

# Pure Words for Perilous Times

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[ 0 : 00 ] The Psalms, they just reflect life. It's no wonder that their intended, their initial intention was to be incorporated into the liturgy of Israel's worship.

They don't water down anything about the realities of this life, do they? They don't try to sugarcoat anything. They actually speak to the rawness of hardship, to the confusion of understanding, on one hand, what God has proclaimed himself to be, seeing examples of that, living out examples of that goodness of God in real time, but then also being confused at why they don't seem to experience that at all times.

I mean, just over and over and over, it's this struggle, isn't it? They acknowledge the tremendous hardship and doubts that are part and parcel of human existence, but they help us to process life in light of God, who he is, and how he promises to act.

And we come to these things, and we think about them, and we can apply them in various ways, of course. And how can we not sit back and think, okay, this is not only the experience of Christians, this is the experience of just humanity, right?

We live in a fallen world. We struggle with life in a fallen world. How is it possible that anybody who doesn't know Christ, who doesn't understand the things that have the promises of God, the hopefulness that is the person and the work of God, how can they cope with these things?

[ 1 : 41 ] We come to them, and the Psalms are quite helpful for us because they acknowledge the realities of the difficulty of living life under the sun, as Solomon called it, a fallen world, tremendous hardship and suffering, while also helping us to interpret those things in light of the promises of God.

David and the other psalmists, they show us what it looks like to face the realities of life while still clinging trustingly to God, trustingly to Christ.

The situation presented in Psalm 12 is probably best understood as an expansion on the idea that is put forward in Psalm 11 in verse 3, where we're told that the moral foundations of society were being destroyed.

They were eroding. We dealt with that in great detail last week. It's as if when we get to Psalm 12, certainly these two are connected, David is now unpacking what that means.

He's unpacking what the moral erosion of society looks like, and in this case, he's narrowed his focus. He's not including every possible circumstance or every possible moral decline.

[ 3 : 01 ] He's zeroed in on just one facet of it. He's highlighting the unrestrained deceit that has permeated his culture.

Lies are everywhere. Flattering lips, double-hearted speech, boasting, so much so that David looks around and he says, there's no more faithfulness left.

Everybody, it has permeated our society so that the moral foundations have been destroyed. I can't find righteousness and honesty and truth anywhere.

His world was dominated by the destructive power of the tongue as he explains it here. And so David does what he always does.

He brings that observation to the Lord. He makes his complaint, if we can call it that, really probably lament is the better word. He makes his lament to the Lord, and he asks for God to act.

[ 4 : 03 ] He asks that God would rescue the faithful from such a terrible predicament, that he would bring resolution to it, that he would do something. But then he also reaffirms his confident hope that believers have in taking God as their refuge.

So while seeking the Lord's help for present issues, David teaches us that we must also just trust in his promises and trust that his purposes are good as we wait his action.

Easy thing to say to do. Really hard thing to live, isn't it? Let's think about just the structure of the psalm itself. Just briefly, I think it will be helpful for us in this case to do it.

As a song for worship, Psalm 12, contrast, really the primary thing happening here, it's contrasting the deceitfulness of the wicked, the deceitfulness of the world, if we're going to think of it in connection to 1 John 2 that we read a minute ago.

The deceitfulness of the world is being contrasted with the absolute trustworthiness of God. In the first half, we're presented with, this is the deceit-dominated society.

[ 5 : 20 ] In the second half, we are lifted up by the reality that though we can trust no one else, we can trust the Lord. His words are pure words. He is able to be trusted. While we live in a society in which using deceptive means to take advantage of people is all too common, we can actually always trust the word of God.

Deceit may reign in our world. God's truth will ultimately prevail. And there is a chiasmic structure to this. I know we could probably find a chiism everywhere in the Psalms.

I don't intend to just confuse you with that, but it is actually helpful to us. It's interesting to see it in this case. There's a diagram for you on the screen so that you can see what I mean. Remember, a chiism, it takes a particular poetic shape to emphasize a particular point.

So verse 1 corresponds with verse 8. Verse 1 deals with the fact that the faithful have vanished. Verse 8 closes that same thought by saying, David is surrounded by the wicked.

So think about how those relate together. David looks around. He's observing his situation. He says, there's not faithfulness anywhere. And then he connects that then at the end with, I'm surrounded by the wicked, right?

[ 6 : 37 ] And then as we move a little bit closer, a little bit more narrow in the structure, verse 2 corresponds to verse 7. In verse 2, we're told that his society is dominated by deceit.

In verse 7, in contrast to that, David emphasizes that God will keep his word. That all around you is lies, flattery, but God's going to keep his word.

He's not deceiving you. And then it moves in a little more narrower, where verse 3 corresponds to verse 6. Verse 3, what do we find? God will judge these deceivers. David prays for that.

He says, let them cut off their tongues, he says. Cut off the person who boasts. And what do we find in verse 6? That God's words are pure. The fact that God's words are pure is an indication of his righteousness, which gives him the right and the authority to carry out the judgment that is displayed in verse 3.

See how they're connected? And then we get to the very center of the chiasm. This is kind of the point. It's driving the focus here. In verse 4, we have the speech of the deceivers.

[ 7 : 43 ] Verse 5, we have the speech of God. God makes his statement. Now that's helpful for us, because it helps us to understand what David is doing poetically, in song, in rhyme, in lyric, in order to emphasize a particular truth.

That in this world, there's lies and deceit, it's inundated with it, but you can trust God. You can trust the Lord. His words are pure. That's the main drive of this psalm.

If you don't get anything else out of what I say, that's the main drive. That as you look around the world around you, and you get discouraged at the fact that you can't trust anybody, you can trust the Lord.

You can trust his word. You can cling to him. He is trustworthy. He is a true shelter and refuge. So let's unpack it.

Let's unpack it all by considering two distinct things. We want to consider the real experience of living in a society that is dominated by lies, and then we want to consider after that how we can find hope in the pure words of God, okay?

[ 8 : 49 ] Number one, look at a deceitful society. Deceitful society. Verse one again. Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone. For the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.

Everyone utters lies to his neighbor with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts.

Those who say with our tongue, we will prevail. Our lips are with us. Who is master for us? Now it's interesting to me that David speaks, that before David speaks about the specific issue of a deceit-dominated society, he first states that there seem to be no faithful people left among the children of man.

What's he communicating here? Not just the reality that he's surrounded by wickedness, but there's no trace of faithfulness. The emphasis is on a different thing.

I think he's communicating that feeling of loneliness and isolation as one who truly wants to live in obedience to the Lord.

[10:02] He observes the world around him. Finding truly faithful people was incredibly difficult to do. Perhaps he's discouraged over the fact that many who would have been committed to obeying the Lord, standing shoulder to shoulder with David at some point in honoring the Lord and worshiping the Lord and being faithful to him and living in holiness according to his law.

Maybe he's discouraged by the fact that those people now are walking in the counsel of the wicked. They're standing in the way of sinners. They're sitting in the seat of the scornful, the scoffers. The moral foundations were collapsing around them and he felt alone in being concerned about it. Surely you understand what this is like.

You can not only be discouraged at the great wickedness that is our world, but then it's devastating when you look around and you say, this person used to say they love the Lord.

They used to stand with me on truth and now I can't find faithfulness anywhere. The faithful have vanished. It's an emotion so often felt by those standing for truth.

[11:23] It's overwhelming to consider the raging wickedness of society. Even more challenging to see those who once contended for the faith now abandoning that faith.

It can be spiritually debilitating, can't it? The feeling of loneliness. Elijah experienced that, remember? After this tremendous victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah cries out to the Lord. He runs to the wilderness. He cries out to the Lord and he says, he says, Lord, will you just take my life? I'm the only one left, God. There's nobody left. Which, of course, is an emotion that we often feel but isn't actually conveying truth, is it?

God always has his remnant. He's always doing his work and that's exactly how God responded to Elijah. He said, Elijah, stop whining. I got 7,000 people in Israel that have not yet bowed the knee to Baal, Elijah.

Just keep going, Elijah. We know what this is like. This is common in the scriptures. It's common in our real lived experience. Things being so bad that the faithful seem to have vanished and what does David do in response to that?

[12:41] Save us, God. Do something, God. Rescue the faithful that remain. But then beginning in verse 2, David explains the particular issue at hand and you'll notice that it all has to do with sins of the tongue.

Four different kinds of sins related to speech are mentioned here. First, David says that everyone is lying to everyone else. Everyone utters lies to his neighbor.

Culture is dominated by deceit. And based on the impact that these sins had on the vulnerable in verse 5, what we find is that this isn't merely just like vain lies.

This isn't stretching the truth to make ourselves look better to other people. That probably is happening. This sounds like scheming. Deceptive schemes meant to take advantage of others in order to benefit oneself.

Then David recognizes flattery as a particularly devastating problem. We might understand flattery as smooth talking.

[13:54] Offering disingenuous compliments. Or feigning interest in a person in order to gain something from them. Ladies ever get hit on by a smooth talker?

Some of you married some smooth talkers, right? It worked. Feigning a little bit of interest, overdue compliments that they don't really intend in order that they might gain something from you, of course, that happens all the time.

It's a sin frequently overlooked, to be honest with you, but routinely present among Christians. People using flattery in order to advance themselves in the church, in order to gain maybe some kind of power, in order to do something, in order to have advantage for themselves.

It's disingenuous. Still, the scriptures speak of its dangers. Solomon said in Proverbs 26 that a flattering tongue works ruin.

It's not merely that you're giving somebody encouragement that you don't mean. It's going to ruin them is what it does. Daniel said that flattery would be key to the seduction of the Antichrist at the end of the age.

[ 15 : 17 ] Daniel 11, 32. He will be by nature a flatterer. Jude included flatterers among the ungodly who will face God's eternal judgment in Jude 16.

And yet, it seems to be a sin of the tongue that Christians don't speak much about. Rather, they tend to indulge it.

Third, David speaks of double-hearted speech. double-hearted speech. James Johnston describes it this way, the double-hearted man is thinking two things at the same time.

What he wants and what he needs to say to get what he wants. Truth takes a backseat to selfishness.

sin. And then the final kind of sin is in verses three and four, which underscore boasting. The people that David sees, they've gotten so good at deception that they now boast of prevailing over God and his people.

[ 16 : 26 ] Their strength is in their ability to persuade people. and they know it and they're using that ability to gain advantage for themselves and to abuse the vulnerable.

They've deceived themselves into thinking also that they're going to get by with it. Now it's bad enough for these kinds of sins to exist in society.

It's devastating when they are commonplace. I mean, who can you actually trust? We know, our society is no different than this, right?

We can look, we see this corruption everywhere. We can point to politicians or maybe used car salesmen.

That's low hanging fruit, right? We can say that, okay, we all get that there's probably a lot of deceit going on there. A little bit of flattery happening there. Certainly some boasting going on.

[ 17 : 33 ] But this is everywhere. We see this in the medical community, don't we? On both extremes of it. On one side, we see pharmaceutical companies that are pushing medicines that are very, very expensive.

And when you watch those ads, what is it? They get to the part where they actually tell you what the medicine does to you and it's like super fast and it's like this may cause you to die, but these people are really happy. They're really happy about it, right?

You go to the other extreme and you have the naturalists that are giving themselves over to lies and to slander and conspiracy just to make a point to drive all of that influence away from the pharmaceutical company over to their side instead.

And then you get to the end of it and you go to the doctor and you think, well, who can I trust here? This doctor seems to be taking advantage of me. This person seems to be a quack. Who can I actually trust?

And you may determine, I don't know that I can trust anyone. And maybe you can't. It's not just that. Again, that's maybe low-hanging fruit. Journalists understand the power of the tongue, don't they?

[ 18 : 46 ] They understand it well. They use it to their advantage. They know how they can formulate their words in order to drive a particular emotion. And we see it constantly in these election cycles, don't we?

Driving fear on one hand in order to push people to one particular candidate, right? Driving maybe empty promises on the other hand with the language that they use, all reporting on the same thing, but using language to their advantage in order that they might deceive.

Now, that's not universal, but they understand the power of it, and it certainly is commonplace.

Perhaps there's no greater place where this is seen and where the danger exists than in the church. Charlatans who understand that they have the power of persuasion, and they stand at a pulpit Sunday by Sunday and they know how to manipulate the people that hear their voice and they will work that to their advantage to build a platform or influence or pad their pockets, whatever it may be.

We can look around, we can see every part of society and say, yeah, I get what David was saying. Everybody's kind of lying here. Everybody's trying to take advantage of me here.

[ 20 : 09 ] people are boasting that they're good at it. What do we do? Save us, Lord. Help us, Lord.

Almost every lament David has offered involved these sins in some way. Have you noticed that? In all these Psalms, so much of it comes back to sins of the tongue. The reason for that is that sins of speech are among the most destructive sins.

They have the ability to disintegrate the moral fabric of society. James makes this clear for us. In James chapter 3, he writes, the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.

The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, set on fire by hell. Every kind of beast and bird and reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue.

It's a restless evil, he says. It's full of deadly poison. With it, we bless the Lord and Father on Sunday morning, and with it we curse people that are made in the likeness of God Monday to Saturday.

[ 21 : 23 ] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. Brothers, these things ought not to be so. He understood the destructive power of the tongue. If death and life are in the power of the tongue, which is what Solomon tells us in Proverbs 18, what must that mean for a society that is permeated by lying?

Permeated by flattery and double speech? It was David's circumstance. It's ours as well. And it's not hard for us to see why David felt this was a desperate circumstance that needed God's intervention.

So he prayed that the Lord would rescue them and that he would do so by dealing a decisive blow to the wicked, cutting off the flattering lips and the boasting tongue.

Again, the Psalms emphasizing, warning us of the reality of God's judgment, his people praying for it, and then God responding with the promise of it.

Now, before we move on, let's consider this. Where do we fall into this? Have you ever broken God's moral law with a sin of the tongue?

[ 22 : 42 ] Of course. Most of us are probably pretty good at it. Have you ever lied or flattered or deceived someone to gain some kind of personal advantage?

Maybe you did it in your business. Maybe you did it with your spouse. Maybe you did it in the church. Maybe you did it with friendship. Whatever. We're all probably guilty of it, right?

This judgment against deceivers that is prayed for by David and then promised by God later in the Psalm, it extends to all of us who have sinned in this way. All of us.

You and me included. So, where does that leave us? there is some hope. In fact, it's a certain hope.

There was a man who never flattered, who never boasted, who never deceived. Peter said that Jesus committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

[ 23 : 54 ] Even when he was reviled, he did not revile in return, but he continued entrusting himself to the judgment of the Father. The good news of the gospel is that though we should be condemned by God for our lies, our sins can be forgiven.

Christ's righteousness can be applied to our account. Peter continues in the next verse, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds we are healed. Peter says, quoting Isaiah, by repenting of your sin, trusting in Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, you will escape the judgment of God for your sins.

Jesus has taken the punishment for sin, and he offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will come to him in personal faith to receive it.

This is the promise of the gospel, the offer of new life through Jesus Christ, the perfect one, the sinless one, who takes the place of sinners like you and me.

[ 25 : 15 ] So there's the perilous condition of a deceitful society. Now we see in the second half of the psalm, we see the trustworthy God, the trustworthy God.

Three truths in the second half of the psalm give us hope in perilous times. The first one is this, the Lord will save the poor and needy.

The Lord will save the poor and needy. Look at verse 5. This is God's statement now. God is saying these words, because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise, says the Lord, I will place him in the safety for which he longs.

David asks for salvation in verse 1, which is precisely what God promises in verse 5. He knows the plight of the vulnerable who are the first to suffer in a deceitful society, and he will come to their defense.

That's the promise here. The Lord hates the wicked. He seeks justice for the helpless. But we need to understand what God is actually promising here.

[ 26 : 31 ] In the context of this psalm, poor and needy are terms that are representing what Psalm 11 called the upright in heart. Those at whom the wicked aim their arrows in 11 and verse 2.

David includes himself in this group. Just look at the very next verse. Or excuse me, in verse 7. You, O Lord, will keep them, your words, you will guard us, he says, from this generation forever.

He includes himself in this group, this group of poor and needy. Well, David physically speaking was neither poor nor needy, nor weak, nor vulnerable. He was the king.

He was the king. He had power. He had wealth, prestige, and yet he includes himself in this. So that forces us to go back and say, well, what is God actually promising?

Is he promising that every person who experiences an injustice in this life will find rescue from that judgment, that injustice in this life?

[ 27 : 39 ] No, that's not the promise that he's making. While God certainly cares about injustices against the physically vulnerable, this psalm has those who are faithful, especially in mind.

Think about it in relationship to Jesus' ministry. God's concern for the physically vulnerable is exemplified in Jesus. He was constantly gravitating toward the helpless and the needy.

MacArthur emphasizes often that during the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry, he essentially eradicated disease from Israel. I mean, everywhere he went, hundreds and thousands of people are receiving his healing touch.

Amazing. He gravitated toward those people. His heart broke for those people. He wanted to help those people. However, miraculous healings were not the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

He himself underscored the deeper meaning of the promise that is highlighted here in this psalm. That God will save his people represented as poor and needy, weak and vulnerable from the wickedness of this world.

[ 29 : 00 ] He will redeem them. He will save them. He will rescue them. It's a promise that's guaranteed. Think about it in Jesus' own teaching.

In Luke chapter 4, we're told that he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he stood up to read.

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives. And recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

[ 30 : 08 ] Jesus interpreted Isaiah's message as referring to his gospel purpose. The poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed, they represented sinners in need of salvation and Jesus' purpose in coming was to bring that salvation through his death and resurrection.

Did he meet the physical needs of people? Did he care to do that? Absolutely. Is that a partial fulfillment of Isaiah's words? Of course it is. Is it the point? No.

Will Jesus eradicate all evil in the end? Yes, we cling to that hope. But the promises made by God must be interpreted with their spiritual meaning.

When we come to a passage like Psalm 12, the promise is not a guarantee that God will bring justice to the oppressed in this life, though he often does that.

The promise is that he will bring spiritual salvation for all who will repent and believe. Not a single one will fail. The physical fulfillment of this promise in Psalm 12 will come at the final judgment.

[ 31 : 28 ] All of the wicked will be judged by God. All of the weak and vulnerable who are believing will be vindicated in that moment. But the spiritual fulfillment of this promise, it's already taken place.

It was fulfilled in the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. That's why we can hope in it. God says, I will now arise.

I will deal with it. And he did. He dealt with it in the person and work of Jesus Christ, bringing salvation to the poor and needy, the lost and oppressed by sin.

That's the first thing that gives us hope. Number two, the Lord's promises are trustworthy. They're trustworthy. Verse six, the words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

Now think about what the psalm is doing. Think about the progression here. We're first presented with the predicament. Here is the deceitful society. This is troubling. We need salvation from this. And then we have God's promise that he will redeem the faithful.

[ 32 : 39 ] And immediately following that promise, we might look at it and say, well, if I can't trust anybody else, what makes me think that I should be able to trust God? And David answers that for us in the very next thing.

And he says, oh, listen, the words of God, they're very different from the words of this world. They are pure words, he says. They're like silver that's been refined seven times. It doesn't have a single trace of dross or impurity left.

That's how trustworthy the Lord's words are. You can trust his promises, David says. In another psalm, he says, this God, his way is perfect.

The word of the Lord proves true. He really is a shield for all who take refuge in him. That gives us hope, doesn't it?

That God promises to save his people. And that his promises never fail. Says Spurgeon, so clear and free from all alloy of error and unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord.

[ 33 : 45 ] The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy to precious ore.

The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat.

faith. What a way to say you can trust him. It's true. You can believe him.

He'll never fail. Which brings us to the final promise in verses seven and eight. The Lord will not forsake his people. He will not forsake his people.

Okay, again, think about the progression here. Here on one hand we have, okay, here's a promise of the Lord for salvation, and then that's followed up with the emphasis that, and you can trust it, you can trust his word, which is then followed up by, and he's never going to change his mind.

[ 34 : 49 ] He's never going to change his mind. He's never going to turn around from this. He'll never forsake his people. Look at verse seven. You, O Lord, will keep them. You will guard us from this generation forever.

On every side, the wicked prowled, his vileness is exalted among the children of men. In this final note, David confessed his faith in the Lord. In the last verse, the wicked are still prowling.

The vile are being exalted by the world still yet, but David was confident that God would guard those who trust him to the very end.

there's a shift that has happened here, a shift that takes place throughout the psalm. It opens in verse one with fear. Lord, save.

But after David considers God's perfect word, his fear transforms to an act of faith, the circumstances do not change. He's still going to have a hard time finding faithful people.

[ 35 : 57 ] He's still surrounded by wickedness. the world in which he lives exalts the vile. That has not changed. What's changed?

David has changed. David has changed. This is why we must remain grounded and rooted in the scriptures. Like the blessed men of Psalm 1, our flourishing will only come through being planted by the rivers of water, which is God's word.

In perilous times, we have the pure words of God as our hope. And as we bring our frustrations, as we bring our fears, and our concerns, and our laments to the Lord, as we come to the scripture, and to prayer, what is it that happens?

The circumstance will very rarely change. God changes us instead. He puts faith in our hearts. He strengthens us. He becomes a refuge for us rather than delivering us from all hardship.

Notice in verse 7, the Lord has not said to remove the faithful from their circumstance. Instead, it is said that He will guard them and carry them through their circumstance.

[ 37 : 17 ] our prayer, like David's in verse 1, is often, Lord, will you just fix this? And God's answer most often is, no, but I'll fix you.

And I'll help you. And I'll strengthen you. And I'll encourage you. The wicked can do a lot to us.

They can. They have great power over us in this life. They really do. But they'll never be able to rob us of the guarantee of God's grace and salvation.

Never. He will not forsake us. He will lose none who belong to Him. He will guard them all to the very end.

And David was confident of that. So though the foundations of society continued to crumble around us, the stronghold of God will remain.

[ 38 : 23 ] And all who take refuge in Him, and only those who take refuge in Him by faith will be blessed forever. That's the words of David that we close with in verse 7.

Oh Lord, you will keep your word. you will guard us, you will guard your people from this generation for how long? forever forever and ever