

A Prayer for Vindication

INTRODUCTION: Although the Psalms are often called *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, in fact there are only 5 Psalms that were composed as prayers.

1. They are Psalms 17, 86, and 142 by David; Psalm 90, “A Prayer of Moses the Man of God,” and the anonymous Psalm 102.
2. The first of these Psalm Prayers is Psalm 17: *A Prayer of David*.
 - a) a personal prayer of David
 - b) *Sitz en Leben?* Can’t know for certain, but ...
 - c) David and his associates are being slandered greatly, and this prayer is an earnest plea for God to vindicate him
 - d) Hence I have titled Psalm 17: *A Prayer for Vindication*
3. **James M. Boice:** *Psalms: Volume One; p. 138*

As we begin to study Psalm 17, I want to suggest that it is a model prayer. It is urgent, perceptive, moving. But, most of all, it models prayer by the way the psalmist uses arguments to make his appeal to God. He does not merely ask for what he wants or needs. He argues his case, explaining to God why God should answer; not because God needs to be persuaded to help his children – he does not – but because arguments force us to carefully think through what we are asking and to sharpen our requests.

4. We do not live in a just and righteous world, and as the people of God – as a man of God or a godly woman – we are often slandered, misrepresented, oppressed and even treated unjustly.
5. Allow me to illustrate this with three very pertinent examples:
 - a) **President Barak Obama**, on May 31, 2016, issued a Presidential Proclamation, designating June 2016 as “*LGBT Pride Month, 2016.*” Here is what he wrote in part:
 - (1) *Since our founding, America has advanced on an unending path toward becoming a more perfect Union. This journey, led by forward-thinking individuals who have set their sights on reaching for a brighter tomorrow, has never been easy or smooth. The fight for dignity and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people is reflected in the tireless dedication of advocates and allies who strive to forge a more inclusive society. They have spurred sweeping progress by changing hearts and minds and by demanding equal treatment -- under our laws, from our courts, and in our politics. This month, we recognize all they have done to bring us to this point, and we recommit to bending the arc of our Nation toward justice. Last year's landmark Supreme Court decision guaranteeing marriage equality in all 50 States was a historic victory for LGBT Americans, ensuring dignity for same-sex couples and greater equality across State lines. LGBT individuals deserve to know their country stands beside them. That is why my Administration is striving to better understand the needs of LGBT adults. It is*

also why we oppose subjecting minors to the harmful practice of conversion therapy, and why we are continuing to promote equality and foster safe and supportive learning environments for all students. And our commitment to combatting discrimination against the LGBT community does not stop at our borders: Advancing the fair treatment of all people has long been a cornerstone of American diplomacy, and we have made defending and promoting the human rights of LGBT individuals a priority in our engagement across the globe. There remains much work to do to extend the promise of our country to every American, but because of the acts of courage of the millions who came out and spoke out to demand justice and of those who quietly toiled and pushed for progress, our Nation has made great strides in recognizing what these brave individuals long knew to be true in their hearts -- that love is love and that no person should be judged by anything but the content of their character. During Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month, as Americans wave their flags of pride high and march boldly forward in parades and demonstrations, let us celebrate how far we have come and reaffirm our steadfast belief in the equal dignity of all Americans.

- (2) In other words, Christians who believe that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin from which people need to repent are ...
 - (3) not progressive but backward, harmful to others, denying others their basic human rights, treating others without dignity, opposed to love and refusing to recognize that lesbians and gays have high character.
 - (4) Really? *What a slanderous document!*
- b) **Archbishop William Lori** of Baltimore is a Roman Catholic priest and chairman of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty. In a speech at the Divine Mercer University, on June 2, 2016, Bishop Lori said:
- (1) *“Bloodless” and “polite” persecution manifests itself in public schools, courts, laws, and “policies that seek to manage and put limits on religion. Massive peer pressure via the social media that affects the thinking and decisions of young people [and] the more localized disapproval of our sophisticated friends,” also contribute to this persecution. Religious freedom “does not mean the freedom merely to escape cooperation with evil by the skin of one's teeth. Rather, it means the space necessary to create in our institutions a true culture of life, a culture that respects the teachings of the faith that inspires and shapes the charitable, social, and educational services we are providing.*
 - (2) He mentioned that the family, local church, private Christian Schools, and Campus ministries were *“structures that stand between the power of the state and the individual conscience.”*
 - (3) *It is in these smaller, more local settings and institutions that our freedoms are exercised, that virtue is gained, and that people find their own dignity and, if you will, their niche in life. Yet it is these same institutions that are under assault today. We have only to think about the arbitrary redefinition of marriage and*

family or anti-family welfare and relief policies. As these intermediate structures either disappear or come under the direct control of the government, our society becomes less merciful and more impersonal, less apt to be a setting for human flourishing. Religious freedom is vital to bringing God's mercy to a wounded world. Defending religious liberty is...a work of mercy because it allows for the creation of conditions "in which the mercy of God can touch the inmost hearts of people who are being carried along by the rapid current of contemporary culture. The institutions that are under challenge are places of mercy that seek to bring the healing balm of truth, love, and human skill to the spiritual, emotional, and physical wounds of human existence, to be indeed the 'field hospital' amid a culture where many are wounded daily.

c) June 6, 2016 **Fox News' Todd Starnes**, in Palmdale, California, reported this story on TV.

(1) Christina Zavala includes, each day, a Bible verse in her 7-year-old son's lunch box.

(2) Her son began to share these verses with his classmates and lunch friends. Soon, other kids were asking the boy for Bible verses for their lunch boxes.

(3) Mrs. Zavala sent these verses and a brief note explaining them with her son, to school each day.

(4) Todd Starnes reported what happened next ...

Eventually, the tradition caught the attention of school officials, who warned the family that sharing Scriptures at school was "not allowed." The family complied, only to find out that the principal made a ban on Bible verses official school policy.

(5) The family complied, but the 7-year-old son shared the verses with his friends after school, off school property, on the public sidewalk, as they walked home.

(6) What happened next was, truly, *unbelievable!*

(7) The school contacted the County Sheriff, who sent a deputy to Jamie and Christina Zavala's home *warning* the family that if this public sharing of Bible verses continued, serious repercussions would follow.

(8) Fox News rightly concluded ...

Apparently, all the real criminals have been dealt with in Palmdale -- and now they're going after kids who share Bible verses during lunch time." Surely, there are better uses of the California police force than scolding a little boy for sharing the virtue and morality of the Bible. What's more, this was outside of class time and off school property. If that doesn't dispel the idea that the government is neutral on religion, I don't know what will. Neutrality says we won't make a value judgment. But clearly, this school - and hundreds of others - have made one. And it isn't a good one - or, as most attorneys will tell you, a constitutional one.

6. What does a Christian do when their President slanders them and promotes flagrant sin, when institutions clamp down on religious freedoms, and when a School Principal and Local Sheriff combine forces to silence your freedom of Speech and Religion?
7. Answer: *You pray. You take your “case” before the Lord, the judge and ruler of all mankind, and ask for vindication!*
8. *“Hear a just cause, O Lord ...” (Ps. 17:1)*
9. **James L. Mays:** *Psalms: Interpretations; p. 89*
The prayer typically uses language that draws on different spheres of experience and culture in Israel. The opening petition employs legal language and appeals to the Lord as judge.
10. A Rich and Profound Prayer in three Parts:
 - a) An Appeal for God’s Vindicating Judgment (17:1-5)
 - b) A Request for God’s Protection as a Refuge (17:6-12)
 - c) A Prayer for God’s Deliverance from Evil (17:13-15)

I. UNDERSTANDING THE PRAYER OF PSALM 17

A. First: This is a prayer for vindication before God (1-5)

1. *Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!
Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!
From your presence let my vindication come!
Let your eyes behold the right!
You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night,
you have tested me, and you will find nothing;
I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.
With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.
My steps have held fast to your paths;
my feet have not slipped. (Ps. 17:1-5)*
2. **Arthur Weiser:** *The Psalms: OTL; p. 180*
He is persecuted by wicked adversaries and is wrongly accused by them. He therefore pleads his cause before God in the Temple that he might be vindicated by him (v. 2) and asks for his help (vv.6 ff.)
3. There is a *careful development* of an argument, justification, case which is set before God, as a lawyer sets his case before the judge.
4. **First:** David tells God the Judge what he is seeking
 - a) *Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!
Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!
From your presence let my vindication come!
Let your eyes behold the right! (Ps. 17:1-2)*
 - b) for God to “*hear a just cause*” (Give me a fair hearing)
 - c) for God to “*give ear to a prayer free of deceit*” (Listen to me.)

- d) for God to *vindicate* him (Declare me not guilty)
 - e) for God's *eyes to behold the right* (See the truth)
5. **Second:** David then enters his formal plea: **Not Guilty!**
- a) *You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing;*
I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.
My steps have held fast to your paths;
my feet have not slipped. (Ps. 17:3-5)
 - b) God has *tried* David's heart and *tested* him as a man
 - c) God *will find nothing* David is guilty of doing
 - d) David has resolved (*purposed*) to avoid the sinful ways of evil, violent men ...
 - e) ... and to hold to God's *path* of righteousness.
6. For many David sounds both *self-righteous* and *dishonest*. He appears to be claiming his own perfection.
7. *Not so!* David is simply saying, "*When it comes to these accusations of my enemy, you, God, know both my heart and manner of life; you know these charges are untrue and without warrant.*"
8. **Today**, in our world of cheap grace that allows us to wallow in sin, our own unresolved guilt, and our *postmodern pessimism* that enjoys moral failure in others and resents a godly lifestyle, we need to hear what **Alexander McLaren** has to say about David's plea –
- a) *The modern type of religion which recoils from such professions, and contents itself with always confessing sins which it has given up hope of overcoming, would be all the better for listening to the psalmist and aiming a little more vigorously and hopefully at being able to say, "I know nothing against myself." There is no danger in such a saying, if it be accompanied by "Yet am I not hereby justified" and by "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."*
 - b) **H.C. Leopold** explains what David is saying (*Psalms; pp. 154-155*)
As to the note of self-righteousness charged against the writer, this is, in the last analysis, nothing more than the claim: I am not guilty of the things with which I am charged; besides, I have sought to live a blameless life and am not to be charged with insincerity. If this claim is maintained rather stoutly, it should not be over looked that the writer had apparently been slandered rather viciously. Such an attack naturally calls for an indignant disavowal.
9. It is **not** humility to sit by and let others slander your character and impugn your Christian witness. To do so is truly both *moral indifference* reinforced by *moral cowardness*.
10. **The point:** *when others falsely accuse us our hearts and our lives will speak the truth to God, who both sees and judges rightly.*
11. David's legal plea and presentation of his case develops even further ...

B. Second: This is a prayer of refuge in God (6-12)

1. *I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me; hear my words.
Wondrously show your steadfast love,
O Savior of those who seek refuge
from their adversaries at your right hand.
Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings,
from the wicked who do me violence,
my deadly enemies who surround me.
(Ps. 17:6-9)*
2. David prays three things here. **First:** he appeals to God’s covenant with him ...
 - a) *I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words.
Wondrously show your steadfast love,
O Savior of those who seek refuge
from their adversaries at your right hand. (Ps. 17:6-7)*
 - b) **There is that key word again:** “steadfast love”
 - c) *chesed:* Covenant love and loyalty
 - d) *Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Samuel 7:8-13)*
 - e) David is praying, “Remember your covenant promise to me, O Lord, to cut off all my enemies, protect me and establish my throne forever!”
 - f) **A promise is a promise!**
3. **Second:** David asks God to shelter him because he is God’s favored one ... His favorite!
 - a) *Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings,
from the wicked who do me violence,
my deadly enemies who surround me.
(Ps. 17:8-9)*
 - b) “*the apple of your eye*” – the child a person loves most.

- c) David is quoting Moses about Israel, and applying the truth to himself, as Israel's king

*“He found him in a desert land,
and in the howling waste of the wilderness;
he encircled him, he cared for him,
he kept him as the apple of his eye.
Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions, (Deut. 32:10-11)*

- d) **John Goldingay:** *“The simile in the first takes up the idea that in the eye one can see a tiny image of oneself. (Psalms: Vol. 1; p. 241)*

- e) *O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,
lest like a lion they tear my soul apart,
rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.
(Ps. 7:1-2)*

- f) When God looks at David (or the Believer) He sees a reflection of His Son, because

(1) David was a *type* of Christ

(2) We are found to be *in* Christ

(3) *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)*

4. **Third:** David contrasts himself to his enemies – pitiless, arrogant, violent people –

- a) *They close their hearts to pity;
with their mouths they speak arrogantly.
They have now surrounded our steps;
they set their eyes to cast us to the ground.
He is like a lion eager to tear,
as a young lion lurking in ambush. (Ps. 17:10-12)*

- b) **James M. Boice:** *Psalms: Volume 1; p. 142*

The third of David's reasons why God should hear him seems a bit humdrum compared with the first two, but it was not humdrum to the psalmist. It is the danger in which he found himself. He speaks about it in verse 10-12. This is the first time in the psalm in which David speaks specifically about his problem: he has enemies, and they are threatening him.

This is a sound basis for a prayer appeal, if we know that we really are God's and are serving him. We are never on such strong ground as when we can pray that God's property and work are in danger and that we need his deliverance.

- c) This is a **strong basis** for David's prayer and a powerful point in his case.

5. God is a God of mercy. God is a humble God. God is kind, benevolent and protective of life. How then could God rule **for** those who ...
- close their heart to pity (mercy)?*
 - speak arrogantly with their mouths?*
 - are lurking in ambush like a wild lion?*
 - Answer: *He cannot. God always sides with His Covenant children and against the wicked. Period.*

6. **Here is another problem** Christians face today: *For them all sin is the same, equal, and no sin (or sinners) are worse than others!*

- But ... **not to God**. Sin comes in degrees of evil.
 - lust is bad but not as bad as fornication
 - fornication is bad but not as bad as homosexuality
 - blasphemy is serious, but not as serious as idolatry
 - Christians are sinners but they are redeemed in Christ and no longer in open rebellion against God.

b) **Does this give us reason to Boast in pride? No!**

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

- But it **does** give us warrant to ask God to destroy evil and evil men before they destroy God's redeemed people!

7. Make no mistake about it: *David is asking God to choose sides between those justified by grace and those pitted against God.*

C. Third: This is a prayer for Deliverance by God (13-15)

- Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him!
Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword,
from men by your hand, O Lord,
from men of the world whose portion is in this life.
You fill their womb with treasure;
they are satisfied with children,
and they leave their abundance to their infants.
As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. (Ps. 17:13-15)*

2. David calls on God for action: **deliverance**.

3. **John Goldingay** translates this difficult Hebrew verse this way:

*Rise, Yhwh,
go to meet him face to face, put him down.
Rescue my life from the faithless by your sword,
from mortals by your hand, Yhwh,*

*From mortals – in their lifetime will you fill their belly
with their share in life, with what you have stored up.
Their children are to be replete,
they are to leave what they have left to their offspring.*

4. Here is David's reasoning with God: *Lord, deliver us from evil men, and since evil societies are formed by families and groups committed to evil, it does no good for you to eliminate the evil individual unless you also eliminate their system of evil passed on to their children. You must eliminate them too!*

5. David, as King, prays not only for himself but also for his children (royal line), Israel, and the generations yet to come – the children not yet born.

6. The enemies are now clearly defined: "*men of the world*"

a) i.e., *mortals* (Hebrew: *mimetim*)

b) some translators render this 14th verse this way ...

c) "*Kill them by your hand, O Lord; Kill them from the world ...*" (**Peter C. Craigie**)

d) An imprecatory prayer in vv. 13-14

7. David ends his prayer in verse 15 by saying

a) *As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. (Ps. 17:15)*

b) He moves from the general (*God's favored ones*)

c) to the personal and specific (*himself*)

d) **He is confident that he has won his case, secured his verdict and received his vindication in God!**

e) Vindication in this world; Resurrection in the next world.

8. **Peter C. Craigie: Psalms 1-50; WBC; p. 165**

The psalm, in its current usage, may provide both hope for the immediate crisis, as for the palmist of old, but beyond that a deeper hope for ultimate deliverance from a more dangerous and insidious enemy, a hope that reaches beyond the sleep of death itself.

II. HOW TO PRAY PSALM 17

1. Can a postmodern Christian, obsessed with grace and burdened with guilt, and afraid of being *Pharisaical* more than anything else really pray this Psalm?

a) **Yes!** The Holy Spirit inspired David to write this prayer for the benefit of the OT and NT Church.

b) Jesus prayed this prayer – for us! (And perhaps in his heart for Himself, as He hung on the cross).

c) This is a prayer of a redeemed person, righteous in Christ.

2. We pray this prayer with **three realities** surrounding us; a **triangle of faith** empowering this prayer.

3. **First:** *We can pray this prayer keeping in mind the moral character of God, the Judge of all people –*
- a) *Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!
Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!
From your presence let my vindication come!
Let your eyes behold the right!
You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing;
I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.
My steps have held fast to your paths;
my feet have not slipped. (Ps. 17:1-5)*
 - b) God is a just judge because He is a holy God
 - c) He is also neither naive or senile; He sees our hearts and knows our ways.
 - d) It is **because** God is morally good that we can bring our troubles to Him and say, “*Hear a just cause, O Lord ...*” (17:1)
4. **Second:** *We should pray this prayer because of God’s cause to restore the moral order of His universe.*
- a) We’ve been talking a great deal about this moral order of the universe, in our study of Revelation.
 - b) God’s moral order depends upon His Covenant with His people: *The moral code He sets before us and calls us to follow.*
 - c) *I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me; hear my words.
Wondrously show your steadfast love,
O Savior of those who seek refuge
from their adversaries at your right hand.
Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings,
from the wicked who do me violence,
my deadly enemies who surround me.
They close their hearts to pity;
with their mouths they speak arrogantly.
They have now surrounded our steps;
they set their eyes to cast us to the ground.
He is like a lion eager to tear,
as a young lion lurking in ambush. (Ps. 17:6-12)*
 - d) It is truly **inconceivable** and **impossible** for God to ...
 - (1) *forsake* His steadfast love for us (covenant)
 - (2) *forget* His elect, the “apple of His eye”
 - (3) *forgo* His judgment upon evil in our world.

- e) **Hear me:** Those who are too squeamish to pray this prayer lack both *moral earnestness* and *moral courage*.
- f) **To be silent in the face of evil is to condone it and to promote it. The worst thing for mankind to do is for good men to do nothing!**
- g) America's silence in the face of the LGBT agenda, religious persecution, and the harassment of Christians – even their 7-year-old sons, is ...
 - (1) **not** due to tolerance or open-mindedness
 - (2) **not** caused by progressive thinking
 - (3) **not** motivated by defending “civil rights”
- h) *It is the result of moral confusion, moral compromise and more cowardice!*
- i) Christians should pray **toward** the moral order of our country, which is truly to seek the common good.

5. **Third:** *Christians will only pray this prayer once they take personal ownership of God's moral purpose in Christ's redemptive work.*

- a) As a messianic Person, David took up God's redemptive mission as his own.
- b) So, He boldly prayed ...

*Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him!
 Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword,
 from men by your hand, O Lord,
 from men of the world whose portion is in this life. You fill their womb with treasure;
 they are satisfied with children,
 and they leave their abundance to their infants.
 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
 when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. (Ps. 17:13-15)*
- c) As long as we reduce “salvation” to merely –
 - (1) our personal *justification*
 - (2) our personal *adoption*
 - (3) our personal *sense of assurance*

... we will **never** pray this prayer.
- d) Here's why: *We will lose sight of how personal sins are passed down to children, families and institutions, until it becomes both structural evil and systemic wickedness.*
- e) Jesus came to do **more** than just save a bunch of individuals.
 - (1) *Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-8)*

(2) *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Cor. 10:3-6)*

f) A true grasp of the **Gospel of God** includes the life-transforming and culture-changing power of Jesus and His Cross –

(1) *The sanctity of all human life*

(2) *The preservation of Biblical marriage*

(3) *The freedom of conscience and religion*

(4) *The end of racism and prejudice*

(5) *The liberty to share God's Word and pray in public*

(6) *Righteous Government, God-fearing Presidents, Just laws*

(7) *He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*

g) **If Jesus came** “to destroy the works of the devil,” my prayers ought to be His partner in doing so!

6. **Finally**, St. Augustine was right: “Christ is the singer of the Psalms.” This is His prayerbook. Psalm 17 was (is) one of His prayers.

a) How could I, a Christian, refuse to pray a prayer Jesus prayed?

b) *Am I more righteous, more humble, more merciful than Jesus Christ – the Author of this prayer?*

c) “*But,*” you will say, “*I'm not 100% righteous like Jesus is!*”

d) **So true.** So that is why we always pray “*in Jesus name.*”

e) “*Through Christ our Lord we pray*”

f) The *I* in this Psalm becomes the *Him* in Jesus Christ.

7. It is *Christ's* just cause I must plead before God. It is *Christ's* favor with God I must rest upon. He is the “*apple of God's eye.*” It is *Christ's* enemies who must be converted or destroyed. It is *Christ's* moral order for our world that divides mankind into believer or enemy of God!

8. When we pray this Psalm we pray *in* Christ, *with* Christ and *for* Christ.

9. “*Hear a just cause, O Lord ... vindicate your Son and His Name!*”