

**“Crying Out for Mercy”**

*Psalm 86*

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(Lord’s Day Service, Sunday, July 22, 2018)

**Psalm 86**

*Great Is Your Steadfast Love*

*A Prayer of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> *Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,  
for I am poor and needy.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Preserve my life, for I am godly;  
save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to you do I cry all the day.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Gladden the soul of your servant,  
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*
- <sup>5</sup> *For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,  
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;  
listen to my plea for grace.*
- <sup>7</sup> *In the day of my trouble I call upon you,  
for you answer me.*
- <sup>8</sup> *There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,  
nor are there any works like yours.*
- <sup>9</sup> *All the nations you have made shall come  
and worship before you, O Lord,  
and shall glorify your name.*
- <sup>10</sup> *For you are great and do wondrous things;  
you alone are God.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
unite my heart to fear your name.*
- <sup>12</sup> *I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,  
and I will glorify your name forever.*
- <sup>13</sup> *For great is your steadfast love toward me;  
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*
- <sup>14</sup> *O God, insolent men have risen up against me;  
a band of ruthless men seeks my life,  
and they do not set you before them.*
- <sup>15</sup> *But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant,  
and save the son of your maidservant.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Show me a sign of your favor,*

*that those who hate me may see and be put to shame  
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

## **Introduction**

This psalm confesses that the Lord is good and forgiving, as the author acknowledges his own sin that contributed to his enemies' plans. The Book of Psalms is divided into five major books, and this is the only Psalm of David in Book Three. It is filled with at least 15 petitions that derive from one main idea: an appeal for mercy based on the character of God. The term "mercy" is used throughout the chapter—most explicitly in verses 3, 6, and 16.

Psalm 86:3, 6, 16

<sup>3</sup> *Be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to you do I cry all the day.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;  
listen to my plea for grace.*  
<sup>16</sup> *Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant,  
and save the son of your maidservant.*

Grace is everything that God gives to us, and mercy is a subset of grace. Specifically, mercy stands in the midst of our failures and when we are in need of God. Mercy is appropriate in this chapter because the psalm writer is talking about his own sin and the consequences from it. Why don't we typically appeal to mercy in our prayers? Perhaps we don't know the concept of mercy, or perhaps we don't understand the depth of our sin. Therefore, we do not show mercy to other people. As we look into this chapter, let's learn how to cry out for God's mercy.

### **I. Prayer of the needy – Plea for mercy [0-7]**

#### **A. We must see the desperate needs of our hearts [0-1]**

*Great Is Your Steadfast Love  
A Prayer of David.*

<sup>1</sup> *Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,  
for I am poor and needy.*

"Poor" and "needy" are associated with poverty and often used together. "Need" is used to convey misery that results from oppression. David is praying as enemies are surrounding him. "Incline your ear" means to stretch out. David is desperately asking God to listen to his prayer. We need to see the desperate needs of our hearts. As human beings, we have two kinds of needs: wickedness and deficiency. One is due to our sin nature – we are sinful and need God's mercy. But also in our Spirit's nature, we are not God and are still in need of Him and His strength. Whether it is our deficiency or wickedness, we must see our hearts' desperate need for His grace and mercy.

**B. We must know that God is the only One that can meet our needs [2-4]**

<sup>2</sup> *Preserve my life, for I am godly;*

*save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.*

<sup>3</sup> *Be gracious to me, O Lord,*

*for to you do I cry all the day.*

<sup>4</sup> *Gladden the soul of your servant,*

*for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*

When David writes, “I am godly” in verse 2, he is not claiming that he’s awesome but that he’s god-ward – the direction and purpose of his life is to live for God. David’s godliness is not the basis or cause of his plea, but rather, mercy enables him to live for God and to glorify Him. When he says, “to you do I cry all the day long”, we see that David’s life is in danger and that he’s discouraged. But he is not passively sitting there, dwelling on his unfortunate situation. Rather, he’s crying out to God. There’s a world of a difference between crying and crying out to God. As you go through hardships and difficulties, cry, but use your cries to move towards God. Then he says, “for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul”. “Lift up” means to carry. Your soul does not want to go there on its own volition, but carry it to God so that He will fill you with His mercy. God is the only One who can meet our needs. We must understand the uselessness of doing anything other than crying out to God in our depressed circumstances.

**C. We must understand God is good and forgiving, therefore He will listen to our plea for mercy [5-7]**

<sup>5</sup> *For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,*

*abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.*

<sup>6</sup> *Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;*

*listen to my plea for grace.*

<sup>7</sup> *In the day of my trouble I call upon you,*

*for you answer me.*

God’s character, not David’s, is the reason and the foundation that God will answer this prayer, which is why the word “forgiving” is used. It is possible that David is facing the consequences of his sins. There are general consequences and specific consequences of sin. Specific consequences are a result of having committed certain acts. But general consequences are a result of sin having entered this world – there are natural tragedies, sickness, and death all around us. In this life, all of us will face general or specific consequences of sin. However, it’s difficult to tell whether things happen to us because of specific or general consequences of sin. Therefore, when situations arise, don’t judge other people. Always be repentant because our sinful nature still operates in every situation. Face the situation as you cry out to God, and as you overcome, grow to be more like Christ, and shine His name and character into the world.

As we face hardships and difficulties, we need to remember that God does not hate us, nor is He punishing us. He's disciplining us as a loving parent for our good. If He really hated us, He could easily get rid of us. Whatever we face in this life is nothing compared to what we really deserve. God is working all things for the good of those who love Him, and maturity is the ability to see that. Good can come from anything and everything we face in this life. Whatever we face is for our good and for His purpose. It may be painful, but God will never abandon those who are in Jesus Christ. He will always hear our prayers in the midst of hardships because we are His children.

The phrase, "my plea for grace" is one word in Hebrew, and it means "earnest prayer". And inside this Hebrew word is the base word "mercy". This tells us that the basis of all of our pleas is mercy. Everything that we cry out to God for is founded upon His mercy. Mercy is favor given to an undeserving receiver by an unobligated giver. Whatever we get and whatever we don't get, all of the good and all of the bad, is out of His mercy. If that is our foundation, we can always cry out to the Lord.

## **II. Prayer for God's glory – Purpose of mercy [8-10]**

When we receive mercy, it's not just for our comfort or relief, though it may provide both of those things. It's not there so that we can abuse the grace of God. The goal and purpose of mercy is for His glory.

### **A. He is worthy to be praised [8]**

*<sup>8</sup> There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,  
nor are there any works like yours.*

In verse 8, "none like you" refers to who God is, and "any works like yours" refers to what God does. As you look into the Bible, these are the core reasons why we should praise Him. When we talk about who God is, we talk about His character. There is no god like our God. When there was nothing, there was God and only God. When we talk about what God does, we know that His work is trustworthy because it comes from His character. Therefore, His works are consistent and trustworthy.

### **B. He is worthy to be praised by all nations [9]**

*<sup>9</sup> All the nations you have made shall come  
and worship before you, O Lord,  
and shall glorify your name.*

This is the center verse of the psalm and contains its most exalted confession of faith concerning God's sovereign and universal rule. "All the nations" means everyone, and "shall glorify your name" means that God deserves all praise that exists in this world.

### **C. He alone is worthy to be praised [10]**

*<sup>10</sup> For you are great and do wondrous things;  
you alone are God.*

“For you are great” talks about who God is, “and do wondrous things” talks about what God does. And then it says, “you alone are God”, which means that He alone is to be praised. This is the most comprehensive way to talk about the worthiness of God, who is to be praised.

Throughout this psalm, three names of God are used: Elohim (5 times), Yahweh (4 times), and Adonai (7 times). Elohim translates to “God” and refers to God’s supreme deity over any other. Yahweh translates to “LORD” and is the name that God used to refer to Himself with Moses and the Israelites. It means that God keeps His covenant promises. Adonai translates to “Lord” and means “my master.” When you put these three names together, it summarizes who God is: He is above any other, He keeps His promises, so therefore, He’s my master and my Lord.

### **III. Prayer for an undivided heart – Process of mercy [11-13]**

#### **A. Praying for an undivided heart [11]**

*<sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
unite my heart to fear your name.*

“Teach” involves your head, “walk” involves your feet, and “heart” involves your heart. David is praying for the saturation of his entire being so that he can live for God and glorify Him. What good would it be if God saved David from his circumstances and the consequences of sin, but didn’t save him from the cause of sin, which is his heart? David is praying for God to save him from enemies on the outside and the enemy within – his sinful nature. The phrase “unite my heart” means “to make it one” and “undivided in its loyalty”. We have the desire to love God, but there are so many other desires that do not love God. David is asking God to help him to have only one desire to love Him in everything that he does—one desire for God that stands alone, with no other competing desires.

#### **B. Proof of an undivided heart [12]**

*<sup>12</sup> I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,  
and I will glorify your name forever.*

##### **1. Wholehearted gratitude**

The opposite of being thankful is to complain. We complain when we experience pain that we don’t want or we are not experiencing pleasure that we do want. But in the midst of hardships, we have God. Therefore, when we are undivided in our hearts, we are wholeheartedly thankful.

##### **2. Focused life**

The opposite of a focused life is an unfocused life that continuously seeks different pleasures. So, when we have undivided hearts, we can be so focused to live for the Lord even in the midst of hardships.

### **C. Proclamation of an undivided heart [13]**

*<sup>13</sup> For great is your steadfast love toward me;  
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

God's heart is undivided towards us, despite our hearts that are so divided towards Him. "Sheol" means "grave" or "hell". Whether we are saved from the circumstances of this life or from eternal condemnation, we should wholeheartedly be thankful knowing that He's undivided in His love for us.

*Romans 5:5 – and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

The Holy Spirit uses prayer and the Word to pour God's love into our hearts. Is your life united and focused? Are your conscience, will, intellect, and emotion in harmony, or are they in conflict with one another? Until your kingdom is overthrown and there is crisis on the throne of your soul, peace and prosperity cannot dwell there. This is all made possible because of His mercy. We need His mercy to have an undivided heart that will live according to His Word.

## **IV. Prayer for prevailing power – Power of mercy [14-17]**

### **A. Problems [14]**

*<sup>14</sup> O God, insolent men have risen up against me;  
a band of ruthless men seeks my life,  
and they do not set you before them.*

The word "ruthless" suggests ferocity. We have enemies in all spheres of life that stimulate our hearts to sin against God. Hardships expose our divided hearts. David's hardships can be categorized in one of two time periods: before he became king and after he became king. Before he became king, he faced difficulties through his father-in-law, which were more general consequences of sin. After he became king, he faced specific consequences of his own sins. In this psalm, he is probably facing specific consequences of sin, and he cries out to the Lord.

### **B. Promises [15]**

*<sup>15</sup> But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

Verse 15 is similar to verse 5, but David is alluding to the Old Testament when Moses asks for God's glory. God hides His face because if He really showed Himself, no one would live. As He barely shows Moses the back of Himself, He speaks this word, which is His glory.

*Exodus 34:6 – The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,*

This unfolds the meaning of the name of God expressed in His mercy to all who confess their sin and come to Him. This is one of the greatest revelations of God in the Bible and is one of the most frequently quoted passages of the Old Testament. With this character of God as the foundation, we see that David's prayer is intensely personal. The writer refers to himself about 35 times not because he's selfish, but because he remembers himself in relation to God. Make these promises personal so that in the days of your trouble, you can cry out to God.

### **C. Power [16]**

*<sup>16</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant,  
and save the son of your maidservant.*

When the psalm says, "give your strength", David is asking for God's power to be made his own. The phrase "the son of your maidservant" means that David comes from the household of God and that he himself has been a servant of God from infancy. David asks for power so that he can continuously serve God.

### **D. Praise [17]**

*<sup>17</sup> Show me a sign of your favor,  
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame  
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

David is asking God to show a sign of His favor so that his enemies can see it and be blessed. The faithful do not worry that God will abandon them because of their sin. God will uphold them so that the world can see that God is merciful to them.

Charles Spurgeon says that we should learn to pray with arguments. Otherwise, we have worldly motives and pray for our own good and comfort. When we have Biblical reasons, our worldliness is washed away, and we trust God. This is not for God's benefit, as if God forgets His promises, but for our own benefit so that our minds can become more Biblical and trusting of Him.

Psalm 86:1-4, 7, 10, 13, 17

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for I am poor and needy.*

*<sup>2</sup> Preserve my life, for I am godly;  
save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.*

*<sup>3</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to you do I cry all the day.*

*<sup>4</sup> Gladden the soul of your servant,  
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*

*<sup>7</sup> In the day of my trouble I call upon you,  
for you answer me.*

<sup>10</sup> *For you are great and do wondrous things;  
you alone are God.*

<sup>13</sup> *For great is your steadfast love toward me;  
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

<sup>17</sup> *Show me a sign of your favor,  
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame  
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

We see that David is thinking of God's promises by looking at the words "for" and "because" in these verses. A summary of these reasons is in a phrase used in verse 13, "for great is your steadfast love toward me". The Hebrew word for steadfast love is "hesed", which means God's loyal, covenant love towards us. God demonstrates this love by making us His children through a new birth in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ Himself is a summary of the reasons for our prayer.

*Matthew 7:9-11 – Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

Because of Jesus, we can receive, and we know that God will answer our prayer. So let's go to Him, for there is an ocean of mercy available for us who are in Jesus Christ.