

# I Cry To You For Help

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Date: 13 June 2010

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Our text this morning as we hear from the living God in his word is Psalm 28. So take out again if you would the green sheet in your bulletin that has Psalm 28 printed there for you.
- I would like for you to be seeing the words of this psalm as we go along. So we're spending time in the psalms this summer specifically to think about how they model prayer for us.
- Hopefully we will be growing individually and corporately in prayer over these weeks. And so the sermon this morning is very straightforward.
- In keeping with the purpose of the series there's only one question. One question that runs through the whole series really but also shapes the approach of this sermon in particular.
- The question is simply this. Do you pray like this? Do you pray like this?
- [ 1 : 0 9 ]     To you, O Lord, I call. I call. I call out. Loudly.
- I shout. I cry out. Not a cool, calm, collected, emotionally level request. But an urgent cry. Shouted when all other modes of appeal would fail us.
- Do you pray like this? It is a directed and personal cry. To you, O Lord, I call.
- The psalmist doesn't waste his words on the air or the space around him. We don't talk to ourselves when we pray. When it's time to cry out, we cry out to the Lord.
- L-O-R-D in all capital letters. All capital letters because it's the Hebrew name for the covenant God.
- [ 2 : 0 8 ]     Like the psalmist, you have the privilege of addressing the covenant God with your cries. Prayer is the privilege of the covenant people. The God to whom we cry is the God who invites his people to call on him in their distress.
- Even when their prayer is an urgent cry expressed with boldness. Urgent boldness in the face of sickness or sorrow.
- In the face of sudden tragedy or slow, painful loss. Of suffering at the hands of those who work against God. Of frustration or hurt as we face the evil of the world.
- Of anger in specific circumstances. Of injustice. Of feeling alone or forgotten in a society of isolation. Whatever the case, whatever the reason for which we must cry out, the opening line of Psalm 28 reminds us that we shout for help to the covenant-keeping God who invites us to call upon him boldly.
- Psalm 28 is bold. Do you ever pray like this? To you, O Lord, I call out.
- [ 3 : 2 6 ]     My rock, be not deaf to me. My rock, the strong rock who gives strength to his people.
- The sturdy rock who provides shelter. The immovable rock. The foundation of all our hopes, our refuge in times of trouble. The psalmist is determined to flee to his rock.
- His stronghold in the hour of danger. And so he says, my rock. Put yourself in the place of the psalmist.

The Lord is your rock too. Personally, individually, he's your rock. In our distress, there is a definite object on which to fix the thoughts of our cries for help.

It is the rock, the Lord himself. For the psalmist, that meant Yahweh, the God of Israel. For us, of course, that also means Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[ 4 : 38 ] Have you learned to pray like this? Is this the instinct of your heart when trouble comes? When you find yourself sorrow stricken or fearful or in danger?

Do you know your rock and cry out to him? It will not do to have faith in a vague theory of how God might care for you in one way or another or have some abstract notion of what God's love is like.

You must know him as your rock. Personally, you must cry out to him in prayer as my rock. And then, you will understand what it is that the psalmist desires above all else.

That God would speak. The rest of verse 1. Be not deaf to me. Lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.

When we call to the Lord our rock, we desire above everything else that God would speak. That God would not be silent.

[ 5 : 55 ] And what do we most desire that God would say? As we cry out for help, what is it that we most need to hear?

It's simply this. That the Lord has heard our cry. Do we not, most of all, want God to let us know that he hears us?

It's enough to know that God has heard us. Because then, and here I think really is the key to this psalm.

Because then when we feel sure that God has heard us, we can with deepest confidence leave the matter about which we've been crying out in his hands.

That is the basic movement of this psalm, I think. And now I've given the whole point away and I've run ahead of the psalmist. But let's stay with verse 2 for a second. Just trying to walk you through the way the psalmist is thinking.

[ 7 : 01 ] There's one thing the psalmist wants above all. It's the first word in verse 2. You see it? He wants the Lord to hear him. He understands that no matter what the context of suffering or trial is in which we find ourselves, there is one essential issue.

Whether or not God hears us and speaks. I do not exaggerate in saying that it is a matter of life and death.

Whether or not, in the midst of our need or trial or sorrow, we have a relationship with the God who hears and who speaks.

It is life and death. Because if you are silent, reasons the psalmist, I become like those who go down to the pit.

Put that in the language of our day. If you are silent, Lord, I might as well give up and die. Before the testing becomes too severe, the situation too unbearable, hear me.

[ 8 : 09 ] Let me know that you are there for me as my rock. Do you ever pray like this? Have you ever learned to pray like this?

Have you ever acknowledged your need for help and pleaded with the Lord to hear your cries? Or is something holding you back from boldly praying as the psalmist does?

What is it? What holds you back? Is it pride? Is it some unhealthy form of humility?

Or are you not really sure that anyone is listening? Or that if someone is listening, that maybe God can't really do anything to help you?

Let me suggest this week that if that's you, if you have a hard time praying in this way, that you be brutally honest with yourself.

[ 9 : 20 ] And that if you don't pray like this, you find out why. Name the reason and confess it. Confess it to God. Confess it to others, to your friends, who can pray with you and bring you into a life of prayer as the psalmist models for us.

It is the psalmist's chief desire that the Lord hears him. Verse 2. Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.

The lifting of hands was common practice in the ancient Near East, both in political and religious context. When a subject in Egypt would come before Pharaoh, it was common to enter the Pharaoh's court with hands uplifted, a sign of submission and hopeful appeal to the king.

There were whole collections of prayers in ancient Mesopotamia labeled prayers with raised hands. The psalmist lift his hands in a symbolic expression of utter dependence on the Lord, complete dependence.

Hear me. Hear me. Do you pray like that? Do you ever pray with lifted hands?

[ 10 : 38 ] I mean literally. Do you ever pray with your hands lifted up? Try it. Try it. Start to use your body in prayer.

The psalmist needs the help of the Lord. No other position could be appropriate. So he lifts his hands to the most holy place, the dwelling place of God. This is a direct appeal to the God of the universe.

His hands are raised. It's not the first time he's pleaded with the Lord. According to the wording of verse 2, the psalmist has already pleaded for mercy several times.

He has pleaded, he has called upon the Lord knowing full well the Lord's character, asking for the grace of God to be extended to him. The psalmist pleads for mercy from the God who has revealed himself to be merciful.

Crying out in his distress, the psalmist prays that the all-merciful one comes to his help. He knows he cannot deliver himself. He trusts that the Lord will extend divine mercy to him.

[ 11 : 47 ] He is utterly dependent upon the Lord, and yet he comes boldly. He speaks in imperative verbal moods. He gives commands to God.

Don't be silent. Hear the voice of my pleas. I cry to you for help. Help me. Do you know how to pray that way?

Psalm 28 doesn't actually relay the specific situation in which the psalmist finds himself. We simply aren't told what it was that he was facing.

And we aren't told, I think, because the specific situation of the psalmist isn't the point. That's not why this psalm was preserved for us. The psalms are generally this way.

They leave out the exact circumstances, allowing us to imagine the situations in our own lives that might correspond to their wording, to their prayers. Psalm 28 invites you to think of those times when you must acknowledge your need for the Lord's help.

[ 12 : 56 ] When life demands conscious dependence upon the Lord, pleading for mercy and grace. Some of you are in those times right now.

Some of you know that a time like that is coming soon. All of us need to be ready for a time like that in the future.

Whatever the case, learn now from this psalm how to pray. Now, though it's true that we don't know the exact situation of the psalmist, the next few verses do suggest something about the suffering involved in this case.

Because the psalmist is concerned, we find out, with the judgment of the workers of evil. So without knowing the specifics, it seems most plausible that the psalmist has suffered from a lack of justice in his life.

He suffered in the face of evil. Perhaps it was circumstantial in his own life. Perhaps it was more inward as he watched the way of the wicked in the world. Maybe it hit close to home.

[ 14 : 05 ] But whatever the case, the psalmist faced injustice. The wicked seemed to get away with their evil actions. That should sound familiar to us.

Because whether it was in ancient Israel or it's in modern Canada, nothing stings the righteous so sharply as injustice. And nothing should.

The psalmist wants justice. But I want you to notice where he begins in this section of his prayer.

As the psalmist turns his attention now to focus on the wicked and asks the Lord to judge them, he begins by focusing on himself. Verse 3, Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil.

Whatever his exact circumstances, the psalmist first fears lest he himself should be bound up in the bundle of the wicked and drawn along to the same destruction.

[ 15 : 13 ] This is fabulous. Because it is most appropriate to begin any prayer for justice with a careful self-examination. Is it not?

Though the psalmist has evidently been wronged and has suffered in some way at the hands of those who do evil, his initial request is that he not be found among the evil and wicked.

And I realize that could be read in a couple of ways. But I think this is the psalmist being humble and being honest and still pleading for mercy.

There is not, as I read it, a hint of vindictiveness in this prayer. The psalmist is fully submitted to the Lord and aware of his own failings first.

Oh, we need to pray like that. Because just what is it that puts one in the category of the wicked according to this psalm?

[ 16 : 18 ] The end of verse 3 has the definition. The wicked, the workers of evil, are those who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts.

They're duplicitous. The behavior that identifies the wicked most clearly is their hypocrisy and their manipulation of others. Nothing is as sure a sign of evil as when the tongue and the heart do not tune to the same key.

When inner thoughts are cloaked behind a deceptive exterior, I like what one commentator says, deceitful men are more to be dreaded than wild beasts.

It were better to be shut up in a pit with serpents than to be compelled to live with liars. It is concerning these that the psalmist prays for judgment.

Verses 4 and 5, give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds. Give to them according to the work of their hands. Render them their due reward.

[ 17 : 28 ] He's still commanding God. It is these verses, I think, that really take us to the heart of the matter. The psalmist has suffered at the hand of evil and watch this, now he puts that evil in the Lord's hands.

And he implores the Lord to execute his righteous judgment. As obvious as it is, it's crucial to point out that God is the one the psalmist asks to do the rendering.

I say this very carefully, that according to this psalm, to express a desire for justice implies that we leave punishment for wrongdoing ultimately to God.

We don't take matters into our own hands as if we are God. Because it is, I think, a future and permanent rendering of which the psalmist speaks.

I say that because of verse 5. The psalmist gives his rationale. Because they do not regard the works of the Lord or the work of His hands, He will tear them down and build them up no more.

[ 18 : 46 ] He will tear them down in the future. And the tearing down will be permanent. I think the psalmist is here asking the Lord to carry out what has always been the hope of the people of God, the Lord's righteous judgment.

The final setting, all things to write when, as Peter says in his epistle, God judges impartially according to each one's deeds. When, as Paul said in the opening to the letter of Thessalonians read this morning, the Lord Jesus Christ returns to judge the wicked and the just.

So now think about this one. Do you pray this way? Do you pray this way? It gets a little harder to answer that question now, doesn't it?

Because in light of Jesus' command to forgive our enemies, I know that some are inclined to look at prayers such as this one in Psalm 28 and think that while the psalmist was perhaps right to pray this in his own day, that we now know a better way.

And that such a prayer would be inappropriate. And I think that's a mistake. Is it wrong to pray for God to judge evil doers?

[ 20 : 14 ] No. The answer must be no. Or, God help me, I don't know how to face a world as evil as the one in which we live.

How can we not long for justice? Far from being vindictive, the psalmist has expressed what any healthy conscience should express at the wrongs of the present order.

The conviction that a day of judgment is a moral necessity. If you're a Christian, you believe that. So, while seeking the reconciliation of all people to God through the cross of Christ, now, we must still acknowledge the rightness of this prayer.

that it is the proper stance to wrongdoing and to evil in the world to want to see it dealt with, punished.

Will not God give justice to His elect who cry to Him day and night, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 18? God is the Lord Jesus to pray for justice.

[ 21 : 33 ] But there are plenty in the world who are. And God hears their prayers. prayers. Do you have any sense of what it is to pray like this?

The psalmist has expressed his confidence in his rock. He has cried out for the Lord to hear him humbly and yet with boldness as he brings the injustice of his circumstance to the Lord and places it in his hands.

The stage is set for verse 6. A turning point in the psalmist suddenly bursts out in a hymn of praise to God.

For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. This is verse 2 answered word for word. The most important petition granted.

The Lord has heard the psalmist's voice. Of this the psalmist is absolutely confident. But there's more. For not only has the Lord heard his pleas, he now can look forward to an even greater deliverance.

[ 22 : 41 ] Earlier the psalmist called the Lord his rock. Now he calls the Lord my strength and my shield. No longer does he even feel threatened.

With the strength of the Lord now filling him and the shield of the Lord now protecting him, the psalmist's tone is one of complete confidence. Confidence in the Lord in capital letters.

Three times in these closing verses the psalmist employs the capital letter covenant name Yahweh. The psalmist no longer feels threatened.

In fact, he confesses he feels jubilant. in him my heart trusts and I am helped, he says. And then this most magnificent line, my heart exalts.

That is the goal. With the Lord strengthening and protecting him, the psalmist's heart grows in trust and I am helped, he says.

[ 23 : 49 ] But note that the reason he says he's helped is that his heart grows in trust. He does not say that the Lord has yet done anything about the specific situation or the evil described in verses 3 to 4.

This is an interior strengthening of the heart that helps him. Don't miss that point. Don't miss that his movement to confidence, to a heart that exalts in the Lord, may not in fact entail any actual change in the external circumstances of our lives.

It may or it may not. And so here again is the question. Do you pray like that?

Perhaps you've experienced the very thing the psalmist describes. You've cried out to the Lord your rock. You've pleaded with him to hear you. You've put the circumstances of your suffering in his hands and emerged saying together with the psalmist in him my heart trusts and I am helped.

You resonate with the psalmist. This is a confidence you understand because you felt it yourself. You know that God has heard your cry for help. And so like the psalmist you can leave the matter in his hands with deepest confidence and steady joy.

[ 25 : 21 ] Many of you know that sweet reality. But maybe that's not been your experience. For some of you it may be that none of this yet rings true.

Maybe you've never found this confidence. Maybe you've never been able to say with the psalmist in him my heart trusts and I am helped. But you want more than anything in the world this morning to be able to say just that.

There was a man after the nine o'clock service who came up to me and said he's not a normal attender at St. John's. Two weeks ago he runs a painting business of some kind. And he had parked his truck on a road and he left the door unlocked and he went inside the house and when he came back everything he had was gone.

Everything was gone. And he said the bitterness that has been welling up inside of him. He hasn't known what to do with it. And he said now this is the first time this morning was the first time he began to try to put that into the Lord's hands.

To cry out for justice but to put it into the hands of the Lord. If you are like that man who came to me this morning, if that's the case for you, something's happened in your life, you want this sense of help, of trust, but you're not there yet, then let me speak to you for just a moment.

[ 26 : 53 ] Let me urge you to persist, to continue to call upon the Lord in capital letters, to embrace him as your rock, to ask for confidence that the Lord hears you, to submit yourself and your circumstances to him, and to not give up, and then do one more thing.

Sing. Sing. And keep singing. Keep singing in the context of the people of God. Be here at worship.

Meet with others who will be willing to say again and again the truths of verse 8 and 9. This is the song of the psalmist. Verses 8 and 9. Meet and know people who will say this to you.

The Lord is the strength of his people. He is the saving refuge of his anointed. Oh, save your people and bless your heritage.

Be their shepherd and carry them forever. It was Terry, our organist earlier in the week, who suggested to me that perhaps verses 8 and 9 are the song that the psalmist mentions in verse 7.

[ 28 : 10 ] My heart exalts, he says in verse 7, and with my song I give thanks to him. What's the song? The Lord is the strength of his people.

He is the saving refuge of his anointed. Make that your song. Whether or not you can yet sing it with the same joy of the psalmist, sing it.

you persist in calling upon the Lord to remember that the covenant God is faithful to all his people. The Lord is the strength of his people. That includes you, brother and sister, you.

Remember that the covenant God is the saving refuge of his anointed one, the anointed king of Israel in the time of the Psalms, the anointed Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. God is the saving refuge of his anointed one through whom we are saved.

Turn to the anointed one, to Jesus. Remember that the covenant God will save his people and bless his inheritance. And remember that he will be our shepherd and that therefore he is your shepherd and that he is the God who carries his people and who therefore carries you as a shepherd would carry a lamb in his arms.

[ 29 : 34 ] this is Psalm 28. Do you pray this way? If you don't or you never have or you need something to kick start your thinking and the bullet points on the green sheet that you have with the Psalm are meant to do that for you this week, they follow along with basically what I've said here in this sermon.

it is my hope that we will learn to pray through this Psalm to cry to God for help and experience with the psalmist that the Lord is my strength and my shield in him my heart trusts.

Amen. Amen. Please bow your heads or kneel to pray.

I will end each petition with Lord in your mercy and you're welcome to respond with your our prayer.

prayer. To you, Lord, we do call needy, undeserving for your help, for your understanding, for your comfort, for your love.

[ 31 : 00 ] Thank you that you do not turn a deaf ear, but instead you listen so carefully to the pleas and the aches and the hopes of our hearts and that they matter so much to you.

Thank you for giving us King David's pleas, for this blanket encouragement and confidence to be so honest and to be so needy. Thank you that you are our rock, our strength and shield, our shepherd, that you go looking for us.

Thank you that you love us more deeply and more personally than any love our imagination could envision. Lord, in your mercy.

Father, we thank you for the newly baptized this morning for Greta, Aaron, Annalise, Stephen, Michael, and Heather.

Thank you for their and their families' willingness to commit their lives into your saving grace, mercy, and truth. May this choice in their lives be as life-changing as you intended it to be and as life-giving.

[ 32 : 20 ] May it be a really big deal. May the sign of the cross run deep and may your life-giving Holy Spirit embrace and transform each one of them.

May we, as their congregation, love them boldly, generously, and supportively. Lord, in your mercy. Father, in this time of graduations, we pray for those who are graduating from high school.

It's a time of newness and change and ending. We pray for the parents of graduates also trying to process these changes. Watch over each of them in this ending and in this beginning.

And we ask that in your grace, each graduate would hold as their greatest goal to know you and to love you and to rest in you all the days of their lives. Lord, in your mercy.

Father, we pray for our world, your world, in pain and turmoil in so many places. We plead for a speedy end to the violence in Kyrgyzstan and we ask for your mercy and protection for those fleeing and for those who have lost the people they love.

[ 33 : 42 ] We pray for the people of Afghanistan that you would give them safety and wise ways to find lasting peace. We pray for the safety of our Canadian troops there and for their families here at home.

We pray for the troubled relationship between Israel and Palestine and ask for a miraculous humility and spirit of cooperation in their leaders. We pray for all those affected by the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Bring your miracles there in their lives and in that scarred ecosystem. Lord, in your mercy. We pray for the missionaries who go out from our congregation.

May your spirit flavor and bless and uphold all their work. We ask for your care for Richie Spidell with Navigators and Christian Rumery here in Vancouver and for Jeremy Curry in Nepal, Erica and Jess Candelan in Israel and Spencer Bentley in Burundi.

Protect and uphold them as only you can. Lord, in your mercy. Lord God, we pray for pain and sorrow in each of our own lives.

[ 34 : 58 ] we desperately need your comfort, wisdom, and healing every day. We pray for those in pain amongst us. David, Rowena, Betty, Gail, Ann, David.

And in a moment of silence, we pray for those known specifically to each of us. Amen.

Be with them. Bring them to mind that we might pray for them and love them throughout the week ahead. Lord, in your mercy. Amen.

Father, we are waiting for you, and as we do so, may we submit evermore of ourselves and our work and our families and our friendships to you.

May we uphold the hope and the immeasurable joy and goodness of the resurrection to one another. Amen. Amen. And we gather. Thank you.