

Show Your Steadfast Love!

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would, please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to Psalm chapter 17. Psalm chapter 17. We're working through the Psalms for the summer, and we've made our way to the 17th chapter.

When you have your Bibles there to Psalm 17, if you would please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. Psalm 17, a prayer of David.

Hear a just cause, O Lord. Attend to my cry. Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. From your presence let my vindication come.

Let your eyes behold the right. You have tried my heart. You have visited me by night. You have tested me, and you will find nothing. I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.

With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths. My feet have not slipped.

[1 : 12] I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God. Incline your ear to me. Hear my words. Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior, of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me. They close their hearts to pity.

With their mouths they speak arrogantly. They have now surrounded our steps. They set their eyes to cast us to the ground. He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush.

Arise, O Lord. Confront him. Subdue him. Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword. From men by your hand, O Lord.

From men of the world whose portion is in this life. You fill their womb with treasure. They are satisfied with children. And they leave their abundance to their infants.

[2 : 14] As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. This is God's holy, inspired word.

Let's pray once more. Father, we ask again, Lord, as we look to your word, would you speak to us clearly the truths of the gospel? Would you draw us to deeper communion with you in prayer? We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. I read an article this week from the Harvard Gazette titled, Prayers Don't Help Heart Surgery Patients.

Apparently, in the late 90s, Harvard Medical and several others conducted a, quote, scientific study. You see my air quotes that covered 1,802 people.

That's 1,802 people in six different hospitals who all underwent coronary bypass surgery. And it said, I'm quoting now. It said, The 1,802 participants were divided into three groups of about 600 each.

[3 : 24] One group received no prayers. Second group received prayers after being told that they may or may not be prayed for. However, members of the third group were informed that others would pray for them for 14 days starting on the night before their surgery.

They invited people of any or no religious faith to participate. Those included were Catholics, Jews, Protestants, as well as people of no faith at all. The intercessors could pray in any way that they wished, but with some limitations, the prayers had to start at a standardized time.

They lasted for a given duration, and they must include the message that they were praying for specifically. Successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications.

That was the deal. Somehow, this experiment cost \$2.4 million. Riddle me that. And what they concluded was, again, I'm going to quote, it said, They concluded it was a clear setback for those who believe in the power of prayer.

Their prayers were not answered. In fact, many of those who were prayed for and who were told they were going to be prayed for, they seemed to do worse off than the ones who were not prayed for.

[4 : 38] And all of it led the author to conclude that prayer, at least in the case of coronary bypass surgery, was essentially a big waste of time.

Now, of course, you and I know that this is not how prayer works. We can't just bottle it up and treat God like a genie, that if we just pray the right words and ask Him the right way, we'll get what we want.

But I think if we're honest, the questions that this article and this study raised are questions that all of us feel from time to time. Prayer is not always easy.

Prayer does not always have quick, immediate, measurable results. All of us at some point in time have felt like, well, maybe I'm just wasting my time in prayer. Sometimes it feels like nothing really gets done in prayer.

Prayer. Sometimes it feels like maybe our time would be better spent actually working on our problems instead of praying about our problems. Have you ever felt this way? Or am I the only one?

[5 : 42] If only, if I could think of anybody who had a right to feel this way, I think it might have been King David. King David's problems were probably bigger than most of ours.

They were more persistent than most of ours. They did not go away quickly and yet time and time and time and time again, as we've walked through these Psalms, what do we see him doing? We see him calling out to the Lord in prayer. And so this morning, what I want us to do is ask, why? What is it that keeps David coming back time and time and time again to the Lord in prayer? Why does he pray the way that he does? I want us to look to Psalm 17 and see if we can learn the secret to David's prayer life. And what I see here this morning in Psalm 17, I believe that David prays the way he does because David knows the person of God.

David's personal knowledge of God is what drives his private practice of prayer. And so it must be for us. Church, if we want to grow in our prayer life, if we feel like our prayers are struggling, if we feel unmotivated to pray, if we feel like we're wasting our time in prayer, what we need more than anything is an expanded view of who God is.

[7 : 06] We need a bigger view of who God is. So that's what we're going to do this morning. I want us to see three reasons to call out to the Lord in prayer. Three reasons to call out to the Lord in prayer.

All of them are going to be rooted in the character of God. First, pray because God is just. Reason number one, pray because God is just.

Look there to verse one. David, he gives this passionate plea to the Lord. You can feel the intensity of his prayer request here. He says, Lord, Lord, hear me.

Attend, give ear, bring vindication, see what's happening. All these commands that he's calling out to the Lord. But you notice that the emphasis here is on David's innocence in the case.

You see that? Hear a just cause. Give ear to my prayer from lips that are free of deceit. Let your eyes behold the right. David is calling attention to God.

[8 : 11] He's drawing God's attention to his innocence. Now, of course, we know that David is not totally blameless. He's not without sin. We see other places and other Psalms where he's calling out to God for mercy because of his sin.

But here in Psalm 17, he's calling out to God for justice because in this matter, he is innocent. This is situational blamelessness.

In this case, he's innocent. He's appealing to God's heart of justice because wicked people are attacking. And he hasn't done anything wrong. We don't know exactly the situation here, but we do get a sense of the danger down in verses 10 through 12.

He says, It turns into this one wicked man in particular.

And it may be that David is reflecting on his encounters with Saul. We know from 1 Samuel that Saul pursued David. He wants him dead. And you remember how David responded.

[9 : 40] More than once, David had opportunity to put Saul to death and to get rid of his enemy. But instead, David chooses to act in innocence. He would not put his hand against the Lord's anointed.

Or it could be that he's reflecting on Absalom's rebellion. You remember David's son, his own son, rose up against him and tried to steal away the throne of Israel.

But again, in this matter, in this specific case, David's hands were clean. David's heart longed to be reconciled with his son. He didn't want him to be harmed.

He loved him. He was innocent. Whatever the case may be, it's clear that David is convinced of his innocence. And he says, God, come take a look at me yourself. And he invites God to come and to examine him.

How many of us have ever done that? Lord, you've tried my heart. You've visited me by night. You've tested me. You will find nothing. He purposed that his mouth wouldn't transgress.

[10:40] He's not speaking evil. His lips are clean. He's avoided the ways of the violent. How? By following the words of the lips of God. His feet, his steps have held fast to the paths of the Lord.

His feet have not slipped. He's making it abundantly clear, isn't he? David is innocent. And so because of this, he's crying out to the Lord.

Lord, Lord, listen to my cry for justice. Why? Because he knows that God is just. He's calling out to God because he knows that this appeal won't fall on deaf and uncaring ears.

He knows that God is just. And so he cries out for justice. This is a little bit like a child presenting his case before a father.

Okay? I'm going to speak hypothetically. This doesn't happen in my house. Okay? But parents, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You hear a bang in the other room. An argument starts.

[11:41] Maybe somebody starts to cry. And so you call them in to where you are and you ask them what happened. And then pleas of innocence begin. I didn't do anything. Right? It was him.

It's his fault. I'm innocent. And rarely, rarely is somebody ever completely actually blameless in the situation. But what I'm listening for, not me, what you're listening for, right?

In this situation is who is the guilty party? Who is at fault? Why? Because you as a good parent are inclined towards justice.

You want to bring justice to the situation. You want the guilty party punished and the innocent party set free and vindicated. You don't want to punish the innocent. You want to punish the guilty.

Well, here's the thing. If we get this, how much more do you think God is inclined to be just? God is just. He will do what is right.

[12:39] Psalm 97 tells us that righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. He is inclined towards justice.

David knows this. And this is why David prays for justice. Jesus tells a parable in Luke chapter 18. He says, this is to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

He said, in a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, give me justice against my adversary. For a while he refused. But afterward he said to himself, though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice.

So that she will not beat me down by her continual coming. And the Lord said, hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cried to him day and night?

[13:48] And will he delay long after them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

In other words, God is inclined to justice. Of course he is. God is just. God will give justice to his elect who cried to him day and night.

But are we asking him for it? Are we seeking him in prayer? You know, it's possible that many of you have been in a situation like this.

Like feeling what David is feeling. Maybe not having wicked men coming against your life. But maybe you've been cheated. Maybe you've been lied upon. Maybe you've been prayed upon.

Maybe somebody has done something to you that is simply unfair. And you want to cry out, somebody give me justice. You are invited to call out to the Lord.

[14:50] Because he is a just God. Not only this. Second, we pray because God is faithful. Pray because God is faithful.

You know, one obstacle to prayer, it may be that, well, maybe you know who God is generally. You know that God is just. But you doubt who God is towards you.

And maybe God is just. Maybe he'll bring justice in a general sort of way. But why should we expect him to answer our prayers? Why should God Almighty listen to me?

I want you to look with me starting in verse 6. Because David, he prays here in a way that I think is just incredibly bold. Look there with me. He says, I call upon you for you will answer me, O God.

Incline your ear to me. Hear my words. You know, that I there where he says, I call upon you. That is, that's emphatic in the original language.

[15:51] It's as if he's saying, it's me. I'm calling on you. He's drawing attention to himself. It's me, God. It's me. Hear my words. Don't you know who it is that's calling out to you for help?

It's me. That sounds bold, doesn't it? Is he arrogant to pray this way? David seems to think that he has special claim to the ear of God.

I mean, keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings. Who does David think he is? Is he arrogant to pray like this? You know, the reason for his boldness.

It makes all the difference here. It would be wrong if his boldness were in any way based on him, based on his importance. God, this is the king calling out to you.

Don't you know who I am? God, don't you see who I am? Don't you see what I've accomplished? Don't you see how good I am? Listen up. I'm calling out to you, God. That would be wrong. But listen, his boldness isn't based on his goodness or his importance at all.

[16:56] Rather, he's bold in prayer because he trusts in the faithfulness of God. Look at this. There's a phrase here that we all need to understand there in verse 7.

He says, Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior, of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

Wondrously show your steadfast love. What is that? What is that? The Hebrew word is hesed. It is massively, massively important.

It shows up 127 times just in the Psalms alone. Okay, you have 150 Psalms. This word shows up 127 times alone. It's hard for us to really put into words exactly what it means.

The ESV has chosen to translate it steadfast love. This is covenant love. This is special love.

[17:55] This is faithful, particular love. When you see that word, that phrase, steadfast love, I want you to think in terms of God's faithful love poured out upon his covenant people.

That's what that phrase means. That's what Jesus meant when he said in Luke 18 that of course God will bring justice to his elect. Those who are included in the steadfast love of the Lord.

This is his unwavering, self-initiated, irrevocable commitment to bind himself up with the good of his people.

When we think of the steadfast love of the Lord, we think about the fact that God has bound up his glory with our good. His steadfast love is at the very heart of who he is as our God.

It's the very foundation of our confidence towards him. Who is he? He is the Lord, the Lord. A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in what?

[18:58] What? And steadfast love and faithfulness. And what's our confidence towards him? Our confidence is that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. So when David does mess up, when he does blow it, when he does fall into sin, Psalm chapter 51, he sins in massive ways.

You remember what he prayed? Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy.

Blot out my transgressions. God's faithfulness, his steadfast love, is the reason David prays with such boldness.

He can say, it's me, God. Listen to me. Pay attention to me. Hear my cries because I am yours. You have given me your steadfast love.

[19:58] Now show it. Demonstrate it. Let me see it in action. It's again a little bit like a child calling out to his father or his mother to hear him and to help him.

We had a birthday party. This is us, okay? This is our example. Maybe a year ago, right here in the backyard, and we do simple birthday parties. We don't do elaborate, expensive birthday parties.

This was a water party. And so everybody brought water guns and water balloons. And one very kind, very generous family brought a giant inflatable water slide for all the kids, which was awesome.

And all the kids were coming and bouncing and jumping and tackling and running and piling up on this water slide. And all the parents, as they watched this slide, that slide began to cave in on top of itself with all the children inside somewhere in there.

The kids were screaming. The kids were screaming. They're probably still having fun, but they were screaming. And all the parents take off running towards their children.

[21 : 04] Why? They heard their kids' cries. They ran to the rescue of their kids. They ran to get that thing back upright and make sure their children were okay.

Of course, we want all the kids to be okay, right? But we are especially inclined to come to the aid of our children. David prays this way because he knows God is especially inclined to come to the help of his children, who he has included in his faithful, steadfast love.

And here's the good news for us, Christian. You ready for this? As Christians, God's children, we have this same sort of confidence and access to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen? We are adopted into God's own family as his children in Jesus Christ.

All of God's covenant faithfulness, his steadfast love is given to us in Christ Jesus.

[22 : 16] If you are in Jesus Christ, then you can be absolutely certain that God is for you and for your good. That he is inclined to come to your aid.

That all things work together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. He is for you and so we can pray with confidence, God, it's me. It's your child.

Don't you see what's happening? Don't you see what I'm going through? Won't you come to my rescue? God took it upon himself to take us when we were at our absolute worst.

God took us when we were at our absolute worst. To send his own son to die for us. To take our sin from us. To remake us in his own glorious image.

To adopt us into his own family by his grace. To make us heirs with Christ. To raise us up with him to the praise of his glorious grace for the rest of eternity.

[23 : 18] What more reason do you need to have to think that God is for you? We ought to pray with the confidence that he who did not spare his own son.

But graciously gave him up for us all. How will he not also along with him give us all things? Who can separate us from the love of Christ?

Paul says in I believe Ephesians chapter 4 that in Christ we have boldness and access with confidence to the throne of God in Christ.

Christian, by God's grace we have God's ear. We can call out and cry out to God whatever our trial may be. Whatever our issue may be.

Whatever injustice we're facing. Whatever suffering or pain or loss or grief or despair we're experiencing right now. We are invited to call out to God in prayer.

[24 : 16] God is me. God won't you listen to me. God won't you help me. God won't you come to my aid. If you have received the steadfast love of God for you in Christ.

You are well within your rights to ask him to show it. So we pray because God is faithful. And lastly third. Pray because God is good.

Pray because God is good. Look there starting in verse 13 with me. I wonder if you've noticed some of the contrasts in this psalm.

You notice it? The wicked are guilty but David he follows the ways of the Lord. You see that? The wicked they close their hearts to pity but the Lord he saves those who seek refuge to him.

Verse 13. The wicked they take matters into their own hands. But David he entrusts himself to the Lord. He says in verse 13. Arise oh Lord.

[25 : 15] Confront him. Subdue him. Deliver my soul from the wicked. By your sword. Not my sword. By your strength. Not my strength. He totally trusts God to handle his situation.

But there's one more that I want to draw our attention to here at the end. And I think that this is the key to praying like David prays here in this psalm.

It's a contrast of satisfaction. Look there to verse 14. David says save me from men by your hand oh Lord.

From men of the world whose portion is in this life. You see that? That's a word portion there that it means reward.

Their treasure. Their good. All of their hope. Anything valuable to them. It's right here in this life. They are men of this world.

[26 : 13] Their portion is in this life. But he says but as for me. Verse 15. As for me. I shall behold your face.

In righteousness. You see the contrast. Save me from wicked men of this world whose portion is in this life. And then he says something shocking here in verse 14.

He says you fill their womb with treasure. They are satisfied. With children. With children. They leave their abundance to their infants.

That all sounds like really good things. Doesn't it? Children are a wonderful blessing from the Lord. Amen. Are they not? God. Wonderful.

Wonderful. Beautiful. Beautiful. Satisfying gifts. But he says if that's all that it is for you. If that's all your portion.

[27 : 36] If all your treasure is right here in this life. It is empty. That's what the wicked hope in. Their portion is in this life.

There is a contrast here between those who love God. And those who really love what God might do for them. You see it?

There is a world of difference here. An eternity of difference here. And we have to examine ourselves here. Do you find more satisfaction in God himself?

Or in the many wonderful things that God might do for you? The wicked love what God does for them. These wicked men.

They love his gifts. They are satisfied with these good things. And they miss out entirely on the goodness of God himself. By himself. John Piper has often asked it like this.

[28 : 42] He asks would we be satisfied with heaven if Jesus weren't there? Can you imagine it? If you could be freed from death.

Freed from sin. Reunited with lost family members. You'd be healthy. You'd feel good. Your legs wouldn't ache anymore. Your back wouldn't ache anymore.

You'd be happy. You could have all that you might ever imagine. But no Jesus. Would you be satisfied? He says this is the most pressing question for this generation.

Another way to say it would be. Would you trade in the glory of Jesus Christ for anything in this world? Do you love him for him? Or do you love him for what you can get out of him?

Here's the connection to prayer. If it's the latter. If you just love him for what you might get out of him. Your prayer life will always be empty.

[29 : 45] And it will be dry. And it will be frustrating. And it will be frustrating. And it will seem like a big waste of time. And when you don't get what you want.

Exactly as you ask it. Exactly how you ask it. If you come into that closet. Ask for what you want. And you come out and you don't get it. You will be frustrated. And you will be defeated. But if your heart is satisfied in him.

You will leave that prayer closet satisfied every time. Whether or not you get what you asked for. Exactly like you asked for it. And we're called delight yourself in the Lord.

And he will give you the desires of your heart. And if you delight yourself in him. If you make him the object of your heart's desire. You can have as much as you want of exactly what you want.

You will always be satisfied in him. David calls out to the Lord in prayer. Because his heart, not like the wicked men. His heart is satisfied in the goodness of God.

[30 : 49] God himself is his greatest joy. And his greatest treasure. God himself is his portion. As good as the gifts of God are. They are good.

But God himself is the greatest treasure of God's people. I wonder if you can say verse 15.

And mean it with David. Verse 15. The wicked men of this world. They have their children. They have their money. They have their high paying jobs.

They have their boats. They have their vacation homes. But as for me. I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake.

I shall be satisfied. With your likeness. You know that's resurrection language. That's resurrection language. One day you and I. Everyone here will sleep the sleep of death.

[31 : 47] But for those who delight in the goodness of God. Now. Right now. When we awake. We shall be satisfied with his likeness. That's our hope.

James Hamilton Jr. He says. David is not speaking of seeing God's face in some metaphorical way in this life. Rather. When he speaks of seeing God's face in righteousness.

He is talking about the enjoyment of direct access to the presence of God. When the dead are raised. The world is healed.

The curse is gone. The serpent crushed. The gates to Eden opened. And God's children are embraced in his arms. As he wipes away every tear.

What greater joy can we imagine than that? Our ultimate hope is resurrection. Satisfaction.

[32 : 42] Beholding the face of God. So how do we get ourselves satisfied in him right now? That's the question. Where can we look to behold the face of God.

And get our hearts satisfied in him right now. To be certain that when we awake. We will behold his face in righteousness. And be satisfied in his likeness.

Behold the glory of God. In the face of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

The passage that Mr. Pete read for us this morning. This miracle of conversion. Through the preaching of the gospel. Is that God who said let light shine out of the darkness.

Has shown in our hearts. To give us the light of the knowledge. Of the glory of God. In the face of Jesus Christ.

[33 : 46] In the miracle of new birth. What God does. Is he opens up the eyes of our hearts. So that we see and we behold. And we love and delight in.

And are satisfied in his glory. In Christ. So that we believe and we rejoice in the good news. That Christ Jesus has come to save sinners. Of whom I am the foremost.

So that we see with new eyes. And believe and rejoice in the good news. That Christ is the true and better David. Who has perfectly obeyed. That Jesus Christ is the only truly innocent one.

That all the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. Are found in him. That Christ himself perfectly entrusted himself to the Lord.

He committed no sin. Neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled. He did not revile in return. When he suffered. He did not threaten. But continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

[34 : 49] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. That we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

We have our eyes opened. To behold the glory of God. And the good news that Christ himself has risen from the grave. He has purchased resurrection life.

For all who turn away from whatever treasure they have in this life. And satisfy their souls in him. If you want to behold him then. You must look to Christ right now.

For now we see in a mirror dimly. But then face to face. Now we know in part. But then I shall know fully. Even as we are fully known.

Church. If you are struggling to pray. If you want to grow in your prayer life. If you feel like you are struggling to call out to the Lord in prayer. What you need more than anything is a bigger view of God.

[35 : 51] Where do you find it? You look to the man Jesus Christ. Behold the glory of God. In the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we pray.

Lord. We thank you Father. That you are just. However we may be wronged in this life. Lord. We can crawl out to you.

And cry out to you. Knowing that. That the judge of all the earth. Will do what is right. We praise you God. That you are faithful. That all of your steadfast love. And faithfulness.

Is poured out for us in Christ. We praise you God. That you are good. You are better than any earthly joy. And earthly pleasure. Father.

We pray. Would we get our hearts satisfied in you now. We ask. Lord. If there are any here who do not know you. And to them. This is foreign to them. That they might delight in the Lord.

[36 : 46] We pray God. That now. You would do that miracle of conversion in them. Would you shine the light of the glory of God. And the gospel of Christ. In their hearts. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.