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Main idea: Here, David cries out to God. He knows Him and knows of His grace and ability to hear and care. He seeks communion and help: *have mercy on me, God, and hear my prayer.*

People have been taking advantage of David, seeking to harm him; he searches for the One who can help, but feels left out of the loop. He sees people ruining his name and reputation; and, tired of the gossip and slander, he asks when this will end and when these liars and manipulators will get what is coming to them. Then, David shows his confidence in God. He knows that even though it seems his prayers are not being heard or responded to, the Lord has set apart the godly for His purpose and plan, and He will answer in His time. David commits not to sin by letting his hurt, anger toward bad people, and his doubts in God who seems not to care get to him.

Instead, David commits to trust in God. He examines his life to make sure he is properly aligned with Him. We, too, must offer ourselves and our trust. *Times will improve; but even if they do not, I will trust in God. I know He smiles upon me and loves me; therefore, He is my joy even when my situation is not joyful. I can trust Him, and I can have peace and security even when others come against me. My God will keep me safe in Him!*

Contexts and Background:

This Psalm is by David who wrote it when he was in great distress. At the same time, he shows his love and confidence in God who seems not to show Himself. Even though he is facing perilous odds, certain destruction, and constant suffering, he still continues his confidence in his God. Yet, he is honest; he pours out his feelings without edit or whitewash. He tells God his fears and position, his plight and anguish, and asks why God does not answer him. This is about our covenant relationship with God. When we accept Him as Lord and dedicate our lives to Him, He does indeed respond. The bottom line, as David knew prior and was assured of later, is that there is no need to fear when our Sovereign God is in charge and is there. This Psalm also introduces to us how to use this as a hymn of worship with guidance on musical notes and structure. It was used also as a liturgy on how one comes to God and meditates on Him in honesty, humbleness, respect, and confidence, no matter what we go through in our trials, hostilities, and anxiety.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

Verses 1-2: Our relationship with God is not without its fears and distresses, as with any relationship. We are in a world that is filled with distress and pain and there is no way to walk through it without stumbling onto suffering and distress. David is angry, and being angry is OK as long as we do not sin or curse God in it.

- *Answer me.* In our need, where do we go? We go to God! David does so in boldness as well as in humility and respect. We can't be bold before God without reverence for Him, and we can revere Him while we are pouring out our heart, fears, and life to Him. We can go to God with an imperative, passionate, pleading prayer that is brave and bold and courageous, as long as we are also reverential (Jer. 23:6).
- *When I call.* This is prayer. We are called to go to God in all times, good and bad. God will do right for the innocent, for those who suffer and are needy, and will act in His perfect time. We can drop to our knees and still commune in passion and seek His mercy.
- *Righteous God.* This is referring to the relationship between God and His people, as He promises us His presence and guarantees us victory. God's character is perfect; He has no malice or jealousy that is wrong or misdirected. Therefore, when we pray to Him, we can be honest. He already knows our plight and fears and emotions anyway; we might as well let it out, knowing He will listen and have empathy and concern (1 Cor. 1:30).
- *Relief.* Here is an appeal for God to hear us and have mercy, while we show respect for His holiness. God promises us He will come to our rescue, but it will not always be when and what we hoped for. His plan is best, even when we do not see it (Psalm 25:4-5; Isa. 45:13; Jer. 23:6).

- *Distress*. Meaning trying circumstances that test our patience and ability to persevere, feeling out of control, or experiencing limits to what we want to accomplish, such as pain, suffering, or loss. Here, it is all of the above for David, including betrayal as well.
- *Merciful*. An appeal for God to have “space or room for me.”
- *Hear my prayer*. And God will; this is the great gift we have—to personally commune with the Lord Almighty!
- *How long*. A plea as well as a question, either as a query or rhetorical: *how long will these people sin and come against me? Where is my relief?*
- *Men*. Referring to people of means and wealth, namely landowners and people of society. Most feel they have what they need and are deserving of it; they become prideful and forget who the real Person in charge is. These people scoffed at God and His servant; they had not learned that one cannot put one's trust in money, power, or positions—only in God!
- *Turn my glory/honor into shame*. Meaning, what is bestowed by God to His faithful ones being twisted by evil people. It is referring to betrayal, when one says *I will follow you* or says he or she follows God but then turns away. Disloyalty, betrayal, and unfaithfulness are some of the most painful and destructive emotions experienced by people—and by God!
- *Love delusions/vain words and lies*. Meaning “empty things,” or what is fleeting and of no value or what leads someone down the path of self-destruction. It is thinking, *I am OK; others are doing it—so can I*, when one knows better. God had chosen David to be king and to lead; the antagonists sought to disrupt, mock, and betray what God had set up (2 Sam. 7:15).
- *Seek false gods/seek after lies*. Meaning a hatred of God and His people and thus running after idols that are made of wood and made from the hands of men, which is reprehensible. Idols are not real; they are a lie and the result of sinful, greedy minds that seek its own and not God. They can do nothing but look pretty and take our passion and offering and return nothing but to lead us on a wrong path filled with hopelessness and pain (Jer. 3:9).

Verses 3-4: Our God has steadfast love for us and is here, even when people make difficulties and barriers against us. When we feel distressed and confused, and wonder if this is worth it, if this is all, God is there—even when we do not feel or see Him.

- *Godly/pious*. Meaning blessed by God's grace. Referring to a covenant relationship with God where He comes to us and saves us. This is significant as it echoes what Christ has done and will do for us. God is good, and the only ones who are good are those who are in right standing with God. Christ gives us this, which we do not deserve.
- *Anger/be disturbed*. Here it means to be convicted about God, to think through what you are doing, and make the decision to submit your self to Him. God does not condemn anger; this is a natural emotion. The issue is what we do with it. Do we use it as motivate to solve problems or do we do bad things with it (Matt. 23; Eph. 4:26-31)?
- *Do not sin*. This is about how one approaches God in worship as well as petition. We approach in fear and awe, shaking because we fully realize what is at stake. When we approach God, even with a good sacrifice, what is in our hearts concerns Him the most. Thus, we have to be right with Him; a righteous attitude is paramount—never pride or allowing ones hurt to hurt others (Lev. Chaps 1-7; Psalm 40:6-8; Isa. 32:10-11; Hab. 3:16).
- *Beds*. Meaning you get what you deserve; also, doing evil secretly.
- *Search your hearts*. A call to seek God, place Him first, think through your situation, and plan accordingly to do what is best and what honors God. Conversely, the wicked seek pride and temporary fixes, stepping over others, and bringing shame on God.

- *Be silent/wail.* Reflect on your wickedness and hostility. What has it brought you and what will it do for you and for others? How will this make things better? It has only brought corruption and hurt, so mourn and wail and then stop it (Ex. 15:16)!

Verses 5-6: David the shepherd, the godly king, gives us great advice. God knows His sheep; we are to know the Shepherd. Thus, a person with a right relationship with God has no need to fear the world or the future, for we are already secured in Him. Even when we are in unfulfilled expectations or frustrated or anxious or in the midst of hurt, we are sheep that need the Shepherd!

- *Right sacrifices.* A call to truly and sincerely repent and get right with God, and let one's attitude and commitment reflect it. This means to do what is right; submit and trust God—not your situation, whether it is good or bad (1 Sam. 15:22; Psalm 50:14).
- *Trust in the LORD.* As it denotes, to place our faith in God so we have conviction and commitment to know Him and rely on Him (Ex. 14:32; Psalm 37:3; Prov. 3:5; Jer. 39:18; Nahum 1:7; Acts 14:23).
- *Show us any good.* A retort common to skeptics of Judaism and Christianity: it is an ancient sin, saying there is no good in God, or any goodness at all, so we should do as we feel and not adhere to a Holy God. This can also occur and accrue when we doubt, as we focus on our fears and not on Him. The sin is when we taunt or mock God with this. It is good to be honest with God about our fears and doubts.
- *Face shine upon us/light of God's grace.* God is the source of true blessing. This is in the form of a priestly blessing that shows us God who reveals Himself by His goodness and blessings.

This Psalm also shows us the role of God's plan of redemption and our response to follow God. This phrase is found in priestly prayers and royal letters and from those who consider blessings and curses to have real, tangible impact. Even the Egyptians made reference to this phrase as a request for their god's blessing, believing that if a king requests it, it will be done. Here in the Bible, it is used as a prayer and as a benediction asking that God would grant well-being, mercy, and blessing (Num. 6:24-26).

Verses 7-8: It is extremely foolish to taunt God or put down godly people to make one feel better or complacent. People think that when they tease or put others down, it elevates their worth and standing. In fact, it does the opposite; it just shows foolishness. Here God turns the tables on the ungodly, augmenting their mockery of Him and His righteous ones into personal blessings for His own. The end result is that we have a God upon whom we can rely and in whom we can have hope.

- *Filled my heart with greater joy.* "Heart" refers to the inner being of who we are; it is from our spirit or soul that our emotions, thoughts, and motivations come. Joy means our unshakable confidence in God (Psalm 32:7-9; 34:1-8; Proverbs 4:23; 15:13; John 15:11; 17:13; 2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Peter 4:13-19; 1 Thess. 5:18; James 1:1-4; Heb 10:34).
- *Sleep in peace/lie down.* Meaning resting and trusting in God's intimate presence; this is also a trusting confidence in God and that His plan will work out in His time.
- *Dwell in safety.* Means to live without anxiety. A play on words in the Hebrew, it means to have absolute confidence in God even in the midst of crises and anguish and includes a prayer for peace and a prayer for physical safety, but also a trust that our true security is to be in God's Will and the spiritual blessings we have are because of Christ in our lives.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

This kind of joy that David prays about and lives out will allow us to enjoy our relationship with God through Christ, His creation, and others, in spite of our situation. We can have an outlook of enjoyment and real, authentic happiness—even in distress and uncertainty. This comes to us from our growing relationship with God and the godly people in our lives. We can trust that God can and will fulfill those desires for us that are aligned to His will, and restore to us what those who steal and are ungodly have taken. God wants us to be in His fullness; God-given joy is far more important than what we think it is.

Why is joy important? It helps us understand God's perspective and timing and sometimes even His trimming so we can have the confidence and patience to endure whatever life in this sinful world throws at us!

Our circumstances may not be joyful, but our relationship with Christ and others can be. We need to affirm our relationship with Christ by seeing that we can be happy and fulfilled even when our circumstances are not. We can change our attitudes and ways of thinking when we focus on Him; then, we will realize the care and sovereignty of God and that He is in command and control, even when life seems to be out of control and frustrating.

Christian Life Principle: Do not think upon problems, think on Christ! God hears us and responds, are you listening as much as you are talking? Trust in the Lord not in the situation, do all you can do to evade trouble, but trouble may come anyway. So, bring Him with you (Phil. 4:6-7).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Are you an optimist or a realist? What causes you to lean to one or the other?
2. When in need, where do you go? Why should you not just go to God in boldness? Why are humility and respect also needed?
3. Have you experienced being taken advantage of, or have people who are close to you sought to harm you? How did you feel and respond? What do you think you could have learned from that situation to help you in the future?
4. Have you ever anguished for the Lord's help and intervention? Have you said, *oh my God; please answer me when I call?* How does this Psalm help you?
5. Do you feel God is distant and does not care about you, your situation, or your concerns?
6. How have you cried out to God? How do you feel that He knows you and that He hears and cares and will give you grace and His presence?
7. What does it take for you to have confidence in God? If you feel your prayers don't seem to be heard or responded to, what should you do?
8. Explain your feeling that no matter what situation you are in, the Lord has set you apart for His purpose and plan, and He will answer you in His timing? What does it take to have peace and patience for this?
9. What does it take for you to drop to your knees and commune with Him in passion, seeking His mercy and His face?
10. What causes you to have doubts, focusing on your fears and not Christ?
11. God promises us He will come to our rescue. So, how do you feel that it is not always when and what you may have hoped for? What do you need to do to have more confidence and see God's plan even when you do not understand it?
12. What do you need to examine in your life to make sure you are properly aligned with Christ? How can you offer your self and your trust?