

O Lord God Almighty, the one who was and is and is to come, the one who is from everlasting and to everlasting is God, we come to you this evening, O Lord, to humble ourselves on earth, your footstool, under your mighty throne in the heavens, from which you nullify the counsel of the nations and frustrate the plans of the peoples. because the counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of your heart from generation to generation. And so we pray, Father, you'll come down this evening and own and bless the proclamation of your word to our hearts that you'll remember the prayer of your disciples to you, the request, Lord Jesus, Lord, teach us to pray. Come this evening, we pray, and teach us to pray. as your people on earth, confident that our Father hears from heaven. And we offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it was said in the early church that persecution has killed her thousands and prosperity her tens of thousands. And all across this land, the Super Bowl has taken millions from the pews of the churches. And I was wondering this evening how many of you would come. Dr. Ferguson always says the evening service is the best barometer of a church's spirituality. And of all the evening services in the year, there is perhaps no better service to really test the mettle of God's people than Super Bowl Sunday. If the pigskin is God, follow it, but if Yahweh is God, follow him. And I'm glad to see a lot of you know which side your theological bread is buttered on. Well, if you would, please turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to the fifth Psalm. You'll find that in your pre-Bible on page 449, and on the children's Bible on page 576. And if you've been following these evening sermons, you should be somewhat sobered in your hearts. In the psalm book of the Bible, you have Psalm 2, this great psalm that speaks of rebellion on earth. In Psalm 3, you find the Davidic king surrounded by many enemies. In Psalm 4, you find those enemies are in high places, even within Israel at times. And in Psalm 5, we see the true character of these enemies revealed. It's like a spiritual fasten your seatbelt sign. There may be turbulence ahead. God has put these Psalms in the Bible, and not just in the Bible, but at the very front of the hymn book. because you'll find yourself thumbing to them on more than a few occasions as you make your way from whence to whither, from this world and to the next. And as we read this psalm this evening, we remember, as with all of the psalms, that the psalms are Christ's hymnbook before their hours. And we sing these psalms best as we sing themselves consciously in Him. The eye of the psalm is not me, myself, and I.com and my own little pity party on earth. I sing this psalm as part of the triumphant eye of Christ and His church facing a world that hates Him and that hates God and wants to tear down His kingdom and destroy Him. The enemies

we read in the Psalm, they're His enemies before they're ours, and it's only because they are His enemy that they are ours. We remember that as we come to read the Word of God together. Psalm 5. This is God's Word. Please take heed how you hear.

For the choir director, for flute accompaniment, a Psalm of David. Give ear to my words, O Lord,

Consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you will hear my voice. In the morning, I will order my prayer to you and eagerly watch, for you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness. No evil dwells with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood.

The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit. But as for me, by your abundant love and kindness, I will enter your house. At your holy temple, I will bow in reverence for you. O Lord, lead me in your righteousness because of my foes. Make your way straight before me. There is nothing reliable in what they say. Their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave.

they flatter with their tongue. Hold them guilty, O God. By their own devices let them fall. In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out, for they are rebellious against you. But let all you take refuge in you be glad. Let them ever sing for joy, and may you shelter them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For it is you who blesses the righteous man, O Lord. You surround him with favor as with a shield." Well, in the movie Wyatt Earp,

where Kevin Costner plays the famous American lawman, There's a scene towards the beginning of the movie where his father, Nicholas, played by Gene Hackman, is sending his son off as his son heads off west. And the father says to his son, son, you know that I'm a man that believes in the law. After your family, he says in the Wild West, the law is about the only thing you have to believe in. But there are plenty of men who don't care about the law, men who'll take part in all kinds of viciousness, and they don't care who gets hurt. In fact, the more people they can hurt, the better. And then he says to his son, son, when you find yourself in a fight with such viciousness, shoot first. And if you can, shoot to kill.

Well, David's counsel's a little different. He says, when you find yourself in a fight against such viciousness, pray. And when you can, pray like the

psalmist in Psalm 5. Ralph Davis, in his wonderful little commentary, The Way of the Righteous and the Muck of Life, he says, I have a suspicion that in the Holy Spirit's filing cabinet up in heaven, there's a folder marked Instruction and Prayer. And inside, amongst others, is

a copy of Psalm 5. In this psalm, David teaches us how to pray when we are in dangerous, and frankly, lousy

circumstances. So this psalm then will take it as an instruction on how to pray. How do we pray when we find ourselves up against wicked and godless men, men who hate Christ, who hate Christ's kingdom, and because of their hatred of him, they have intense hatred for us? And David gives us a number of lessons this evening that will stand us, I think, in good stead whenever we're praying, but especially in those kind of situations. First of all, David says, Pray until you pray, and sometimes that takes thought. Pray until you pray, and sometimes that takes thought. Give ear to my words, O Lord, the psalmist says. Consider my groaning. True prayer, effective prayer, is a strange mixture of passion and of pleading. of things we can say joined with the deep groanings of the heart that we find very difficult to actually frame into words. Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my groaning, the psalmist says. And just to stop right there, if the psalmist finds himself struggling to frame his groans into words, You shouldn't be surprised if you find yourself in exactly the same position. And yet the psalmist has this great instinct that there's a God in heaven who not only understands the words he lifts to heaven, but the groans that lies behind them. And that should be a very great comfort to you. Indeed. He'd literally pay attention to the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God." Pay attention. The psalmist prays, and you see this again and again, that verb, pay attention, in the Hebrew, you'll find it again and again and again in the Psalms, and it's a lesson to us. Here's the psalmist, he's struggling, he feels like the guy in the cell phone commercial. Lord, can you hear me now? Can you hear me now? He's not sure his words are getting through. Worse, there's a nagging insecurity in his heart that God actually isn't paying attention to him, but he prays anyway. And the devil will often tell you that you should only pray when you're conscious God is listening. And you should, of course, pray when you're conscious God is listening. But sometimes you have to pray until you're conscious God is listening. You can't wait until you see and feel his listening ear. Sometimes you have to pray yourself into prayer. The ancients would say, the Scottish fathers would say, you pray until you pray. You pray until you're conscious of receiving an audience. And you pray until God has answered your prayer from heaven with a yes or a no, of course. But pray until you pray. my King and my God, my King. Luther said famously, the power of saving religion is found in the personal pronouns. It is one thing to say on earth that the Lord is God and the Lord is King. Oh, but it's entirely another when you can lift your voice and say, my God. and my king. And the central, in the Hebrew, it's beautifully laid out. As David says later, you know,

in the morning, oh Lord, you will hear my voice. In the morning I will order my prayer to you, right? He's ordering his prayer, that's the idea. Sometimes it takes thought to arrange our prayer, just like it takes thought to arrange a sermon. Now David here is not asking or pleading or requiring that kind of studied eloquence of some of the high church men, you know, Dear God, we're gathered here today to worship you, and it's all this wonderful, eloquent stuff, but it's just, you get this strange sense the prayer's not getting past the ceiling, because the man's a pompous fool, right? God's not looking for that kind of arrangement, but He's not looking for thoughtlessness or carelessness either. And while God doesn't need us to arrange our prayers, they don't benefit Him, the arrangement can and does benefit us. And in this opening stanza, as the psalmist arranges his prayer, the central, the central petition is for to you, I pray. Lord, I'm praying to you, I'm ordering, I'm sending all of my energy to you. Oh Lord, don't let me down. There's a wonderful poem that Jimmy Stewart wrote called A Dog Named Boo. It's a long poem, I'm not going to read it all, but you should go home tonight, later on, and look it up on YouTube and hear the old man tell the story of his dog named Boo. It's just a wonderful, whimsical, all who love dogs, if you can read that, hear that poem without weeping, you have a hard heart. It's such a wonderful poem. He says, he never came to me when I would call unless I had a tennis ball, or he felt like it. But mostly, he didn't come at all. And he goes on with the poem, it's really funny. But later on, he talks about how he takes the dog for a walk. And on the evening walks, and Gloria took him, he was always first out the door. The old one and I brought up the rear because our bones were sore. He had charged up the street with mom hanging on. What a beautiful pair they were. And if it was still light and the tourists were out, they created a bit of a stir. But every once in a while, he'd stop in his tracks, and with a frown on his face, look around. It was just to make sure that the old one was there, to follow him where he was bound. We're early to bedders in our house. I guess I'm the first to retire. And as I'd leave the room, he'd look at me. He'd look at me. and get up from his place by the fire. He knew where the tennis balls were upstairs, and I'd give him one for a while. And he'd push it under the bed with his nose, and I'd dig it out with a smile. But before very long, he'd tire of the ball, and he'd be asleep in the corner in no time at all. And there were nights when I'd feel him climb up on our bed and lie between us, and I'd pat his head. And there were nights when I'd feel his stare. And I'd wake up and he'd be sitting there. And I'd reach out to stroke his hair and sometimes I'd feel him sigh. And I think I knew the

reason why. He'd wake up at night and he would have this fear of the dark, of life, of lots of things. And he'd be glad to have me near. And now he's dead. And there are nights when I think I feel him climb up on our bed and lie between us. And I'd pat his head. And there are nights when I think I feel that stare. And I reach out my hand to stroke his hair. But he's not there. Oh, how I wish that wasn't so. I'll always love a dog named Beau. Right, now the point of that poem is, here's a master and his dog. And you've all been there, right? You've all been there. You feel the stare of your dog. Maybe you're eating a steak. And the dog looks at you, and you have absolutely no intention of giving any of that steak to the dog, but he looks at you with such ego-eyed intention. It's like Luther said, would to God I could pray the way my dog watches me eat. And then there are times you're in bed, right, and you're asleep, and you do wake up because you feel the dog stare. And he's looking at you in the corner, in the darkness. And David is saying, for to you I pray. And there's an instinct at the depth of David's heart that there's a God in heaven who feels your stare and who hears you when you say, Lord, to you I cry. I have nowhere else to go, in heaven or on earth. If you don't help me, there'll be no help at all. For to you I pray. For to you I pray. So pray until you pray, and sometimes that takes thought. Secondly, pray mindful of the character of God. Verse four, for you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness. No evil dwells with you. The German commentator Stube suggests that the basic meaning of evil is what harms life, not what benefits. And the psalmist is confident in what harms life, not what benefits it, right? And the psalmist prays confident that the God of heaven is entirely righteous. We ascribe to you, O Lord, our rock. Your work is faithful and all of your ways are just. You are God of faithfulness and without injustice. Righteous and upright are you, O God. No evil dwells with you. What a confidence Christian this evening, that when you pray surrounded by evil on earth, with an evil devil sharp at your heels. You lift your voice to the unsullied ear of heaven that is pure and righteous. He is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes, the kind of man who are full of themselves and empty of God. You hate all, not just the iniquity that they do, but the people who do it. You hate all who do iniquity. If you're here this evening and you aren't yet a believer, you should take that verse very, very, very seriously indeed. God hates all who do iniquity. Now, because of the depth of our God's character, he has a capacity to love sinners. But his natural bent is to

hate

them. And it's only because of Christ who's opened a door to a just mercy. that God can give vent to that love and salvation and gather us in as his children. But God is of purer eyes than to behold evil and those who practice it. You destroy those who speak falsehood. The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit. But as for me, David says, by your abundant loving kindness, I will enter your house. at your holy temple, I will bow in reverence for you." Derek Kidner, who's just a wonderful commentator in the Psalms, he says, the very integrity of the judge, which would be David's undoing if he were under a rigorous moral scrutiny, yet that very integrity is his refuge under wrongful attack. But David here He's arranging his order, his prayer to God. He's conscious of God's justice, a justice that is against his enemies, which begs the question, then what hope can David have, the sinner? What hope can you have of coming into the presence of this God? And David says, I come because of grace, and I come in reverence. But as for me, by your abundant loving kindness. The word loving kindness is a difficult Hebrew word. It's the word chesed. Chesed, and it's a hard word to translate. It's a word that literally means God's stubborn determination to be kind to you. To deal with you in love. No matter what you deserve. And no matter how much it cost him. And when Tyndale's translating the Old Testament, he has to make up a new word in the English language. He takes love and he takes kindness and he joins them together. Loving kindness. God's stubborn determination to be kind to you and to deal with you in love no matter what you deserve and no matter how much it cost him. And of course, There is no bottom to that word. Because of God's chesed, it takes his son from heaven and puts him in hell instead of me and instead of you, Christian. Because there's no limit to the cost that God will pay in His determination to be kind to you. And when David is bowing his knees before the righteous judge of all the earth, he bases his prayer not on his merit, not on his commitment to God, but on God's commitment to him. But as for me, by your abundant, loving kindness, I will enter your house. I need no other argument. I need no other plea. And he comes in reverence. At your holy temple, I will bow in reverence for you. We need to remember that God is our Father, to be sure, but he's our Father in heaven. And as we bow our knees before him, we let our words be few and sincere, lest he bring us into judgment. So first of all then, we pray until we pray, and sometimes that takes thought, and we pray mindful of the character of God in the second place. Thirdly, pray knowing what you really need. It's amazing here, David is up against it. There are wicked men up against him, out for his blood, men who are liars. You can't trust a single word that comes out of their mouth, David says. They're men of bloodshed and deceit. And your instinct, you might

think, my number one priority, O God, is wipe them off the face of the earth. Take them away from me, O God.

But is that David's first priority? No, it's not. O Lord, lead me in your righteousness because of my foes, and make your way straight before me. It's another way of saying what David says in Psalm 23. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. It's not, Lord, that I want them out of my life. You'll get to that later in the stanza. But first of all, oh God, I want more of you in my life, more of your righteousness. I want to please you more and serve you better. There's nothing reliable in what they say. Their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue.

C.S. Lewis in his Reflections upon

the Psalms says, I think that when I began to read the Psalter, the ability of words to inflict immense harm surprised me. I had half expected that in a simpler and more violent age, when more evil was done with the knife and the big stick and the firebrand, that less would be done by talk. But in reality, the psalmists mention hardly any kind of evil more often than this one, the one which the most civilized societies share, the strife of tongues. Hold them guilty, O Lord. By

their own devices, let them fall. In the multitude of their transgressions, thrust them out, for they are rebellious against you. Kidner again says, evil is vulnerable

to truth, to its own instability, and to direct divine action. And notice what's driving David's

arr here is not that they are rebellious against me, but because they are rebellious against thee. That they're against you, God.

And that's why He uses this psalm. Jerome and the church fathers use this psalm in particular, but other psalms like it, to pray against the heretics who were tearing the church apart in the early centuries of church history. This is not something you pray in the midst of petty office squabbles. This is the kind of prayer you engage. It's the nuclear option when

Satan and his brood of vipers threaten to tear a church apart. And it's in the Bible because,

just like the fastened seatbelt sign, there'll be times you're thankful to have that seatbelt fastened securely around your waist. And then lastly, and briefly,

pray confident of the Lord's care for his people. The psalmist ends, he prays himself to confidence. It's wonderful. At the start of the psalm, he's wondering, is God listening? And at the end of the psalm, he's confident of God's circling arms round about and underneath him. But let all who take refuge in you be glad. Let them ever sing for joy, and may you shelter them, that those who love your name may exult in you. Why? For it is you who blesses the righteous man, O Lord. You surround him with favor as with a shield. And there's a beautiful section

in Kidner's commentary on the Psalms where he speaks about this. with favour as with a shield. It speaks of something wrapping you up and closing you in, and that word, compass here, surround, is only used one other time in the Bible, and it's used at the end of 1 Samuel 23, when Saul is closing in like a flood around David. Remember, David's running on this side of the mountain, and Saul's on that side, and Saul's pincer movement of his troops are closing in. They're surrounding him. Kidner says, in 1 Samuel, it describes a hostile force closing in on David, only to find itself quietly deflected by God's encircling providential care. Whereas Davis says, Saul has been closing in. Ah, but Yahweh was closer. The enemy cannot wrap us up. when Yahweh has already wrapped us round about with his favor. And Christians, this evening, as you head into life this coming week, remember that. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, the psalmist says, but he who trusts in the Lord, loving kindness shall surround him. God is the one who blesses the man righteous in Christ. He surrounds him with favor, as with a shield, the favor of God. There's a wonderful story that Helmut Theke says. He was a German theologian. When he was at school, he was kind of a wicked lad, and he hated this boy in school. And because this boy in school was the smartest kid in the class. And he always had all the right answers. And so Helmut and his friend decided to give this boy a solid thrashing at the end of the day. And they had it all planned out. And they came to school that morning, and they saw this boy walk to school with his dad. And the father's arm was around him. And as they said goodbye, the father rubbed his hands through his hair, and kissed his son on the cheek, and bid his son farewell. And as the son walked off, and the father walked off, they looked back once, and the father waved at his son. And they walked on, then the father stopped again, looked back, and waved at his son, and the son waved at him. And just before they parted sight for the last time, the father looked back one last time, and waved at his son. And Helmut says, he looked at his friends, and we were frightened to lay a finger on a lad who was loved by such a father in such a way. And the psalmist says, that's exactly, as the devil looks at you, he tramples, even though he hates you, because he sees your father look at you and love you. And you're surrounded by the Father's favor. And even when the devil does his worst, he can never undo the Father's best. And he can never get at you without coming through the shield of the Father's favor and the Father's wisdom saying, Will this be good for my son? Or will this be good for my daughter? And only if the answer is yes, will the father allow a difficult thing, a painful thing, and sometimes an evil thing, into your life,



but only because he means it for your good. Christian, whatever you face this week, whatever thing, whatever happens, remember, The Father's favor surrounds you like a shield, and nothing can touch you without first coming through that. Let's draw near to God in prayer. Father in heaven, as we come this evening just now to the table, we're reminded of the appalling cost of your lovingkindness, your most expensive promise, that so determined were you in stubborn love and kindness to bring us to heaven that you broke your own son apart because of our sins and sent him to hell to purchase the just mercy that your love desired for us. So draw near to us, Lord Jesus, and remind us that with our sins atoned for, the terrors of law and of God with us can have nothing to do, we are wrapped up in the Father's favor, tonight, tomorrow, and forever. In the Savior's name we pray, amen.