

# Psalm 17 • The Prayer of a Righteous Man

## Introduction

This Psalm is specifically labeled, “A prayer of David”. Knowing him to not just be a righteous man but a spiritual example held up by God Himself, this prayer offers us the opportunity to dissect the prayer of a righteous man to compare and contrast it to our own prayers. We will not find any “formulas” to ensure God answers prayer the way we want, but rather that prayer should reflect our desire to shed ourselves of anything short of the way **HE** wants it.

<sup>1</sup>Hear a just cause, O LORD, give heed to my cry;

Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips.

<sup>2</sup>Let my judgment come forth from Your presence;

Let Your eyes look with equity.

<sup>3</sup>You have tried my heart;

You have visited me by night;

You have tested me and You find nothing;

I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.

<sup>4</sup>As for the deeds of men, by the word of Your lips

I have kept from the paths of the violent.

<sup>5</sup>My steps have held fast to Your paths.

My feet have not slipped.

## [Read v.1-5]

### **Q: How is God viewed in this prayer from the point of view of the petitioner?**

A: As Judge. This is shown in his request of God to “hear a just cause” and as for its outcome “let my judgment come forth from Your presence”. It’s further revealed in v.3, “Let Your eyes look with equity”, a term that is often used in arguing cases for legal restoration or restitution of something or someone wronged.

### **Q: How is this like a court case in the way each point is brought before God the Judge?**

A: Court cases, whether criminal or civil, involve 2 parties: The offender and the offended, or the plaintiff and defendant. The judge evaluates the integrity and actions of both sides to find whether either one has truly acted innocently or bears some responsibility of guilt. All the evidence is examined to see if **EITHER** party is justified or not. David knows that he cannot secure judgment in his own favor without first establishing his own credibility and spiritual standing.

### **Q: What are the ways that God evaluates the petitioner to establish the quality of spiritual legal standing before Him?**

1. **“You have tried my heart”** (v.3) Is it inclined towards sin or consistently rejecting it?
2. **“You have visited me by night”** (v.3) Obedience is not just an outward thing that happens only when someone can be seen; it’s a lifestyle that goes on 24 hours a day.
3. **“You have tested me”** (v.3) It’s not just knowledge about God but knowledge put into practice that proves the listener is hearing from the heart. One can “know” the law without following it.

### **Q: What is the evidence presented that the petitioner has passed God’s evaluation and is therefore established as justified in his spiritual standing before God as Judge?**

1. **Control of speech** (“I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress”) which is visible evidence of what is truly stored in the heart.
2. **Rejection of the world’s ways** (“I have kept from the paths of the violent”) which is visible evidence of obedience.
3. **Faithfulness to God’s ways** (“My steps have held fast to Your paths”) which is visible evidence of sanctification, being set apart wholly unto God for His purpose.

**Application:** When we bring our petitions before God, do we deal with any issues of our faithfulness and obedience directly with Him, or pass them over not wanting to discuss them? How does a parent view a child that always asks for things but is never obedient or doing good? Is it possible that “blocks” or issues in your prayer life are actually the result of only wanting to ask God for things you want without ever addressing the kind of child you are?

<sup>6</sup>I have called upon You, for You will answer me, O God;  
Incline Your ear to me, hear my speech.  
<sup>7</sup>Wondrously show Your lovingkindness,  
O Savior of those who take refuge at  
Your right hand  
From those who rise up against them.  
<sup>8</sup>Keep me as the apple of the eye;  
Hide me in the shadow of Your wings  
<sup>9</sup>From the wicked who despoil me,  
My deadly enemies who surround me.  
<sup>10</sup>They have closed their unfeeling heart,  
With their mouth they speak proudly.  
<sup>11</sup>They have now surrounded us in our  
steps;  
They set their eyes to cast us down to the  
ground.  
<sup>12</sup>He is like a lion that is eager to tear,  
And as a young lion lurking in hiding  
places.

### **[Read v.6-12]**

**Q: What does it appear that David is specifically seeking from God?**

A: Protection.

1. "...refuge at Your right hand..." (v.7)
2. "Keep me..." (v.8)
3. "Hide me..." (v.8)

**Q: From what does he seek protection?**

A: Evil. He seeks protection from the attacks of those that are opposed to God in their behavior and obedience.

1. "From those who rise up..." (v.7)
2. "From the wicked..." (v.9)
3. "My deadly enemies..." (v.9)

**Q: According to v.10, how is their attitude contrary to God's ways?**

A: They exhibit no love or mercy ("They have closed their unfeeling heart") and verbally attack in accordance with their pride ("With their mouth they speak proudly").

**Q: How do their actions further prove their contrary attitude in v.11-12?**

1. "**They have now surrounded us in our steps**". They're attacking the very path or ways of God that the petitioner is adhering to.
2. "**They set their eyes to cast us down to the ground**". Like toppling a statue or building, they're content only with total destruction.
3. "**He is like a lion that is eager to tear**". They're caught up in the thrill of destruction, ready to enjoy the kill.
4. "**And as a young lion lurking in hiding place**". They'll do it any way possible, even to the point of setting an ambush.

**Q: So in keeping with this being a case brought before the Judge, how does this contrast with what David established about himself in the preceding section?**

A: In the opening section David presented evidence of his own good spiritual standing before God; here he presents the evidence of the offenders' bad spiritual standing. They combine to present a case of why David needs, and is worthy of, God's protection.

**Q: How would you characterize the situation between David and these people? Is this just a failed relationship that can be repaired or some kind of personal misunderstanding that can be resolved?**

A: The case being presented is whether or not it's true that one side is walking according to God's ways and the other is not. It can't be resolved on a personal level because it's truly an issue of spiritual warfare.

**Application:** Do we separate our prayer requests so that we seek God's protection from those attacking us spiritually, from relationship issues for which we really need to be personally responsible to address? Do we take our own actions against others or, even when attacked by the most wicked, do we rush to turn it over to Him? In your most recent list of prayer requests, how many are for "things" and how many are for overcoming spiritual battles? What does this indicate to you?

<sup>13</sup>Arise, O LORD, confront him, bring him low;

Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword,

<sup>14</sup>From men with Your hand, O LORD, From men of the world, whose portion is in this life,

And whose belly You fill with Your treasure;

They are satisfied with children, And leave their abundance to their babes.

<sup>15</sup>As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness;

I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake.

### **[Read v.13-15]**

**Q: What is surprising about David's specific request against his attackers?**

A: David does not ask for their destruction but that God would "confront him, bring him low", a way of asking God to conquer them spiritually.

**Point:** *The prayer of a righteous man is concerned with the souls of even his most evil spiritual attackers that they might be reconciled to God and saved. The righteous man knows that only God can achieve a positive, spiritual breakthrough with them.*

**Q: Does David ask for the strength to overcome them himself?**

A: No, he asks, "Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword...with Your hand, O Lord".

**Point:** *The prayer of a righteous man is more concerned for things to be carried out according to God's ways than his own ways.*

**Q: How does David contrast the essential difference between those that follow God's ways and those that don't?**

A: In v.14, those that don't follow God's ways are concerned with the things of the world or their earthly inheritance ("whose portion is in this life...treasure...satisfied with children..."), whereas in v.15 the righteous are concerned about their spiritual inheritance ("I will be satisfied with Your likeness").

**Point:** *The righteous man sees the bigger picture beyond just the limits of this present life to embrace the eternal.*

### **Overall Application**

- *Did you notice that the prayer of a righteous man does not include a list of all the things that God will provide naturally in the course of this life? Did you notice that the prayer of a righteous man is concerned about the one thing that matters for this life and the next—to keep in a right relationship with God and follow His ways?*
- *How often do you include personal accountability of your personal walk as part of your prayer list? Do you first deal with issues of personal faithfulness before bringing forth your list of requests?*
- *Is your prayer for overcoming spiritual battles or meeting personal desires? Are you seeking God's protection or really just asking for "stuff"? Do you seek His intervention to confront the hearts of even your most vile spiritual enemy?*
- *Overall, are you more concerned for the things of this life or eternity?*