



I want to begin this morning by simply asking, How do you begin the day? I read an article this week entitled, "How to start the day in a healthy way." It gave no less than six steps.

*Don't hit the snooze button.* Once your alarm goes off, your sleeping pattern has been disrupted. If you go back to sleep and wake up ten minutes later, you're more tired the rest of the day.

*Shower.* You're more awake and alert.

*Exercise.* This sends out endorphins into your body, so positive energy is flowing through you right from the start.

*Choose an outfit that reflects well on you as a person.* It shows you care about yourself and others and makes a good impression.

*Eat a good breakfast.* This affects how your body works all day.

*Try not to rush.* Wake early so you can take your time in your morning routine. Think positively about the day.

Now those might be helpful things to do to start the day out right, but Psalm 5 tells us something entirely different. In Psalm 5:3 David says, "***In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you...***" It's no mistake Psalm 4 ended with David saying, "***In peace I will lie down and sleep...***" It's almost as if David wrote Psalm 5 the next morning as he woke up! Evening and morning David cried out to God. His days were bracketed with prayer.

I know some of you don't consider yourself a morning person. If you pray in the morning, it might go something like this:

Dear God,  
So far today,  
I've done all right.  
I haven't gossiped.  
I haven't lost my temper.  
I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or  
over indulgent.  
I'm very thankful for that.  
But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed;  
and from then on, I'm going to need a lot more help.  
Amen

Maybe you **are** a morning person but your spouse isn't. Like the guy who said, "Sometimes I wake up grumpy, but most of the time I just let her sleep in."

Whether you're a morning person or not, the best way to start your day is by coming to God. The Bible is filled with examples of people who rose early in the morning to meet with God. Read the Old Testament and you'll see how Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, Job, Isaiah and Daniel all rose early to worship and pray. Psalm 149:147 expresses what they all did, "***I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.***" In the New Testament we see the same pattern. Even Jesus rose early to pray. Mark wrote, "***Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed***" (Mark 1:35).

What we have in Psalm 5 is at the very least some encouragement for us to develop this discipline of starting the day by coming into the presence of God, but with that we get some very helpful instruction on how to do that. Sometimes we're willing, but we don't feel equipped to do it. Psalm 5 equips us.

Listen to my words, Lord,  
consider my lament.

Hear my cry for help,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.

In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you  
and wait expectantly.

For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;  
with you, evil people are not welcome.

The arrogant cannot stand  
in your presence.

You hate all who do wrong;  
you destroy those who tell lies.

The bloodthirsty and deceitful  
you, Lord, detest.

But I, by your great love,  
can come into your house;

in reverence I bow down  
toward your holy temple.

Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness  
because of my enemies—  
make your way straight before me.

Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;  
their heart is filled with malice.

Their throat is an open grave;  
with their tongues they tell lies.

Declare them guilty, O God!

Let their intrigues be their downfall.  
Banish them for their many sins,  
for they have rebelled against you.  
But let all who take refuge in you be glad;  
let them ever sing for joy.  
Spread your protection over them,  
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.  
Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous;  
you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

### **Come to God Directly**

There are several things we see in the psalm about how to come into the presence of God. Some of these are so simple and so obvious that we might just forget about them altogether and that would be a mistake. Notice first he comes to God directly. He says, *“Listen to my words, LORD.”* He comes directly to the Lord. This is a privilege we all have, and it's a privilege granted to us through Christ. This is what Paul was getting at when he wrote to Timothy, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2:5). The writer of Hebrews made the same point. After describing the ministry of Jesus as our high priest he says, *“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Heb 4:16).

This may seem to be a “given” for us, but it's really not. It's not because a good percentage of us grew up in a tradition where we were taught we couldn't go directly to the throne of grace; instead we needed to through someone else. The idea seemed to be that we'll find more mercy and grace from them than we will from God, and maybe if we were good enough they could talk God into granting our request. That's entirely unbiblical. Come to God through Christ alone. God the Son gives us direct access to God the Father. Begin the day by coming to him directly.

### **Come to God Humbly**

The second thing we see here is we should come to God humbly. Remember that David, who wrote this prayer, is a King. He's a man with a great deal of authority. He's used to people bowing down before him, serving him, obeying him and catering to his every need. Yet, he comes before the throne of God and he calls him, *“My King.”* So you wake up in the morning, and you come directly into the presence of God, and the first thing you do is get yourself in perspective—I'm not in charge. I'm not my own. I'm a person under authority. I've been given one day (24 hours) as a gift and first and foremost I'll surrender my will to his. He's my King.

We all know that in theory, don't we? But how often do we forget? When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in prison for his resistance against the Nazis, prior to his execution, he wrote what he called a morning prayer:

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.

Help me to pray  
And to concentrate my thoughts on you:  
I cannot do this alone.  
In me there is darkness,  
But with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways,  
But you know the way for me...  
Restore me to liberty,  
And enable me to live now  
That I may answer before you and before me.  
Lord, whatever this day may bring,  
Your name be praised.

You see, that's a prayer of humble surrender. “Whatever this day may bring, your name be praised.” That's a good way to start the day.

### **Come to God Personally**

The next thing we see here is that David came to God personally. Notice the first person singular is used repeatedly in these first few verses: *“Listen to MY words, consider MY lament. Hear MY cry for help, MY King and MY God, for to you I pray.”* There are times, of course, when we come to God corporately. When we come together on a Sunday morning like this it's right that we approach God together, but there are also times when we come to God personally. We're alone with him. We're in our prayer “closet” as a generation past often put it. What a wonder it is that the God who created the universe, the One Isaiah saw seated on his throne with flying seraphim crying out, *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory,”* that One invites us to come personally into his presence. He is **my** King and **my** God.

We don't normally think of approaching royalty in such a personal way, do we? We've all been reading about the royal baby and it reminded me of a visit the Queen once made to the White House. The First Lady at the time was so excited to see the Queen she walked up to give her a big hug. Well, what she failed to understand is you don't hug the Queen. You may hug the President but you don't hug the Queen. I was wondering about that. Why can't you hug the Queen? The answer is because she's the Queen and the Queen doesn't want to be hugged. But here's the wonder: this King of all kings delights in such personal affection. We come to him not only as our King but as our Father; a Father who has no earthly favorites, but who welcomes each of his children as if we were the only ones that mattered to him. Isn't the morning a good time to remember that? My Father in heaven welcomes me into his presence.

## Come to God Transparently

The next thing we learn from David is to come to God transparently. It's obvious as you read this Psalm that David was in great need. As we'll see in a moment it seems he was surrounded by wicked, arrogant, godless people that wanted nothing more than to bring him down. And just a glimpse at the beginning of the psalm makes it very apparent he's holding nothing back in the presence of God. There are two words he uses that are quite instructive for us in this regard. First, he says in verse 1, "**Listen to my words...**" Obviously, when we pray to God we use words, as David says here ("Listen to my words..."). We articulate our needs and our requests to God. We speak them. There is even some evidence he prepares his words. In verse 3 he says, "**...I lay my requests before you.**" The word that's translated "lay my requests" has the idea of arranging or preparing something. Some scholars believe David is referring to the preparations made for a sacrifice—like he's arranging pieces of wood before lighting the fire. Others believe it has the idea of preparing a legal case before a judge. Either way, the idea is we don't just thoughtlessly and carelessly pray; we arrange and prepare our words and requests and bring them before him. That's part of transparent prayer.

I was out riding my bike on Monday. It was a beautiful day to ride up on Cañada Road until I heard the sound of a siren. Sure enough, I had ridden through a stop sign and despite my pleadings the police officer gave me citation. As I told him before I rode off, it was an expensive bike ride! I spent the rest of the ride thinking about what I was going to say to the judge when I stood before him. That's what David says he does in the morning—he presents his case before the Lord. That's part of praying transparently.

But then he also says, "**...consider my lament.**" The word "lament" here is a word that points to a deep, inward kind of groaning or sighing. There is an aspect of prayer in which not only does God listen to our words but he listens to our heart. Remember how it was said of Hannah who was childless, "**In deep anguish she prayed to the Lord...**" Later it says, "**Hannah was praying in her heart, but her voice was not heard**" (1 Sam 1:10, 13). In the same way, it's like there's an ache in David's heart he can't articulate. Have you ever felt that? I know I have, and here we see that God understands our groaning. He reads the scribblings of our heart, even when we can't.

This past week Lynn and I were asked to come to the home of a young couple in our church whose daughter has a serious lingering illness. They asked us to come and pray with them. We talked for awhile about the situation and then we decided to start praying. My wife suggested we get on our knees and so we did and we had a time of prayer in which there was as much groaning and sighing as there were words. How good to know, even when we can't fully articulate our needs, God understands our heart.

## Come to God Expectantly

Perhaps that's why he also teaches us to come to God expectantly. He says in verse 3 he "**waits expectantly.**" The word for "wait" here is often used in the Old Testament to speak of a watchman who stays awake at night and watches for the dawn. His job in the final watch of the night would be to look for the rising of the sun. When he saw it, he would cry out to all and let them know it had come. I think about when my kids were young and I'd come home from an overseas trip, not only would they be waiting at the airport when I came out of customs but they would anticipate the gifts that I would bring them. They wouldn't say anything about it but I could always tell by the look on their faces they were hoping I'd open my suitcase right then and there and give it to them.

Are we like that when it comes to our prayers? Do we look expectantly for God's answers? Do we believe he's good and he loves to bless his children? If he doesn't give us what we asked for he will give us something even better? Spurgeon writes, "Do we not forget to watch for the results of our supplications? We are like the ostrich who lays her eggs and looks not for her young. We sow the seed and are too idle to look for the harvest. How could we expect the Lord to open the windows of his grace and pour out his blessing if we will not open the windows of expectation and look up for the promised favor. Let holy preparations link hands with patient expectation and we shall have far larger answers to our prayers."

## Come to God Confidently

Now we've hardly gotten through the first three verses of this psalm and haven't even really gotten to the real meat of this prayer. There's just one more thing you mustn't miss here about how to approach God. Notice how David prays confidently and the source of his confidence is the character of God. In verses 4–6 he describes in some detail God's abhorrence of evil. You see, God is holy and because he's holy David says to God, "**You are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest.**" Those are strong words! They make us a little uncomfortable because our parents taught us "hate" is a bad word, but there **are** some things God hates.

Not only that, we're uncomfortable with this because we all know there's something of us in this description. Romans 3:11–12 says about humanity as a whole, "**There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.**" That's you and me! So this is a bit frightening, but would we want it any other way? Would we want a God who is pleased or even apathetic in the face of wickedness? Would we want a God who with a

wink of his eye and a shrug of his shoulder just welcomed the arrogant, bloodthirsty and deceitful people of this world into his holy presence? Even I know that police officer was doing exactly what he was supposed to do! He was upholding the law and the law is there for my own good. And it's this holiness of God that's bringing comfort to David because he knows his enemies fit that description.

We might wonder then why David isn't just more than a little bit concerned about his own fate since he had some dirty laundry of his own. He had the blood of Uriah on his own hands. How could he be so confident in God's holy presence? It's because of what David says in verse 7, ***"But I, by your great love, can come into your presence; in reverence I bow down to you."*** David can't come into God's presence because he's such a righteous guy; he can come into God's holy presence because of God's great love and mercy. So the contrast here isn't between those who are sinners and those who aren't, but it's between those sinners who repent and cry out to God for mercy and those who don't. And we know something David didn't. We know a Savior who came to seek and save the lost. We know a Savior who took our arrogance, deceit and wickedness upon himself on the cross. That's the source of our confidence.

It is with that confidence that we can make our requests known to God. David prays for several things in verses 8–11. He prays for guidance in verse 8, ***"Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make your way straight before me."*** We can get off track so easily, can't we? Our enemies don't make it any easier. In verse 10 he prays that God would deal with them: ***"Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you."*** This isn't about personal retribution for David, rather it's because they've rebelled against God. Finally, he prays in verse 11, ***"Let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you."*** What's he asking for here? God's protection; a protection that's like an eagle spreading its wings over its young. But with that he's praying that all those who like him put their trust in God and love his name would rejoice and be glad and sing for joy. What a great way to start the day—with joy.

As we saw last week, David is a different man at the end of this prayer than he was at the start. He started in confusion but he ends in confidence. He can say, ***"Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield."*** He didn't wake up feeling that way. He woke up feeling

overwhelmed, but he went before the Lord and that changed his entire perspective on life.

D.L. Moody once said, "We ought to see the face of God every morning before we see the face of man." What will it take for us to change our morning habits so that's true for us? Will we need to wake up just a bit earlier? Will we need to rethink our priorities regarding what we really think is important? Will we need to turn the TV off or shut down the computer for a bit? Whatever it is, it will be hard at first, but over time it will change us.

Ben Patterson tells a story about a man named Jack Sanford who looks back fondly on his childhood visits to the old family farmhouse. There was an old well in the front yard. The water from the well was surprisingly pure and cold. No matter how hot the summer or severe the drought, the well was always a dependable source of refreshment. As Jack grew older, he often thought of that faithful old well, but eventually the farmhouse was modernized with indoor plumbing and hot and cold running water. The old well was no longer needed and sealed shut.

Years later, Jack returned to the farmhouse and found himself longing for the cold, pure water of his youth. So he unsealed the well and lowered a bucket for a taste of the refreshment he once enjoyed. But he was shocked to find the well had gone bone dry. He wondered what had happened and so he began to ask several of the locals. He finally learned that wells of that sort are fed by hundreds of tiny underground rivulets. As long as water is consistently being drawn from the well, new water will flow in through the rivulets, keeping them open so that more water can flow. But when the water stops flowing, the rivulets get plugged up with mud and the flow stops. It turns out the well dried up not because it was used too much but because it wasn't used enough.

Ben writes, "Our souls are like that well. If we don't draw regularly and frequently on the living water that Jesus promised would well up in us like a spring, our hearts will close and dry up. The consequence of not drinking deeply of God is to eventually lose the ability to drink at all. Prayerlessness is its own worst punishment, both its disease and cause."

What a great encouragement this is to persevere in a life of disciplined prayer. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly. Like King David, I want to keep the water flowing, and perhaps the most important thing to do in accomplishing that is to just keep showing up—morning by morning.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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