

Unite my Heart

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 86, which we read from, is, as you can see in your Bibles in front of you, it's titled A Prayer of David. But even if we hadn't known that, even if we were just going by its content alone, we could see that this is, at the very least, the prayer of a believer. You might think, well, of course, it's in the Bible. Everything in the Bible is about a believer. Well, an awful lot of stuff that's in the Bible is concerned with people who actually aren't believers. You think like Nebuchadnezzar, you think of Darius, the king, or the people who were opposed to Jesus and so on, or the Herodians, or others like that. There's an awful lot of people mentioned in the Bible, and an awful lot of people whose words are recorded in the Bible who are not believers. So the Bible is full of real characters and real life and real situations because it's real truth. But this is the prayer of a believer, clearly. The first seven verses, if you look at your Bibles in front of you, take the form of variously expressed cries to the Lord, cries which are uttered by a believer who is, yes, in great need and extremity, but who even as he cries, expects God to help and expects deliverance. Look at verse 7. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. This expectation is built firstly on the strength of the character of God himself. Look at verse 5 there. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. It's on the strength and the character of God.

That's first and foremost. God has always got to be the foundation on which we build. Secondly, it is on the strength of the believer's existing relationship with God. Look at verses 2 and 4. 2 to 4 there. Preserve my life, for I am godly. In other words, trusting in God. Save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. Gladden the soul of your servant. For to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. It's all about this relationship between the servant and his master and that he trusts that the Lord is going to deliver him. They've got this living relationship, this ongoing relationship between them. So firstly, it's the strength and character of God. Secondly, the strength of the believer's existing relationship with God. And thirdly, it's on the basis of the believer's own extreme need. We see at verse 1, incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Verse 3, be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. Verse 7, in the day of my trouble, I call upon you for you, answer me. These three aspects are then repeated and reinforced further down the psalm. Look at verses 8 to 10.

[3 : 1 1] There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor there are any works like you. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord. You are great and do wondrous things. You alone are God. So this again is the character and greatness of God. It's expanded on, it's reinforced.

And verses 9 to 13, we see the believer's already existing relationship to God. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord. Shall glorify your name. You are great and do wondrous things. You alone are God. Teach me your way, O Lord, for that I may walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, Lord, with my whole heart. I will glorify your name forever.

Great is your steadfast love toward me. You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol, or hell, the place of the dead. So there's that relationship between the believer and the Lord. And thirdly, in verses 14 to 17, we see again the desperate plight of the believer as he cries to the Lord. Insolent men have risen against me. A band of ruthless men seeks my life. They do not set you before them, but you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious. Turn to me. Be gracious to me. Give your strength to your servant. Save the son of your maidservant. Show me a sign of your favor that those who hate me may see and be put to shame, and so on. So we have these three bases again in the psalm, repeated and expanded. The character of God, the nature of the believer's relationship to God, and the extreme need of the individual. These are reinforced again. And the

effect, if you like, is like, it's like that of a wave breaking on the shore. We've all stood on a beach and seen a wave kind of rolling up, and then it sort of splashes out the shore, and then it sort of runs up the sand, and it thins out as it goes. And then it pulls away back again. Then it comes back with another greater curly wave of that, and it comes in again. It's like waves in that sense. Curling up, reinforcing, crashing down, spreading out. Then again and again, the process is repeated. That's like what we've got here in this psalm. It starts off with brief expressions, the character of God, the nature of our relationship to him, the believer's need, and then they're expanded, they're reinforced, and reiterated again.

[5 : 35] And the repetition of the theme, the expansion of the theme, the character of God, the believer's relationship with God, the needs of the emergency. You'll also notice that at the end of each section, look at verse 7, and then at verse 13, and then at verse 17, there is an expression of devout confidence in the Lord, and the deliverance which is being asked for. And you'll notice that the latter two, verses 13 and 17, are in the past tense.

Yes, you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol, verse 17, because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me. Now, I don't think that we should take the psalm as having been begun in a time of extremity and then completed once the emergency has passed. You know, David doesn't start scribbling away and writing away once he's in the midst of his anxiety and his desperation and his emergency.

And then it all gets sorted out and the Lord has helped him. So then he writes his lines of gratitude afterwards and says how the Lord has helped him. But rather, I would suggest to you that once the, it's not the completed emergency comes and then it's past, but rather the past tense statements at verses 13 and 17 are expressions of God's faithfulness on previous occasions.

David is still in the midst of trouble. He's still in the midst of his hassle just now. It's still problems are happening, but he remembers that the Lord has always delivered him on previous occasions. What he has already done for the believer in the past, and because of the nature of the Almighty, that is the character of an unchanging God, his faithfulness in the past is thereby proof of his reliability for the present need.

[7 : 29] I'll say that again. His faithfulness in the past is thereby proof of his reliability for the present need. This is the prayer of a believer in distress, who remains yet confident of God's readiness to supply grace to help in time of need.

Now, we may not all be professing believers here this morning, but many of us will be, and even those who are not, to at least come seeking the Lord in his house with his people on his day indicates, at the very least, a desire to be with the Lord, to seek after him, and a willingness to take what to some people is perhaps the most difficult step of all, you know, to actually cross the threshold into the Lord's house.

That's not an easy thing to do for some people. For some of us, it may be kind of routine. We've done it for years, but for others, you know, there's a first time they cross the threshold into the Lord's house in earnest, as opposed to like for a funeral or a wedding or something like that.

You know, when you cross it in earnest for the first time, it's a hard thing to do. But to have come that far means you're seeking. It means you're desiring at least to be with the Lord, to seek after him.

Even if you're not a professing believer, something brought you here today. This psalm is a prayer for those who already know something of the character of God, who perhaps already know their need, their extremity, and the dire situation in which their life or their soul may be.

[9 : 11] So in other words, two out of the three aspects of this psalm are already covered. You know, we've got the character of God, that's a given, and the fact that I am in need of his help. Well, that too is a definite.

But the nature of my relationship with the Lord, that is the variable, that is the thing which must be addressed, because most of us need quite a bit of reassurance on that score.

This settling of our relationship with the Lord, this we cannot do of ourselves and in our own strength. As verse 11 points out, Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.

Unite my heart to fear your name. It is the Lord himself who must teach us. And what David asks him here to do is, Unite my heart.

Now, this is a unique phrase, not used anywhere else in Scripture. And that might be surprising initially, and I thought, that can't be right. But sure enough, it's not used anywhere else in Scripture.

[10:22] Unite my heart. And I would suggest to you that this phrase is, in fact, the key to this psalm, and to the establishing of a right relationship with the Lord, particularly if we are to recognize that part of what we need as we draw near to the Lord is a spirit of repentance, of humility before God.

To come seeking him, that is one thing. Or to know him already, that's another thing too. But a spirit of repentance, of humility before God, that we need.

And it's not that we're necessarily puffed up or arrogant or whatever, but we'll come to that in just a minute. The word of God is precious. He will not waste any of it.

It's like if you were in a desert, and you had one bottle of water, you're not going to go flinging it about and sprinkling it everywhere. No, you're going to conserve each drop is precious. If you find you're in poverty, and you find a whole bunch of diamonds, each one is going to be...

You're not going to say, oh, I've got loads of them, chuck them away all over the place. No, the word of God is precious. Each piece is like a jewel, a drop of life-saving water of life.

[11:37] Therefore, God will not waste any of it. You know, we might think the Bible's a big book, but if we think in terms of 66 books within it, and you can hold it in your hand and so on.

You know, as John says, you know, if all the things that Jesus had done and said were to be written, the whole world couldn't contain the books that were written. So God has really compacted it down, his written revelation, quite a lot.

It means that what we have, each word is precious. It is weighty. It means something. It's there for a reason. Whatever God has done, he's not intending to waste any of it.

Whatever he causes to be recorded is not just idle words. Romans 15 puts it at verse 4, For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.

Joshua chapter 1 is a case in point, if you think of that chapter. You know, we quite often, people quote from this chapter, talking about, you know, be strong and very courageous and so on.

[12:46] Joshua is told no less than four times to be strong and to be very courageous. Why does this need to be said to him? And more to the point, why does it need to be said so often?

You know, well, the point being made is that far from being an all-conquering hero of fearless character, Joshua in chapter 1 feels himself to be both weak and afraid.

So he has to be told and told and told again to be exactly the opposite. That he has the power, if he will do it, not to be weak but to be strong.

So be strong, not to be afraid but to be courageous. Be strong and very courageous. He gets told it again and again and again. Why does he get told it so many times?

Because he needs to be told. God doesn't waste one drop of his water of life. He doesn't waste one word of his precious, infinite word.

[13:49] So likewise, when God inspires David to plead, unite my heart. It can only be because David's heart, and therefore that of even the most devout believers, is at times divided.

Divided not so much from God as divided amongst other things. And this I think we can all relate to. If we were to say, oh, your heart's divided from God, you think, well, no, it isn't.

And actually, I mean, sure, I love the Lord, I try to do something, I don't do as great a job as I should, and I know I'm far more worldly than I ought to be, but I do love the Lord, and I do want to serve, and I try to be faithful.

My heart's not dividing from God. No, it probably isn't. If you're believing in the Lord, if you're loving the Lord, seeking the Lord, your heart probably isn't divided from God. But it probably is.

In fact, 99% certain it is divided amongst other things. And God. If we think, for example, if you can picture, you know, the skyline of London, central London, which is often on pictures and postcards, and, you know, it's an image that's often portrayed.

[15:06] And you can think of the things that you would see there. You know, we talked with a child about Tower Bridge, you know, or you can, like, the Gherkin, or the Millennium Wheel, or the London Eye, as it's called nowadays, or, you know, Big Ben, or maybe the Post Office Tower is in there too.

Somewhere on that skyline amongst all these landmarks you can imagine, there would probably be, in your mind's eye, the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral would be in there too as part of the skyline of London.

But it's amongst all these other things, the skyscrapers and other modern blocks and so on. So, but St. Paul's would be in there. But you only glimpse it as part of a skyline.

Your eye is distracted by all the other things. Your heart is divided by all else that there is to see. But now, in your mind's eye, if you picture yourself, you know, coming to the front of the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, and now you're looking up.

And you're looking up at all the pillars and the stonework and the way it all, you know, is fitted together and the architecture of it now and the intricate design. And then you go up the steps and then you go in and you hear the echo of your footsteps.

[16:21] And you look up into the dome when you get to the center there. And you're, it takes your breath away. And the more details you might actually know, I mean, I don't know about architecture or building, whatever, but I imagine the more you know about architecture and the way in which you can curve stone and use sound to echo back and so on, all these things, the more details you actually know and how you design such a structure, the more you're filled with wonder and admiration and amazement.

Now, when your footsteps are echoing there and you're looking up into the dome, now you're not thinking about all the other skyline, you're not thinking about Big Ben and the Gherkin and the Shard and all these other things now that might break the skyline up of London.

Now you're just focused on the one thing that you're taken up with. Now you're just caught up in wonder and amazement and your mind, your thoughts, your heart are focused, concentrated, united on one subject, on one thing, this one structure.

Let's leave aside for a moment the fact that it's a church, it's meant to be a church. Very few of those who visit St. Paul's, you know, cathedral, are visiting it as a church, they're just visiting it as a tourist attraction.

So they're not really thinking of it in terms of a church. They don't really go there to worship, but I imagine that once you've been there for a little while, a sense of awe and reverence and worship is what you would begin to feel.

[17:50] But you get the sense of going from seeing this only as a passing feature on a busy skyline skyline to what you're now seeing. The closer you come to it, the deeper you go into it, the more it fills you and all your senses.

The more you know about it and learn about it, the more it consumes every part and detail of your sight and your hearing and your imagination and everything. It consumes you.

It fills you. Your heart is totally focused now on this. It is united on that one thing. Unite my heart.

Very few people are actually genuinely atheist. Some people are, but very few people actually are. Most people believe in the existence of either God or our God or some kind of supernatural being or life after death or something.

But knowledge of him, understanding of him, relationship with him is hampered by the fact that their heart is divided, distracted by all the things of the world which are perhaps understandably important to them.

[19:06] God is maybe in there somewhere or the possibility of God is in there somewhere out of the corner of their eye. But there is no focus upon him. The still small voice cannot be heard in a room jarring with the noise of business and money and leisure and sport and relationships and the unending treadmill of activity in which we are ceaselessly engaged.

It's loud, it's demanding, it's endless and it divides our heart, our attention. We might be trying to focus on something in the quiet and then, you know, your phone pings and you've got a text oh I must just look at this, must just answer this.

And your heart is divided instead of focused. All these things are demanding if not our love then at the very least our attention. Now, this minute constantly lurching from one crisis or emergency to the next and that's all the devil has to do.

He doesn't need you to become an occult devil worshipper. He doesn't need you to go dancing around the Calendash Stones on Midsummer's Eve or whatever it may be. He doesn't need you to give your soul and heart to the evil one.

All he needs to do is to keep you away from the only thing that's going to save you. The only person who can redeem your heart and all he needs to do for that is to keep on making interruptions.

[20:31] To keep on making distractions. Make sure the phone goes. Make sure the text comes through. Make sure somebody rings a doorbell. Make sure that there's always something getting in your way.

Always something stopping your heart from being united. and focused upon the Lord. And even for the believer the demands of life in this world are so clamant, so urgent, so pressing that our religious duty to know the God whom we profess to love can become perfunctory, cold, formalized, a drudge or a burden.

We have just so much else to get on with and such a heart, a heart divided into so many competing slices, cannot be a whole heart.

Cannot know the Lord as he ought to be known. Indeed, it has no time to do so. What is it that Jesus said was the first and greatest commandment?

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.

[21 : 52] If we plead like David that the Lord should unite our heart, what is the result here going to be? Peace? Relief?

Oh, that's always rest at last. I can get peace from all these other things. No, our heart is united. It is put back together again that it may focus wholly undividedly upon the one thing, the one person who matters more than all the trivial noise and busyness of the world.

And like with the cathedral, as we stand before him and really enter into his presence, we begin to have a sense of awe.

Unite my heart to fear your name. Fear of the Lord. It's the beginning of knowledge, Proverbs says, chapter 1, verse 7, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Chapter 9, verse 10 of the same book, it's described as the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

[23 : 09] The more our heart is reconstructed and united and we begin slowly to recognize that this is not simply the old heart with bits stuck back together again or patched up here and there, but this is rather like what Ezekiel speaks of in chapter 36, verse 26 and 27, I will give you a new heart, he says, and a new spirit I will put within you and I will move the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful that it's filled with care to obey my rules.

Rules is not an ideal word. Decrees, commandments would be better, but it's a new heart altogether. So when Jesus doesn't say, you know, just amend your life a wee bit and you sort of, you know, get rid of your bad habits and sort of patch up the things you're doing wrong and you can make a fair fist of following me in your own strength.

No, he says, you must be born again. You must have a complete fresh start. You must have what Ezekiel is speaking of here, the Lord inspiring him to say, we must have a new heart.

If our heart is to be united, it must be new. The more the feet of the Lord takes root, once we have that united heart, then we recognize this is something the Lord does, not something we can do.

This is the spirit of which we ought to approach his presence in a spirit of repentance and in the fear of the Lord, knowing that just by filling our lives with so much and sometimes it's necessary, yes, but when it takes over our life and squeezes out the one thing needful, even in those days without texts and phones and computers and doorbells and so on, there was still that same problem.

[25 : 13] Remember what the Lord said in love to Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, hassled, you know, constantly making the meal and hassling with this and with that and the next thing and it's all good.

She was doing it for the Lord. She was serving. She was at work. She was doing everything she could. She wasn't a bad person. But as he said, one thing is needful and Mary's chosen that good part which will not be taken away from her.

There's Mary sitting on the Lord's feet just soaking it all up. Not hearing the clattering of the dishes and the pots and pans and that's what's driving Martha up the wall. But what she's probably thinking, bless her, is there's work to be done and there's Mary just sitting taking things easier and this has to be focused on but at the end of the day when you've made the meal and served it and Jesus has eaten it and gone on with it.

There's another meal to make tomorrow and another one and another one. How many times is the Lord going to be right there able to be listened to, able to be soaked up? You know, this phrase, quality time is something people think of with regard to their kids or perhaps their relationships or whatever but the opportunities of quality time with the Lord.

On the one hand, they're comparatively rare. On the other hand, they're not going to come by accident or by magic. They have to be carved out and this is one reason why the Lord has set

apart, just as it said, one day in seven, that we should give ourselves wholly to Him and rest from everything else but also He's given us other times whether communion seasons and other things, the focus especially upon Him.

[26 : 48] He's given us His word. He has instructed us to make time for Him personally in our own lives, in our closet, in our private lives that we ought to approach Him in this way in a spirit of repentance in the feet of the Lord.

The awesome wonder, the mind-blowing amazement at who this God is and what He has done once we begin to think about it, silences our idle chatter like the echo in the dome of St. Paul's, our very whispers are almost offensive intrusions into the silence that commands us to be still and know that He is God and the more we are aware of this great God, of the sacrifice of His Son, of all that He endured upon that cross, of all that He suffered for sinners, of the deep, deep love of Jesus and the wrath of God which shall surely be poured out upon any and all who despise that once and for all sacrifice, then there is one last reason why even our new heart will need to be united.

Not now because it is distracted, but because in the knowing of God, in the deep love of Christ, God the Son, our heart breaks.

It groans, it strains, and it breaks. And it is well. A broken spirit is to God a pleasing sacrifice, a broken and a contrite heart.

Lord, thou wilt not despise. Such a heart, broken and now put back together again, mended, healed by the grace and Spirit of God is a heart which the Lord has indeed united.

[28 : 58] Not only to fear His name, but to love and praise Him wholly and undividedly. Verse 13, for great is your steadfast love toward me.

You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol, the depths of hell, the place of the dead. And verses 11 and 12, teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.

Unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart. And I will glorify your name forever.

Let us pray.