

Praying in the Dark

Psalm 18

Rev. Brian Bill

August 2-3, 2025

I needed GPS to find my way back up here today! Let me explain where I've been the last three weekends. A couple months months ago, I asked the deacons if I could take some time off from preaching to expend extra effort on future planning. As a result, I scheduled other pastors on our team to speak during our "Summer in the Psalms" series.

Beth and I celebrated our 40th Anniversary three weeks ago. Two weeks ago, I had a blast teaching the Junior and Senior High students during the first service and then left quickly because Beth's dad was in the ICU and had taken a turn for the worse. This past weekend, I was with Beth and her family as we gathered for her father's funeral.

I engaged online for each service. Three weeks ago, I was deeply ministered to by Pastor Daniel and David Beebe, along with the Celebrate Recovery Team. Two weeks ago, I celebrated as Pastor Chris preached on repentance and how to pray for the prodigals in our life. Last weekend, I learned from Pastor Chad's deep insights into Psalm 22. And several weeks ago, Pastor Kyle expertly tackled the topic of anxiety and depression by walking us through Psalm 13. Along with Pastor Ed and Pastor Dan's preaching abilities, Edgewood has been blessed with high caliber pastors who revere God's Word and have the ability to interpret and apply it to our lives.

It's about time there's been some good preaching around here!

In 2018, the world was captivated by the story of twelve teenage boys and their soccer coach, who were trapped deep inside an underground cave system in Thailand. Heavy rains had flooded the passageways, cutting off their exit. For nine days, they sat in total darkness, unsure if anyone even knew where they were.

They had no light, no food, and no idea how to escape. Then, out of the silence, a light pierced the darkness. Two divers emerged, shining their beams into the black cave. The rescue that followed was complex and dangerous. After 18 dark days, everyone was rescued. And when they reached the surface, the world rejoiced.

David knew what it was like to be surrounded by the darkness of a cold cave as described in Psalm 18. He also dealt with darkness in his own soul as he was hunted, hated, and hemmed in.

Think back to a time when God became very personal to you. As you recall the situation, was it during a time of trial and trouble or was it a period when everything was going great? My guess is you've sensed God's closeness more during tough times and dark days than when everything was rosy.

I think of Andrew and Hannah Cato who read Psalm 18 over their baby son Barrett each night he was in the hospital. This has been Hannah's favorite Psalm for a long time. I read the first part of this psalm to someone who was struggling just this week.

Psalm 18 is a song written by David as he gave glory to God for bringing him through some very dark days, as God delivered him from his enemies, from King Saul, and from his own son Absalom. Commentators suggest David was on the run for 8-10 years!

The words to this song can also be found in 2 Samuel 22. These lyrics were later expanded and used in public worship, which is what we have recorded in Psalm 18. It's similar to a songwriter who writes a song out of private pain and then the song is picked up and sung by congregations around the world. Since it's recorded twice, we should take double note of it.

We're given a superscription, or an introduction, which provides the setting for David's song: *"To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said..."*

A few things jump out. First, this Psalm is intended to be sung. Second, David is called the servant of the LORD. What a great reminder for us. We are saved to sing and to serve. Third, this was written to the Lord in praise for His attributes and His actions on David's behalf.

We don't have time to consider the entire Psalm because it's the third longest one in the Psalter, but I hope you'll take the time to dive in for yourself. We'll spend most of our time on the first six verses and will touch on some highlights from the rest of the Psalm as an incentive for you to read and reflect on all 50 verses.

As we read the opening verses, let's give special emphasis to the words "my," "I" and "me" to see how personal God is to David. Let's emphasize these words when we read.

"I love you, O LORD, ***my*** strength.
The LORD is ***my*** rock and ***my*** fortress and ***my*** deliverer,
my God, ***my*** rock, in whom ***I*** take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of ***my*** salvation, ***my*** stronghold.
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
and ***I*** am saved from ***my*** enemies.
The cords of death encompassed ***me***;
the torrents of destruction assailed ***me***;
the cords of Sheol entangled ***me***;
the snares of death confronted ***me***.
In ***my*** distress ***I*** called upon the LORD;
to ***my*** God ***I*** cried for help.
From his temple he heard ***my*** voice,
and ***my*** cry to him reached his ears."

I counted 24 times that "my," "I" and "me" are used in just six verses! When did God become so personal to David? He became personal when David had problems that were overwhelming to him. David could have said, "*The LORD is the rock, the fortress and the deliverer*" and that would have been true. He even could have said, "*The LORD is a shield and a stronghold*" and that would be true, too. But he didn't. He said, "*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge.*" Pagan religions often referred to gods in impersonal and impotent ways. But David's God is powerful, personal, and present. Do you have a personal relationship with Him?

The word "rock" appears four times in this Psalm, which gives us a clue as to its theme. Here's our main idea: *When you're rocked by life, make sure the Lord is your Rock.*

I'm going to borrow the first part of our outline from Alan Carr and will add to it as we go through the passage.

1. God is worthy of my delight. In verse 1, David makes two declarations: "***I love you, O LORD, my strength.***" If you're struggling today, it's important to declare what you will do in spite of all that you're going through.

- **I will love the LORD.** This Hebrew word for “love” is more affectionate than the other word, which speaks of covenant love. It has the idea of a strong yet fond love, a love that is felt deeply in the gut, from the bottom of the heart. David is saying that he loves the LORD with tender affection and intimacy, like a mother does her infant child. This is not just love in the head but love that captivates the heart.

I appreciate how Pastor Chris often begins his prayers: *“We love you, Lord.”* When I asked why he does this, he replied: *“I say it in praise of God, but it also is a reminder for me. It helps to set my heart right. We are to love the LORD with our heart, mind, and strength. Starting my prayer this way, is a reminder to me to make the choice to love Him with everything.”* When’s the last time you told God that you love Him?

- **I will lean on the LORD.** The first time David uses *“my,”* he refers to the Lord as *“my strength.”* He’s settling this once and for all. He’s weak but God is strong and therefore he chooses to lean on Him.

When you’re rocked by life, make sure the Lord is your Rock.

2. God is worthy of my dependence. We’re called to delight in the LORD and we’re called to depend on Him. In verse 2, David lists eight metaphors that describe how powerful, yet personal our God is. It’s as if he listed all the attributes and multifaceted mercies he could think of and squeezed them into one verse: *“The LORD is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”*

- **God is my stability.** The word *“rock”* refers to a lofty cleft where one can find stability in the midst of the messes of life. In 1 Samuel 23:28, David refers to God as his *“Rock of Escape.”* A rock speaks of unchangeable stability. Drop down to verse 31: *“For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?”* and verse 46: *“The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation.”* Deuteronomy 32:31 states: *“For their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies are by themselves.”*

Are you anchored to the rock? Is God your stability today?

- **God is my safety.** God is also like a *“fortress,”* which pictures those places high up in the mountains where David hid when Saul was searching for him. Psalm 91:2 says, *“I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress...’”*

When our son-in-law Matt was out of work, I prayed this Psalm on a regular basis for him. Several weeks ago, I sent him some verses: *“He brought me out into a BROAD place” (19); “He set me SECURE on the heights” (33); “You gave a WIDE place for my steps” (36). He’s got this, Matt...and He is keeping you secure as you trust in Him.”*

- **God is my Savior.** When David calls the LORD his *“deliverer,”* he’s calling on Him as *“one who saves and delivers from danger.”* This literally means to escape or to be given *“a legal judgment of freedom.”* This verse is quoted in Romans 11:26 to show that the Deliverer, whom we know as Christ, will come from Zion. Can you say today that Jesus is your deliverer? Is He your Savior?
- **God is my Sovereign.** David uses the name *“El”* for God which refers to Him as the Almighty God. He is over all things and in control of everything. Spurgeon said it like this, *“My perpetual, unchanging, infinite, eternal God.”* El is often used as a prefix with other nouns or adjectives to express a name for God, like “El-Shaddai,” which means, *God Almighty* or “El Roi,” the *God who sees*.
- **God is my strength.** Referring to an immovable rock or huge boulder, God never changes: *“My God, my Rock, in whom I take refuge.”* When everything else changes, hold on to the One who never changes and run to Him for refuge. If you’ve experienced loss, Grief Share and Divorce Care will be starting again on Sunday, September 7. Our Alzheimer’s Support Group meets the last Sunday of every month at 2:00 p.m.
- **God is my shield.** Sometimes God allows adversity to come into our lives and other times He shields us from storms. Drop down to verse 30: *“He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him”* and verse 35: *“You have given me the shield of your salvation.”* A shield was used to ward off the blows from an enemy. When Abraham was uncertain and afraid, listen to how God refers to Himself in Genesis 15:1: *“Fear not, Abram, I am your shield.”*

- **God is my salvation.** Next, David calls God his *“horn of salvation.”* This phrase is rich in meaning and can refer to the following:
 - **The highest point of a rock formation.**
 - **The horn of a ram used as a trumpet** (shofar). The trumpet blast brought Israel together and was also blown on the Day of Atonement.
 - **The horns of the altar.** This was a place of safety and was also where the blood of sacrificial animals was applied (Exodus 30:10).
 - **Cornucopia.** Known as a “horn of plenty” this was a curved goat’s horn overflowing with fruit and grain and symbolized abundance.
 - **The horns of an animal.** Just as horns represented strength and power for an animal, so too our salvation is our security.
 - In Luke 1:69, Zechariah combines horn with salvation when referring to Jesus as our *“horn of salvation.”*

- **God is my supply.** In this final metaphor, God is referred to as *“my stronghold.”* In that culture, huge towers were built on the edges of cities so soldiers could see enemies coming and shoot arrows at them from above. These towers were stocked with supplies. When soldiers would run to the stronghold, they would find rest, refreshment, and replenishment. My mind goes to the fortress called Masada in ancient Israel, occupying a location high on a flat plateau above the Dead Sea. BTW, Pastor Ed will be leading a trip to Israel May 5-16! When we run to God, we can experience the truth of Proverbs 18:10: *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.”*

When you’re rocked by life, make sure the Lord is your Rock.

3. God is worthy of my devotion. God is worthy of our delight and our dependence. Verse 3 tells us that He is also worthy of our devotion: *“I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.”* The idea here is that David *continually* calls to the LORD. Because God had been faithful in the past, David knows that he can count on God for the future. Do you see how prayer is linked to praise? Our praying comes out of praising and our praying should lead to more praising.

4. God is worthy in my distress (4-6). Don’t you love how real and raw the Psalms are? If you’re struggling, take solace in these songs. David remembers back to a time when all the walls were crashing in on him. He felt like he was suffocating with stress. We see four metaphors of misery in verses 4-5.

- **ENCOMPASSED** - *“The cords of death encompassed me.”* The word *“cord”* was used of a noose. Do you feel like you’re all tangled up and you’re being strangled by stress?
- **ASSAILED** - *“The torrents of destruction assailed me.”* This image is of a sailor on the sea that has crashed on the rocks and the waves are engulfing him. Do you feel overwhelmed with all the waves rolling over you?
- **ENTANGLED** - *“The cords of Sheol entangled me.”* This is a picture of how circumstances can suck the life out of us. Does it feel like wherever you turn there are problems?
- **ENSNARED** - *“The snares of death confronted me.”* A snare is a trap or a net that was used to catch unsuspecting animals. Have you been ambushed by a problem recently?

In verse 6, we read that David is in *“distress,”* which means *“tightness and misery and refers to a narrow space or object, with a small distance across it.”* It is used figuratively of a person’s pain and distress; a feeling of being hemmed in.

David is in major distress but he doesn’t give up. He doesn’t lash out or fold up or run away or isolate. Instead, he calls out in verse 6: *“In my distress I called upon the LORD...”* But he does more than just offer a polite prayer as he moves to earnest crying: *“to my God I cried for help...”* His cry is intense and means to *“cry out for help.”* But it’s also very personal. Once again, he says, *“my God.”* Someone has said *“prayer is not eloquence but earnestness.”*

After expressing his anguish, David is given some sweet assurance: *“From His temple he heard my voice, and my cry to Him reached His ears.”* Several weeks ago, someone asked me a question: *“With all the people in the world, why would God take the time to hear my prayers?”* God brought Psalm 18:6 to mind. This was my answer: *“Even with billions of prayers rising to heaven, God is never overwhelmed. He’s not like us. His attention isn’t divided. Your prayers go right into His ears.”*

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5. God is worthy when He displays His power in my life (7-15). In this next section, we see how God dramatically delivered David by moving heaven, earth,

and sea. Listen to verse 7: ***“Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because He was angry.”*** Verse 12 says: ***“Out of the brightness before Him hailstones and coals of fire broke through His clouds.”***

6. God is worthy when He delivers me (16-48). In this next section, David describes how God rescued him when he felt like he was drowning. We see this in verse 16: ***“He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out of many waters.”*** In verse 19 David says, ***“He rescued me, because He delighted in me.”***

7. God is worthy when He declares salvation to the nations (49-50). God’s plan has always been for all nations to praise Him. We see this in verse 49: ***“For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.”*** This is quoted in Romans 15:9 to show how salvation must be extended to the whole world. We’ll develop this in detail at the end of this series when we study Psalm 67 in a message called, “Let the Nations Be Glad.”

Recently, we updated our mission statement to reflect the centrality of the Great Commission: *“Edgewood is committed to living on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus in our families, among our neighbors, and among the nations.”*

We’re calling on parents and grandparents to lead their families to become missions-minded. For her dad’s funeral on Monday, Beth and her sisters shared tributes about the generational impact their dad has made. Here’s part of what Beth shared: *“God was Dad’s center and he was committed to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. Our father did all that he could to support God’s kingdom work all around the world. As the head of our family, he led us to be missions-minded. Missionaries were in our home, in our prayers and in our hearts. Dad’s life was centered on sowing the seeds of the Gospel near and far, into the patient room and to the nations.”*

I’m excited for our Go Con missions conference September 27-28. This event will focus on God’s heart for the world and explore our role in spreading the gospel, whether as goers, who take the message beyond the church walls to our neighborhoods or to the nations. We’re also called to be senders who support the mission. As part of our six-week “Here Am I” sermon series in September and October, Go Con will give us a unique opportunity to dive deeper into God’s global calling for our lives.

We are honored to welcome Dr. Todd Ahrend as our keynote speaker. Dr. Ahrend is the founder and International Director of The Traveling Team; a national mobilization movement focused on engaging believers in the task of world evangelization. A graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, Todd has spoken to thousands across the country and has ministered in over 60 nations, including extended time living in the Middle East.

In addition to Dr. Ahrend's powerful message, Go Con will feature many of Edgewood's Global Go Team partners, as well as representatives from national mission organizations and all of our local Go Team partners. You'll hear inspiring stories, explore practical ways to get involved, and connect with others who are passionate about the Great Commission through many breakout sessions.

As part of our emphasis on taking the gospel to the nations, we're called to be mindful of the persecuted church. Recently, I had the privilege of recording a 4G Podcast episode with Todd Nettleton from Voice of the Martyrs, which is one of our Go Team partners. I encouraged you to listen to the audio on Apple Podcasts or Spotify or watch the video on the Edgewood YouTube channel. Here's a two-minute clip.

Play Podcast Clip.

BTW, Lord willing, Pastor Kyle and I will be recording our 100th podcast episode this week!

Psalm 18 is a song about David's life and it's also a Psalm about the life of David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. It shows that while the cords of death coiled around Him on Good Friday, He triumphed over sin and death and rose again on Easter Sunday. His victory provided our salvation. We see this in verse 50: ***“Great salvation He brings to His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and his offspring forever.”***

The root of the word ***“anointed,”*** is “Messiah,” translated as “Christ” in the New Testament. The word ***“forever”*** takes us back to the prophecy in 2 Samuel 7:12-13: ***“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.”***

Here are a few questions. Will you let God become personal to you while you go through your problems? Do you know Him personally through a relationship with

His Son, Jesus Christ? If not, cry out to Him for salvation. Romans 10:13 says, ***“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”***

While most of the boys trapped in the dark cave are Buddhist, one of the boys is a Christian, who has been supported by a sponsor with Compassion International. He gave testimony to how the Lord gave him strength by bringing Bible verses to mind. He also loved singing, “How Great is our God” as the words echoed off the walls of the cave.

Listen to how he recounted his experience: *“By the tenth night, we were losing patience, hope, physical energy and courage...we could not do anything to help [the situation]. The only thing that I could do was to pray. I prayed ‘Lord, I’m only a boy. You are Almighty God, you are holy, and you are powerful. Right now, I can’t do anything. May You protect us, come to help us all...’”* He continued, *“Help came from God during the hardest time. I very intently prayed, and God answered me with His help. It was me and God together facing that situation, and I am thankful to Him for helping me get out of the cave.”*

We too, are trapped in the dark, with no hope of rescuing ourselves. Matthew 4:16 says, ***“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”***

When we go through difficult times, it’s common to ask, *“God, why did this happen to me? Where are you? Why do I feel so alone? Lord, what are you doing? How does this make any sense?”*

God’s ultimate answer to suffering isn’t an explanation; it’s the incarnation! The best answer to the problem of evil is Jesus Christ. God isn’t a detached, distant, or disinterested deity. He sent His Son who entered our world of suffering, evil, and grief. He took the worst of it for me and for you. He sympathized with your pain, He died as your substitute, He was raised to life as victor, He ascended to Heaven as the conqueror, and He is coming again in glorious triumph!

Randy Alcorn said it like this: *“When you’re tempted to ask God, ‘Why did you do this TO me?’ Look at the cross and ask, ‘Why did you do that FOR me?’”*

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Communion

Let's go back to the superscription of this Psalm which says, "*To the choirmaster.*" Bryan LaBerge points out this means, "Sing to the One who rejoices when conquered." This makes us think of Jesus who appeared to be conquered when He was crucified, but was actually victorious when He absorbed the wrath of God.

At just the right time, Jesus came to earth and offered His life in our place, taking the blame for all our sin and shame. His amazing grace obliterated our atrocious guilt and rescued us from the dark cave of our depravity. When His blood was shed, God the Father accepted the sacrifice of His Son's life as full and final payment for all our sins. God's righteous and holy wrath was fully satisfied by the death and resurrection of our living Lord Jesus.

1 Corinthians 11:28 says we're to not take communion flippantly: "***Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.***" The bread represents His body, and the cup is a reminder of His blood which paid the ransom price for our forgiveness and freedom. As we prepare to celebrate communion and remember His work of redemption, let's spend time in confession, repentance, and recalibration.

Confession Time

We practice open communion, which means you don't need to be an Edgewood member to participate, but you do need to be a born-again believer.

Our deacons and pastors will distribute the trays by passing them down each row. When the tray comes to you, simply lift a cup straight out. You'll notice there are two cups stacked together. Give a little twist and hold one in each hand until everyone is served so we can partake together.

BTW, all the bread is gluten free, and we use grape juice instead of wine.

Distribution of Elements

Forever family, before we take the bread, let's focus on these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: "***For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'***"

Before we drink from the cup, consider these words from 1 Corinthians 11:25-26:
“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”