

The book of Psalms is a part of the poetic or wisdom books in the Bible that starts with the book of Job and it runs through the Song of Solomon. It is literally titled in Hebrews "songs of praise" or "the book of praise." And it really was Israel's and is Israel's songbook. Because of it, you get to learn a lot just by reading them about God's heart towards you and towards me. And the things that are recorded there, prayers of worship, you know, cries of anger and despair, even prayers of fear, and then songs of victory and intimacy, are designed to help you and I examine how we're doing spiritually with the Lord in the present tense. In fact, I think I mentioned to you that the poetic books here in the middle of your Bible, they make the presumption you're interested in your walk with God and that they will then help you to draw you in to consider your present walk with God, and they apply the truths to the present tense as opposed to maybe the future or the past.

You'll find the book of Psalms mentioned a lot in the Bible. It shows up in a lot of people's lives. Jonah quoted out of them, Peter did, Paul did, Jesus used them often. The Psalms is the most quoted book in the scriptures; by the way, followed by the book of Isaiah, and then by the book of Deuteronomy, and then Genesis, and then Exodus, and then Leviticus in terms of quotes.

We've been going through some of these on Sunday mornings and we've told you, for the most part, that you can trace the historical backgrounds of many of the Psalms just by what's written in them. We are given more help as to why they were written in some of these super inscriptions that are before the Psalms themselves, and as you read through the Psalms you'll find them marked. This one just says "A Psalm of David." There's only, I think, 34 Psalms that have nothing written before them, so you'll always get maybe who wrote it. A lot of times you'll get why they wrote it. And if that doesn't help you, then certainly the subject covered can be helpful as well. Until you get to this one.

David gives us no indication as to when he wrote this or why he wrote this, but we do know that it is a prayer of David as he is

asking for the Lord to examine his heart, to prove his ways. He confesses he has tremendous confidence in the Lord. He confesses his love for the place of worship. He asks God to declare his integrity, to look at his commitment. He cries out for God's mercy. The conclusion is in verse 12, "My feet stand in a leveled place." Or I am standing on leveled ground. I have sure footing because of the grace and the mercy of God.

And this morning we'd like to just look at David's prayer and I'd like to give you six words that will help you, I think, to come to prayer with confidence. Six words that covers 12 verses, but that speak to David's approach as he comes to seek the Lord at a time when he needed His help, whatever time that may have been. Starting with this word: The word "An Open Life." An open life. They're all with "O." They all start with "O." For me they're easier when they all start with the same letter, I've even twisted some of them to get you to get to an "O." So there you are. An open life. He says in verse 1, "Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. And I have trusted in the Lord; I shall not slip. And examine me, Lord, approve me; try my mind and try my heart."

Here's what David knew going to pray that you and I should know: Your life is an open book before the Lord. It's not always a good thing to know. Sometimes you wish the Lord wasn't watching, or you wish, you know, He could get busy somewhere else. But David in his approach to the Lord in this Psalm appeals in prayer to the Lord's knowledge of his walk. He knows that God knows his intentions, he knows that God understands his thoughts and his actions. And he begins with the words "vindicate me." The word "shaphat" in Hebrew means sentence me or pass judgment upon me. And it doesn't really tell you whether it's for or against, but obviously here David believes that when the Lord passes the judgment on his life, that God is going to clear him.

As often in the Psalms, most of David's prayers of deliverance had to do with severe threats or trouble. Most often his prayers for the seven and a half years of his kingly reign at the beginning, when Saul was still alive and trying to kill him every chance he got. Don't know if that's true here. But David is asking the Lord to vindicate him and in his devotion to the Lord. This word "vindicate," you could easily start the Psalm with the words "act as a judge over me."

We've mentioned to you a few times going through Psalms -- it bears repeating because it's repeated a lot in the Psalms --

that there is a tremendous amount of assurance and joy that can be added to the times that you pray when you come before an all-seeing God and know that you've done your best. I don't mean earn your way to heaven or put God in a position where He owes you. You'd be foolish to think about yourself that way. We are not capable of doing any of that on our own. However, the Bible makes a pretty good distinction between those who are devoted and those that are not; those that are seeking to do God's way and walk in His way, to the best of their ability, and those that have made no effort whatsoever.

And David arrives at this time of prayer with the ability to know that he has been seeking God with his whole heart. He comes to pray with a clear conscious. That really is helpful in your spiritual life. If you come to pray and you realize that you're a goof, you know, spiritually -- "Hi, Lord, You know it's me. I love You." And the Lord goes, "Yeah, this is the first time I've heard that in a while," you know it's different. But David comes with an assurance.

When John was in his 90s he wrote several of those books towards the end of your Bible -- 1st, 2nd, 3rd John as well, but he wrote it in 1 John 3, verse 20, "If our own hearts condemn us, then God is greater than our hearts. He knows all things." But the next verse says, "If our hearts condemn us not, then we can have confidence towards God." In other words, there's something to be said for having done your best, having given it your all. Then when you can come pray, you realize God is watching, He knows everything about you, but it becomes a source of encouragement rather than a source of stumbling.

Now, I don't know how many of you would like to pray this kind of prayer: Lord, check me out inside and out. Check my heart, check my mind, check my thoughts, look at my behavior. You might just go, oh, Lord, let's just talk about Your grace. But David here wants God to look at his life. And he believes that due to his trust in the Lord, that he won't fall. There'll be no slippage, right? There's no backsliding here. In fact, it ties into that last verse. My feet are on solid ground, they're on level ground. I'm not going to trip up here.

David's concern was that he would walk with the Lord in such a way that knowing his life is open before God, he could call upon that understanding and be encouraged. Look at the words that he uses here, "I have walked in my integrity. I have trusted in the Lord; and I'm not slipping." Those are pretty bold statements, but faith demonstrated by faithful living will

produce a confidence you can't find anywhere else, even in the midst of very difficult circumstances, because you're doing your best. I didn't say you do well enough. I'm not saying that you're going to live beyond the grace and the mercy of God. Boy, you're going to need that every step of the way. However, put yourself out there and give it your best shot. Build your house in the sun, you know, not just when it's raining.

Look what he says in verse 2, "Examine me." Put me to the test. I got really good grades in school for the most part. I got a full scholarship to a university. I loved math. In fact, I think when I walked into any kind of math class throughout high school and into college, I had that same attitude. Just give me a test. I'll show you what I know. Until I got to organic chemistry, and then somehow I hated school. And I didn't want a test. I wanted to sit in the back in case there was a test, I could leave. Oh, I'm sorry I missed the test. I was really sick today, or whatever I was.

I love David's words here. He wants God to check him out. He believed that he was walking in such an upright manner, that when God came to look, God would be pleased with what He found and what he was doing wouldn't hinder the work of God through his life. Prove me. Prove me is that smelting process word where, you heat up the gold to get rid of the impurities. Whatever it takes, just turn the fire up, and prove me. And then try my heart and try my mind. Probe into the very recesses of my thoughts and feelings, and look to see if there's anything at the core of my being that would interrupt You from blessing.

David liked the open book idea with the Lord because he had devoted himself as best as he could to the ways of God. So he uses words like "prove" and "try" and "examine." Check me out. What a wonderful way to pray, that you can say that to the Lord with all confidence, "God, you know I'm trying. I'm not playing games, I'm not saying one thing and doing another. I'm seeking to obey. I'm aware that my life is an open book before Your eyes, and I like it that way." So an open life is an important aspect when you go to pray.

Second of all, an "Obedient Life" will help you and encourage you when you pray. Look what he says in verse 3, "For your loving-kindness is before my eyes, and I have walked," past tense, "in Your truth." Love is by far the greatest motivator in the world. It will have you do what fear can't, and hatred can't, and anger can't, and the desire for gain can't. Love is the greatest motivator of all. John, same guy, same book, 1

John 4:19, says "We love Him because He first loved us." Right? So that's the motivator that drives us to behave. David says this: "Your loving-kindness is always before my eyes." That's a present tense statement. Because of that, in the past or in my experience, I have been walking in Your truth, driven by Your love.

When Hosea was told by the Lord to marry a prostitute who was anything but faithful, and his life became an illustration of God's relationship with Israel; how they had run off with different idols and different gods, and how they hadn't remained faithful to Him, though He had always remained faithful to her. There is a line in Hosea chapter 2 which says of this prostitute, "She will chase her lovers, but she won't be able to find them, and she will eventually say in her heart 'I'm going home to my first husband, for life with him is better than it is for me now.'" And it was the loving kindness of God that drags us back to Him.

David not only had an open life, but he had an obedient life that was driven by his understanding of God's love. It was the Ephesians that Jesus spoke to in Revelation 2, verse 4, when He said the only problem for them was that they had left their first love. Their motivation now was no longer driven by love for God.

I think if you need revival in your spiritual life, if you feel like your walk with God has become dull or kind of dragging along, you might want to go back and consider how much God loves you. And I don't mean just in passing. Remind yourself of it every day. There's really no way that you can overuse that understanding. Let the Lord show you how much He cares for you. His love for you is wide and it's eternal and it's free and it's certain and it's faithful. It's expressed in the largest and in the smallest of details and it can be applied to every situation, every part of your life, which is why David says that he keeps the love of God before his eyes, present tense. That should be something that motivates you all the time, how much God loves you. It will keep you from deciding to just walk away. So he had an internal life, verse 2, that pleased the Lord, but he had an external walk that reflected clearly his life with him.

I think it was Spurgeon years ago, he wrote, "If your actions are evil, it is vain to take comfort in your thoughts." Oh, I meant to do good. You know I would. But if you're not doing them, then there can't be much confidence. But David found

great hope in his prayer before the Lord because he lived an open life that he was willing to have God examine and he lived an obedient life driven by God's love for him. It was the motivating factor. That's two; right?

Thirdly -- this is where I twist it a little bit -- a "One-way Life". One way, verse 4. "I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, I will not go with the hypocrites. I've hated the assembly of evildoers, I won't sit with the wicked. I will wash my hands in innocence; and I will go about Your altar, oh, God." He wants to live a one-way life. He is separated from the world. He lists them in all kinds of ways. They're idolaters, they're hypocrites, they're the wicked, they're the evildoers. The hypocrites say one thing and do another. David determined in his life he wouldn't go with the majority opinion. He wouldn't follow the crowd. He chose not to sit in agreement and support the wicked. He chose not to head in the direction of evildoers. In his life he decided he was going to walk with God. He had a one-way life. I'm going one way. I'm going His way.

There is much to be said by the decision that you make sometimes to say no to certain friendships and certain alliances or certain allegiances or associations or partnerships. It can be in business or it can be in dating, in close friends and the people you choose to spend your life with. The only sensible thing to do if you're interested in your well-being with the Lord is to be separate from the world. And sometimes that just takes a decision that has to be made. And David makes that decision here. I'm going to live a one-way life. I'm not sitting or standing in agreement. I hate it. I'm not going to sit there. I'm coming to You. I'm heading in one direction. One way.

You know, when Potiphar's wife hit on Joseph, the young man who had done so well in serving the Lord, his response to temptation was just to run out the door. Get as far away from that temptation as he could. 1,000 years later Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter 15, "Don't be deceived. If you have evil company, it will corrupt good habits." It will change you. It's important that you surround yourself and head in the direction that the Lord is headed in. It's the same as the blessed man in Psalm 1, the one who doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly at all, doesn't stand in the ways of sinners, doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful. Look, here's the deal: Make some good choices in regards to who you spend time with. Whose example will you follow? Whose philosophy of life will

you embrace? If you want to stand in an even place, you're going to have to separate yourself from the world.

Now, a lot of people by nature tend to choose friends that are just a little less spiritual than they are, and the reason they do that is then they can live however they want. There's no irritation, there's no challenge. Find some people that are more spiritual than you are, who set a bar that is higher than yours. Let them challenge you, and then you'll grow. But you'll hate going out to dinner with them. "Oh, they're always preaching to me." But it will help you. It will strengthen you.

David determined in his life he was going to go one way. He was going to live an open life and an obedient life and a one-way life. He was going to be separated, verse 6, unto the Lord. I'm going to go to the altar of the Lord. I'm going to go where He cleanses me and washes me.

Sanctification is the positive side of separation. On the one hand, you want to remove yourself from the worldly influences, whether they are people or practices or whatever, but on the other hand you got to be sanctified. You got to draw closer to the Lord, right? The word "sanctified" literally means for one use, right? You're a one-use person. I am available to serve God. I belong to Him. No to the world, yes to the Lord, cutting off ungodly friendships to develop a closer friendship with Jesus.

And David understood that and he said I'm going to go, when it comes to my innocence, I'm going to go to the altar, far from being perfect. David knew he needed God's cleansing, and so he found it there. I'm going to go wash there. He's not saying my hands are clean, he's saying there is a place for me to be cleansed. And so rather than hanging around with the world, he's going to go hang around with the Lord and be cleansed.

"Overflowing Life" now, the fourth one, verse 7, "That I might proclaim with a voice of thanksgiving, telling all of Your wondrous works. For Lord, I've loved the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells." An open life, an obedient life, a one-way life, an overflowing life. Notice what he writes here. "I want to praise the Lord," in verse 7. "I want to proclaim Your work to others, and then I want to pursue Your glory." I would say this to you: There is no greater joy in the world than the satisfaction of knowing that you're pleasing God. I don't know what is more satisfying than that.

David writes I want to do that so I can shout loudly with thanksgiving for all that You've done in my life.

We had our baptism yesterday. It was such a great, beautiful day that the Lord gave us. And there was a little boy that came out to be baptized. He was 10 or 11 years old. And I said, "What are you doing out here?" And he says, "I'm wanting to be baptized." And I said, "Why?" And he said this: "I want to get closer to Jesus," which is pretty cool coming out of the mouth of a little kid. And so I said, "Well, is this going to work?" And he said "Yep." And I said, "Well, how do you know?" he said, "The Bible said so." And I thought, man, if we could have a whole church full of 11-year-olds, we'd do something, you know? This kid was amazing in his devotion to the Lord. Overflowing life. Praise, proclamation, and pursuit.

If you've ever been to Egypt, especially down in the delta where the Nile is, you know that in the spring the Ethiopian mountains, most of the water runs down towards that delta. That's eventually where it ends up. And the people that live there are mostly farmers. They can tell you almost immediately how good of a year for their crops it's going to be by how much the river overflows, how much that delta is full, and the greater the filling, the glorious the harvest is going to be. It's a very arid kind of country that has very little rain. So that's what David is saying here, I want my life to overflow. I want to come to a place, verse 7, where I can just proclaim with a thanksgiving voice, a loud voice all that You've done for me, and then I want to tell others about who You are, and then I want to get together with Your people at a place where there's glory to be found, Your glory.

I'll tell you what, the best testimony comes from a consumer. There's nothing better when you're wanting to convince someone of what you'd like them to do than to say I use it, I've tried it, I've tasted it. It's great. It's worked just fine. Look at my life. If you can't do that, it's awful hard to witness to anybody. But look what he says, "I want to proclaim with thanksgiving and tell of Your wondrous works." I want to have firsthand information that I can pass along to others.

David longed for the fellowship of God's house, where God's glory dwelled. It's fun when we have church. Everybody comes together, we worship. And the Lord is here because He's in you, but you leave, this is just a big old empty building. It's a worthless place until it's filled, or else it just takes up space. But to be with God's people. That's four, yeah?

Number five, "Obstructed Life". Obstructed life. Unlike verse 8, David wanted no fellowship with those who missed the mark. So I want to gather with your people, verse 9, "But don't gather my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands is a sinister scheme and at whose right hand, they're full of bribes." David literally prayed, Lord, obstruct my steps. I don't want to go with them. Keep me from those who are on routes that are harmful, that their influences would destroy or interrupt.

David recognized those whose life in the world were sin driven: Liars, deceivers, schemers, bribers; those that would obstruct his life, and he asked the Lord to live his life obstructed from them. Literally to say this: I don't want to stand with them in life, and I certainly don't want to stand with them in death. Disassociate them from me now so that I could be disassociated from them then.

Jesus said in Matthew 13 about the tares that were sown amongst the wheat, just let them go together until the harvest, and then when they gather them, they'll gather the wheat into the barns, but the tares they'll throw into the fire. There'll be a separation. And David prays for that here. There's an entirely different result. David didn't want to associate with the wicked in his life so God wouldn't associate him with them in his death. Living an obstructed life. Ask the Lord for that.

Balaam was a wicked guy. He was a prophet for hire. He didn't love the Lord or want to serve the Lord, didn't care for His people. He was interested in gain. But interestingly enough, you can read one of his prayers in the Old Testament, where he says to the Lord, "I want to die like the righteous, and I want my end to be as his." I think that's every sinner's prayer. I want to live like hell and then go to heaven. That's pretty much what Balaam prayed. Just live like I want and then I want to have a wonderful entrance. It just doesn't work that way. So redeem me, Lord. Be merciful to me, help me. And David wants to be that guy that stands away from sin now, not persuaded by bribes of sin that makes promises it can't keep. Keep me from them. Don't gather my soul with them. Don't let me stand with them.

And finally, sixth one, "Ordered Life". An ordered life. "As for me, I will walk in my integrity; redeem me, be merciful to me. My foot stands in a flat or level place in the congregation where I will bless the Lord." I want you to notice that though

David prays with great confidence because his life is open before the Lord, he ends by saying redeem me, purchase me. It's a word that speaks about the help that we need as sinners.

The word "mercy" just means that God doesn't give you what you deserve, which is contrary maybe to what you might conclude if you start at the beginning and don't really think it through. David was not asking for the Lord to give him what he deserved. He was just asking the Lord to observe that he was doing all that he could, and still hanging on to the grace of God and to His power. So David had the appropriate resolve, but he also had the appropriate trust in God, and because he did that, his feet were on level ground. His footing was good. He's not going to slip. He's not going to fall. And neither will you.

Open life, obedient life, one-way life, overflowing life, obstructed life, ordered life. Pretty good for 12 verses. Good thing this isn't a really long Psalm. We'd never get finished.