

Psalms 31:1-5, 15-16(ESV) ¹In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ³For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. ¹⁵My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! ¹⁶Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!

So many Christians are not comfortable praying out loud in a public setting such as a worship service, a Bible study, or any small group setting other than a memorized prayer such as “Come Lord Jesus be our guest,” or Our Father who art in heaven.” I have a very deep conviction that any Christian ought to be able to stand up any time in a Christian setting (non-Christian too if asked) and pray out loud a prayer from the heart. I know we have first graders in our church who are able to do so because I have heard them pray such beautiful prayers that touches the heart of God. If you really want God’s heart touched, ask a child to pray for you out loud. Their trust in God often exceeds that of adults.

In my years of ministry, I have often spoken from the pulpit this conviction regarding praying from the heart in front of other people. I had the privilege of going to a Christian school. From 7th to 12th grade, any student could be asked to pray out loud in class without any warning. Fortunately, I had parents who taught us children how to pray non-memorized prayers. In that sense, my parents taught us the prayer language.

I say all of this because our sermon text is out of the Psalms. The Psalms are a prayer book. The Psalms give to us the prayer language of so many different ways to bear our hearts to God. The Psalms are prayer guides. If you do not know how to pray from your heart, pray through the Psalms. Let what the Psalmist writes become your words. Use the Psalms like training wheels on a bicycle. We need those training wheels to teach us how to properly ride. Memorized prayers such as “Come Lord Jesus” are training wheels to give us confidence to eventually take the training wheels off and speak to God on your own as honestly and

forthrightly as you are able. I ride my bike every other day and I don't use training wheels. I still so enjoy the Psalms because they are God's Word to us, and they can become our words to God. Jesus Himself prayed to the Father using the words from the Psalms.

During this season of the virus the Psalms are especially applicable to us. David wrote this particular Psalm in a time of trouble. David had real enemies. Being the King of Israel there was a huge number of people that thought him better dead. He badly needed a safe place where he could find rest for his soul. Under the stress of having real enemies and more, David sought out his refuge in God.

David is known as having a heart for God. I interpret that this way. From childhood on, David had a close link to God. David spent hours as a boy taking care of sheep, just himself and the sheep and God, even sleeping under the stars. Sheep may bleep but they do not talk so David developed a strong inner life with God. Who else was there to talk to while taking care of sheep? David spoke to God, developing a huge love relationship with God. As you read the Psalms you gain a sense that God gave to him deep insights that you only gain by spending an incredible amount of time alone with God. David had a constant flow of communication with God, a heart for God, a mind that thought of God constantly. "The Lord is my shepherd. He meets all of my needs." "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." David had a mind directed toward God and in this sense he could perceive the mind of God.

Having said all of that David was far from perfect. The Bible also lays out David's horrendous sins including, his failure as a father. The Lord chastised David, disciplined David for his failures. And out of all of this David still clung to God, repented of his sins, and drew closer to God his entire life. Yes, he sinned greatly, and he knew ever so deeply God's forgiveness. On his deathbed he uttered these words, **1 Kings 1:29 (NIV)** ²⁹"As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble,..." **1 Kings 1:29 (ESV)** ²⁹And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity,..."

Knowing the full life of David as well as I know it, to utter these words on his deathbed means his connection with God, his heart for God was still there. Sometimes, great men and women of God have great doubts on their deathbed which I do not understand, nor do I judge. Not David. He was so well acquainted with God he already had an inner sense of certitude and confidence in God knowing without a doubt where he was going, to the Lord's house forever and ever. When you have a heart for God, a strong sense of eternity goes with it for God dwells in eternity, our safe place, our place of refuge.

I will close this sermon with prayer, using the words of David as a model for prayer. (Pastor used these words of David putting them into the context of today with an extemporaneous prayer you can listen to if you wish on YouTube at SMLC Digital).

Psalms 31:1-5, 15-16(ESV) ¹In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ³For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. ¹⁵My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! ¹⁶Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!