

Read also *Ephesians 1:15-23*. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

What things are on your heart so much that you immediately pray about them? Do you pray about good news? Do you sit down and thank God you are here on this earth in 2017? Do you talk to the Lord about decisions you are trying to make? Do you pray for people who are sick?

Today's passage is a prayer made by a governmental leader of the highest order; the King of a nation that still exists today. The very last line describes the subject of the prayer.

A prayer of one overwhelmed with trouble, pouring out problems before the LORD.

Have you prayed that way? You pray and then you say,

Signed, one overwhelmed with trouble, pouring out problems to the Lord.

Sounds to me like an excellent way to pray. Let's hear the prayer. As we do so, remember, this is the King, so you can imagine his concerns for his government, his leaders, his citizens, his army, his police, his city councils, and his trash collectors. He is overwhelmed with trouble and turning to whom we should all go when we are overwhelmed.

Before we read, let's think how we would do it.

If you had problems with your job or the people you were responsible for, or at home, would it make you be just a little bit introspective? Would you examine your own behavior first and resolve to do the right thing?

Lord, I go to church every week! And I give money to Duncanville Outreach Ministry. I won't even take it out of my tithe. And, I'll be nice to my wife and won't cheat on my taxes! I'll go to Sunday School.

That's the sort of tact King David took. Hear the Word. [READ Psalm 101]

A few hundred years after King David wrote this, in the region of Israel in what is now Greece, Turkey, and Italy, a region that already had the Old Testament Scriptures, Greek colonies developed some of the greatest literature, art, sculpture, and architecture. From this great culture, the western world's first democracy originated. Greek rulebooks of rhetoric were adopted which set out the rules and conventions of a good society. These rulebooks were followed by ordinary citizens who were given the right to argue their own disputes in court. The subject matter was morality and ethics.

As this culture of democracy developed, philosophers insisted that the leader in society who was effective was a good person who was capable of examining values and asking questions about right and wrong. They knew how to present their opinions persuasively based on values and questions about right and wrong.

This was about 400 years before Christ that the foundation for western democracy was established.

When we have a legal problem we usually hire a lawyer and go to court because the lawyer is trained to argue your case. Your lawyer likely studied the book *Rhetoric*, by Aristotle. Aristotle tutored Alexander the Great, under whom Greek civilization spread, and after Greece fell, its principles were adopted by the Roman Republic. Even today their philosopher, Cicero is studied in Latin classes.

Why is this important?

Underpinning our governmental principles is the very structure developed from that period: a strong moral tone.

We are not on an upward trajectory of better and better democracy. Nations are fluid in the sense that they depend on people, and thus moral principles get stronger and weaker at times. The two things that were said to have brought down democracy and morality: the love of wealth and pleasure.¹

Being able to discern right and wrong was considered the duty of a citizen—to have a strong moral character; to be good.

You may think that does not matter in 2017 but I assure you it does. This Psalm is relevant for you and it says that exact thing.

Integrity makes a difference.

Leaders, politicians, and citizens had the duty to be able to discern right and wrong and to discern truth, and we do, too.

This has continued to be a value throughout the centuries, despite the ups and downs. We need to understand its power—the power of being a person of integrity.

What is integrity? According to Webster it is: *adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty*. In Hebrew the word means: *guilelessness, good faith; blamelessness, purity of heart; walk in integrity*

So here are the values of our passage. A good person:

- lives a blameless life ~ at home, also.
- Refuses to look at anything vile and vulgar.
- Rejects crooked deals and perverse ideas.
- Does not slander the neighbors.
- Is not arrogant.
- Has faithful friends.

The King also looked for staff people who were above reproach. He hired employees who did not lie or deceive. He pledged to keep an eye out for wicked people and usher them out of town.

¹ Winifred Bryan Horner, *Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 7.

Do you think it is possible to live up to that high bar? Or do you dismiss it as unattainable?

The king prayed it—it is passed on to us as a reasonable prayer. Do you believe we can do it?
There are two keys:

He has faithful friends (vs. 6)

Do you have friends that seek integrity, who do good, and strive to be upright and decent? It helps! How many people are drawn away by a bad influence!

Secondly, notice verse two: “I will be careful to live a blameless life-- *when will you come to help me?*” David could not do it without God’s help!

In Ephesians we are told that there is power in the name of Jesus because Jesus was raised up by God. Paul’s prayer is that you understand that same power is in you. So you can raise the bar because “Your Lord is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else--” and He will help you.

This is not an empty request: “Oh God, I find it impossible to be good in this area or that...” and then we crumble in defeat. No, we must reject that!

Do you struggle with lying or yelling or turning your back on your friend or do you deceive others? Ask God to send the power of the resurrection your way! God is willing to help you.

Order my steps in Your word dear Lord,
lead me, guide me everyday,
send Your anointing, Father I pray;

Bridle my tongue let my words edify,
let the words of my mouth be acceptable in Thy sight,
take charge of my thoughts both day and night;
Order my steps in Your word.

Do you want to walk worthy? Ask Him for help and He will help you.

God’s Word establishes the truth. You have to study and question it and contend with it. If you make the effort, He will come through.

Again, why is integrity important?

Christian B. Miller, Professor of Philosophy at Wake Forest University is the project leader of the Character Project. He says we should be good because it takes good character to help other people. He says, we tend to not be virtuous. He bases his opinion on hundreds of studies. He says the first reason we should strive for goodness is that God wants us to become good. If you don’t buy that, strive to be good because it makes the world a better place.²

² Christian B. Miller, “Why be Good for a Three-Year-Old” at <http://www.slate.com/bigideas/why-be-good/essays-and-opinions/>, accessed January 23, 2017.

Striving to be good matters. Let's watch this video. You will hear a letter read from parents to their children. Notice the admonition to be good, and the witness of the goodness counteracting and overcome the evil. Watch.

Goodness. Integrity. The most powerful actions in the world. Freely strive to become good, for God's sake and for yours.

AMEN
