

Psalm 26

*Protestation of Integrity and Prayer for Protection.
A Psalm of David.*

¹ Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,
And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.
² Examine me, O LORD, and try me;
Test my mind and my heart.
³ For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes,
And I have walked in Your truth.
⁴ I do not sit with deceitful men,
Nor will I go with pretenders.
⁵ I hate the assembly of evildoers,
And I will not sit with the wicked.
⁶ I shall wash my hands in innocence,
And I will go about Your altar, O LORD,
⁷ That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving
And declare all Your wonders.
⁸ O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house
And the place where Your glory dwells.
⁹ Do not take my soul away along with sinners,
Nor my life with men of bloodshed,
¹⁰ In whose hands is a wicked scheme,
And whose right hand is full of bribes.
¹¹ But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.
¹² My foot stands on a level place;
In the congregations I shall bless the LORD.

David the Psalmist: This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king. God anointed David to be king (1 Sam.16), but King Saul refused to yield and mobilized forces to kill him. They chased David into the wilderness, where David slowly gathered those who supported him and trusted God and believed that he would one day ascend the throne.

v.1: David is likely speaking about his integrity in a limited sense: He did not kill King Saul (1 Sam.24, 26), and did not retaliate with violence, despite Saul seeking his life. He has already acknowledged other sin (Ps.25:7). So this is about his vindication as the truly anointed king, which is about his *role*, *not* vindication as the Israelite with the completely circumcised heart under the Sinai covenant who has perfected and healed human nature (Dt.10:16; 30:6), which is about his *humanness*.

v.2b: “test” (*tsaraph*) is synonymous with “smelt, refine” as a metalsmith would use fire to smelt, refine, and test precious metal (Ps.17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19; cf. Judg.17:4; 2 Sam.22:31; Neh.3:8, 32; Isa.1:25; 41:7; 48:10; Jer.6:29; 10:9).

v.4: “sit with” and “go with” and “assembly” echoes Ps.1:1.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Hebrew Biblical Poetry:* These poets rhyme *concepts* more than *sounds*, where the rhyming goes from a general thought to a more specific one. That makes it nice for those of us who have to work from the English translation. Here’s an example of a rhymed concept in v.10. Consider what the poet is saying by pairing these two lines:

In whose hands	is a wicked scheme
And whose right hand	is full of bribes.

- *David’s Trust in God’s Promise:* David knew that God defended the human leaders He appointed, and also was faithful to fulfill promises He made.
 - *God Defended Human Leaders He Appointed:* In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses unjustly, and God defended Moses. In Numbers 16, Korah led a faction in wholesale rebellion, and God used the earth to swallow them up.
 - *God Fulfilled His Promises:* In Genesis 1, God said, “Let there be light,” and then, there was light. Then in Genesis 12, God made promises to His people, and called them to trust Him. For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah He would give them a son despite them being dead in a reproductive sense. In 1 Samuel 16, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king. That was God’s promise; David is trusting God to fulfill His word.

Discussion Questions

1. In context, David is speaking in a limited and narrow sense. There are lots of times when you might be treated badly even though you didn't deserve it. Maybe you are made fun of, accused wrongly, or treated in a hostile way. Possible questions with this interpretation?
 - a. "Right, because David said he has "walked in [his] integrity," in every way, shape, and form," because he:
 - i. Already acknowledged sins of his youth and other transgressions (Ps.25:7)
 - ii. Married Ahinoam and Abigail (1 Sam.25:39 – 43) after already being married to Michal, which was questionable at the least (Gen.2:24 – 25; Dt.17:17).
 - iii. Despaired and lacked faith in God (1 Sam.27:1) despite the fact that God clearly protected David to that point.
 - b. "But David sounds like he is speaking about having complete and total integrity, in all aspects of his character. Right?"
 - i. Actually, he's not speaking that way. In v.2, David assumes that there are some things in him that God still needs to burn away, like a smelter refines away dross from gold.
 - ii. Augustine of Hippo says of Psalm 26:2, that David refers to "secret sins" that he's not aware of yet: "Lest, however, any of my secret sins should be hid from me, prove me, O Lord, and try me, making me known, not to Thee from whom nothing is hid, but to myself, and to men. Apply a remedial purgation, as it were by fire, to my pleasures and thoughts." This is certainly a good *application* of the meaning, but I don't think it is *the meaning itself*.
 - iii. Notice that David refers to "men of bloodshed" in v.9b. The more general term "sinners" in v.9a is clarified as the more specific "men of bloodshed" in v.9b, which is typical of Hebrew poetry with dynamic parallelism. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. The first line is often the more general, and the second line is the more specific, and the movement from the first line to the second is significant. That is one indication that David is referring to the hit squad that King Saul has mobilized against him.
 - iv. David could still ask God to vindicate him as the anointed king (v.1a), despite not being totally and completely perfect in every way. This is about vindication as the anointed king, *not* vindication as the Israelite with the completely circumcised heart under the Sinai covenant (Dt.10:16; 30:6).
2. Think of a time when other people mistreated you, or could mistreat you. But you loved others and yourself with integrity, prayerfully, with Jesus.
 - a. Leader: Think of a story in which you did fairly well at "loving your enemy." It's very possible to say in a limited and specific sense, "Vindicate me, O Lord!"
 - b. Does this make sense of why David refers to "deceitful men" who are "pretenders" in v.4?
 - c. It could be that King Saul paid people to support him and oppose David and hunt David down. This could be why David says in v.9 – 10 progressively that those who chase him are "sinners" who are specifically "men of bloodshed," and in their hands are "a wicked scheme" involving "a bribe."
 - i. By the way, poetically: "wicked scheme" evokes feelings of disgust and revulsion and judgment. Then, the simple phrase, "a bribe" targets those emotions at the corruption.
 - d. Application: If you are facing a situation where you are mistreated, pray for your own softness of heart towards Jesus, and wisdom from Jesus, to be truthful and upright! If you handled a situation poorly before, ask Jesus for the humility and wisdom to consider an appropriate next step.
 - e. Application: Imagine yourself in a conflict with other people, yet feeling like you have an absolutely clear conscience, and are at peace before Jesus, with regards to how you handled it. Jesus calls us to be at peace with others to the extent it depends on us (Rom.12:18).
 - f. Application: If you feel internally like other people are your competitors or enemies, even if they aren't necessarily hostile per se, pray for Jesus to refine you and show you more of yourself, like David did in v.2.
 - i. You might be an anxious person who interprets other people as demanding or threatening, even when they don't intend malice.

- ii. You might be an introverted person in the middle of very extroverted people. You might be a quieter person in the middle of assertive people. You might be the only woman in the middle of a bunch of men. You get the picture.
 - iii. Still, this Psalm challenges us to keep our role in God's kingdom in mind. We are called to be in community and even speak to everyone. We can't give up on God's kingdom community. God is crafting a testimony for us and our story is meant to encourage others.
- 3. David does not have a "me and God" view – an individualistic view. What is the picture of the people of God here?
 - a. The people are gathered to worship God, around the altar and around the sanctuary. Jewish law and tradition called people together three times a year: Passover, Pentecost, and Yom Kippur. So it was just part of the spiritual and relational rhythm.
 - b. David views himself as a worship leader of sorts. He tells God that he wants to be in the midst of the people and "proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and declare all Your wonders" (v.7).
 - c. He wants to encourage other people, too. David probably sees that his time in the wilderness is like Israel's time in the wilderness, and that his hope is a part of their hope. So God enthroning David as king is eventually related to God honoring Israel among the nations.
 - d. God has enthroned Jesus as the greatest Son of David, the true Heir of David. And we are "seated with him in the heavenly realms" (Eph.1:15 – 2:10).
 - e. Application: We need to remember Jesus has fulfilled this on our behalf, and shares his kingship with us. This certainly helps with self-esteem, defensiveness, anxiety. It also challenges us to keep his kingdom community in mind. He is always drawing together his people, and we are part of his people.