And so do we.

Praying through Psalm 25 teaches us another principle. *Know that you will never be disappointed if you trust God*. David prayed, "Do not let me be ashamed" (Psalm 25:20, NAS). He's talking about being disappointed. About being publicly humiliated. About looking like a fool for trusting God.

We know David believed he would never be disappointed by God by the way he began Psalm 25. "O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be (ashamed) disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat. No one who trusts in you will ever be (ashamed) disgraced" (Psalm 25:1-3, NLT).

If you're going through a tough time, wondering if God is there, wondering if God will help, praying Psalm 25 will allow you to lean on David's faith. Praying Psalm 25 will remind you that no one who trusts in God will ever be disappointed.

David went on to pray, "For I take refuge in You ... for I wait for You" (Psalm 25:20-21, NAS). Praying this Bible verse will encourage you to *run to God as your refuge*. Run to God, not to something else. Not to alcohol or pornography or Netflix. God is the "shelter from the storm." God is our "refuge."

Refuge supposes retreat. Refuge supposes that we are on the run from danger, desperately looking for a safe place to hide. Like taking shelter from the storm, the Lord is our shelter. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1, NIV). "Trust in him at all

times ... Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8, NIV). “The Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge” (Psalm 94:22, NIV).

When you’re worried or afraid, stressed or distressed, pray through Psalm 25. Read David’s prayer. “For I take refuge in You ... for I wait for You.” Let his words guide your prayer. “Oh Lord, You know I’m worried. More than worried. I’m not sure I can take this anymore. I’m coming to You. Will You be my refuge like You were for David? Help me trust You and wait on You like David. It’s so hard right now. Please help me like You helped David.” Do you see how David’s prayer can help you pray?

And yes, sometimes we have to wait. “For I wait for You” (Psalm 25:21). *So, wait on Him.* I don’t like the “wait” verses in the Bible, but I need the “wait” verses in the Bible. They remind us that God is working while we are waiting. They remind us that He has not forgotten us. The Bible says, “Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 40:31, NAS). David encouraged others, “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret” (Psalm 37:7, NAS). “Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord” (Psalm 27:14, NAS). “None of those who wait for You will be ashamed” (Psalm 25:3, NAS). “For You I wait all the day” (Psalm 25:5, NAS).

Why pray through Bible verses? Why pray through the Psalms? Because David teaches us how to pray when we’re hurting, when we’re confused, when we’re distressed. Because David teaches us how to trust while we wait. In another prayer, another song, he said, “Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5, NAS).

Here’s the truth about all our problems. All our problems are temporary. All the stress and distress, all the worry and fear, all the sadness and grief is temporary. But wait a minute. The death of a loved one is permanent, irreversible. The grief never goes away. I understand that; I’ve felt that grief too. But the Lord promises in His word that “our momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen (not on the problems of today), but on what is unseen (on the hope of tomorrow). For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18, NIV).

Relief from our problems may not come until the day we die. And if so, the moment you close your eyes on earth will be the same moment you open your eyes in heaven, and see Jesus face to face, and experience ultimate relief and rest and peace.

CONCLUSION

David wrote most of the book of Psalms. It is his personal prayer journal. As we read them, we hear him talk to God. He reminds us that we too have a personal relationship with our Creator and with our Father. He also wrote many of the key verses we’ve been looking at during this series, verses promising God’s help. And praying these verses will give us strength and confidence when we cry out to God for help.

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So, whatever you're going through, whenever you cry out to God for help, praying through Bible verses will remind you that ***God promises to be there when you need Him most.***

NOTES

¹ In Psalm 56, David prayed, "O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long. I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me ... They are always twisting what I say; they spend their days plotting to harm me" (Psalm 56:1-2, 5, NLT).