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## Psalm 18:1-19

Praying with God:  
Praying in the Dark

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Do you ever have a really **bad dream**? I mean just a **terrible** dream. I have a recurring dream of being chased by a **bear**. Maybe you're **lost** and **alone** in the **woods** or maybe a close **family member** or **friend dies**? Isn't it great when you **wake up** in the morning and realize you're not lost or alone and your loved one is still there? In those moments do you ever just take a deep breath and say, "Thank you God!" That's what Psalm 18 is like. It's one big **thank you** for God delivering King David from **desperate** and **dark times**.

David is **waking** from a really bad period in his life and so he thanks God. He wrote it "when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." So David is thanking God for delivering him from **trouble**. The Psalms are like his **prayer journal**. He sang and prayed this Psalm as a reminder of the ways the Lord had delivered him, and so can we. As we look at how David prayed in this Psalm, we see he prays **three** ways. He prays in **desperation**, in **darkness**, and in **deliverance (three Ds)**.

The **purpose** of this sermon series is to learn how the Psalms can **guide** our prayers. In other words, I can read a Psalm and pray what the Lord is **saying to me** through it. I hope that by the end of this series we'll each **feel comfortable** reading the Psalm and praying back to God what we hear. So what do we see in this Psalm? We find three ways to pray, in desperation, darkness, and deliverance...

### Pray in desperation (Psalm 18:1-5)

But what type of desperation? This isn't necessarily a **negative** desperation. First, pray in...

#### a. Desperate love (v1)

1 I love you, Lord, my strength.

This word for love, **rāham**, is less common (47x) than other Hebrew words for love, **'ahab** (217x) and **hesed** (249). Rāham usually describes the Lord's **compassionate** and **merciful** love for people, but here we find a **person** using it to describe his love for God. This word for love, **rāham**, shares the same root of the Hebrew word for the **womb**, **rehem**. David is saying that he loves God with his **deepest depths** like a mother loves her child from the womb. It's a really **sweet** picture of how we can approach God in prayer.

Do you pray because you **love God** or because you **want something** from him? I was listening to a sermon where the pastor pointed out the **first** and **greatest commandment** is to love God.

**Deuteronomy 6:5** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (NIV®)

When an expert in the law asked Jesus, "which is the greatest commandment...?" he said the same thing.

**Matthew 22:37** Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" (NIV®)

The pastor pointed out that **despite** this being the greatest commandment there are very **few examples** of people actually saying they love God in the Old Testament. This is a **rare** occurrence. Do you pray because you **love God** or because you **want something** from him?

A couple years ago I had a **friend** from **high-school** message me saying how fun it would be to try and reconnect and stay in touch. She asked for my number and she called me, but instead of getting caught up she asked if I wanted to earn a little **extra money** and offered me a **business opportunity**. Have you ever had that happen? When we call God, do we spend time loving him and receiving his love, or do we try and convince him of a great business opportunity? I want to **stop** and take a moment to **pray** for God to fill us with love for him (stop and pray). Just because we need to **approach** God because of our love for him doesn't mean it's wrong to approach him with our **needs**. Second, let's pray in...

## **b. Desperate need (v2-5)**

King David remembers how God was there for him when he needed him most.

2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

3 I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,  
and I have been saved from my enemies.

4 The cords of death entangled me;  
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

5 The cords of the grave coiled around me;  
the snares of death confronted me. (NIV®)

When **David** was a boy God called him to become king of Israel, **replacing** the current king **Saul**. David became famous very quickly because he defeated the giant **Goliath** and was a **mighty warrior**. But as David's **fame grew** so did Saul's **jealousy** until he tried to **murder** David multiple times. Saul even pursued David and his men into the wilderness. But God provided **caves** and **crags** where David and his men could hide from Saul. David is saying that the Lord was his **rock** and fortress where he took refuge. God hid him and kept him safe. Without God **providing** for his need he wouldn't have made it.

We see the desperate nature of David's need in **verses 4-5** where he uses words like **death** four times (4x), "the cords of death, the torrents of destruction, the cords of the grave (or Sheol), the snares of death..." In the Hebrew **verse 4** says "**Belial terrified me.**" **2 Corinthians 6:15** tells us "Belial" is a name for **Satan**. David's need is **physical (death and despair)** but it is also **spiritual (demonic)**. We can pray no matter what we face, whether we face death, despair, or even the demonic. God can be our refuge against all things.

My **old office** had this **photo** on the wall of a man standing in the door of a lighthouse with giant waves crashing down. This photo is one of the most reproduced photos in the world. In fact, when most people saw this photo they assumed that the man standing in the doorway **perished** moments after this photo was taken. When people see your troubles do they think you're going to perish? "He won't believe in God. He's been through too much. She'll start drinking because her despair is just too great."

The lighthouse guard is a **frenchman** named **Theodore Malgorne** and when he heard the waves crash down he ducked back into the lighthouse. He lived and so can we as we bring our desperate needs before God in prayer. Duck into your refuge. "God, be my refuge. Be my lighthouse. Keep me safe from the storm."

*First, pray in desperation, desperate love, desperate need. But sometimes our desperation doesn't turn to deliverance. Sometimes the storm gets worse before it gets better.*

## Pray in darkness (Psalm 18:6-15)

I want to draw out a couple points as we read these verses.

### 1) God can hear us in the dark. (v6)

6 In my distress I called to the Lord;  
I cried to my God for help.  
From his temple he heard my voice;  
my cry came before him, into his ears. (NIV®)

**No matter what** you are going through, the Lord can hear your prayers. Sometimes it feels like God can't hear us when our desperation feels so dark. When we're overcome with **depression** so deep we're **numb**, we may not be able to hear God but God can hear us. Just because we can't hear words of encouragement doesn't mean God can't hear our words of pain. *God can hear us in the dark*. Second...

### 2) God is present in our darkness, even bringing the darkness. (v7-11)

I want you to notice **who** is the **cause** of the darkness in verses 7-11.

7 The earth trembled and quaked,  
and the foundations of the mountains shook;  
they trembled because he was angry.  
8 Smoke rose from his nostrils;  
consuming fire came from his mouth,  
burning coals blazed out of it.  
9 He parted the heavens and came down;  
dark clouds were under his feet.  
10 He mounted the cherubim and flew;  
he soared on the wings of the wind.  
11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—  
the dark rain clouds of the sky. (NIV®)

**Who** brings the darkness? God **brings** the darkness! In our Psalm David is saying that when God came to rescue him the whole earth shook, fires burst forth, and he parted the heavens and came down in darkness and storm clouds. This is what we call a "**theophany**"—a manifestation of God's presence in a **storm cloud**. What does this tell us about God? God isn't safe. He's **dangerous**.

As far as we know there's **no record** of God using a storm like this to rescue king David, but that doesn't mean God didn't use weather to hide him from Saul. But I think David is actually doing something else. He's **nudging** us to think of another time when God came down in darkness, clouds, and fire. He's reminding us of **Moses** at **Sinai**. The God who was present at Sinai is **still present** for David and me **today**.

When I was in **seminary** I took a **spiritual formation** class and the teacher asked us to spend our semester with a **spiritual** teacher from another **time** and Christian **tradition**. I chose a man named "Juan de la Cruz" or "**Saint John of the Cross**." He was a **Spanish Priest** who lived in the second half of the **1500s** and was a **mystic**. A mystic is someone who embraces the **strange** parts of the Christian faith. He wrote the poem the "**Dark Night of the Soul**" and several commentaries explaining it. John was someone who struggled with **depression** and feeling **overwhelmed**. He came to believe the darkness is actually God's **blessing** and **love**

upon us. His **brightness** is so powerful it **seems** as if it's **darkness**.<sup>1</sup> **1 Timothy 6:16** says God “dwells in **unapproachable light**” and yet he chooses to wrap himself in darkness at Sinai, and even in our lives, so that his light won't destroy us and he can draw us close. Maybe **you're going through** a dark night of the soul. *God is present in the darkness, even bringing the darkness.* Third...

### 3) God can scatter my darkness. (v13-15)

- 13 The Lord thundered from heaven;  
the voice of the Most High resounded.  
14 He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,  
with great bolts of lightning he routed them.  
15 The valleys of the sea were exposed  
and the foundations of the earth laid bare  
at your rebuke, Lord,  
at the blast of breath from your nostrils. (NIV®)

When the darkness overwhelms you, remember the Lord can **scatter** the darkness. He does it with **lightning** he can do it with hope. Verse 5 says “The valleys of the sea were exposed...” When you feel swept away by the ocean like that man standing on the **lighthouse**, remember how the Lord **parted the red sea** and his people walked through on **dry land**. God can **reverse** the waves that are about to come crashing down on us. Like a **movie rewind** God can defeat our darkness. *God can scatter your darkness.*

Like David, we pray in desperation, and sometimes when it get's worse, we pray in the darkness. But if Christ is your lighthouse, the **sun will rise** in the morning.

### Pray in deliverance (Psalm 18:16-19)

David once again returns to how the Lord has delivered him.

- 16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.  
17 He rescued me from my powerful enemy,  
from my foes, who were too strong for me.  
18 They confronted me in the day of my disaster,  
but the Lord was my support.  
19 He brought me out into a spacious place;  
he rescued me because he delighted in me. (NIV®)

If God can rescue king David he can rescue us. He can reach down and **draws us out** of the dark waters, out of the despair and desperation. If that's you, if you put your **faith** and **trust** in Jesus Christ, you can be **confident** one day Jesus will draw you out of your darkness. I don't know when that will be, but it's my **prayer for you** that it would be **soon**. Jesus **gets** what you're going through. Look at verse 50 how king David ends this Psalm. **Psalm 18:50**

- 50 He gives his king great victories;  
he shows unfailing love to his anointed,  
to David and to his descendants forever. (NIV®)

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<sup>1</sup> Romig, Jonathan. St. John of the Cross. MC 501/Dr. Steve Kang. 13 December 2010. Page 8.

Who is the **king**? Who is the **anointed**? Who is the one and final **descendent** of David? It's King Jesus! Jesus stepped out of the **brightness** and joy and happiness of **heaven** and into our **dark world**. He **stepped down** into sin and pain and hurt and despair and depression, bringing **hope** with him. But that doesn't mean that it was easy. In the garden of **Gethsemane** Jesus prayed in **desperation** for his father to take the **cup** of the **cross** from him (Luke 22:42). When Jesus hung on the cross, for **three hours** darkness covered **him** and the **whole land** (Luke 23:44). But God **delivered** him when he raised Jesus from the grave three days later, conquering death with life, despair with joy, darkness with light. Jesus is the **lighthouse** we can hide in. He **swam** in the **waves of death** so we can have **eternal life**.

***Pray in desperation, in darkness, in deliverance.***

My **opening illustration** about waking up from a bad dream isn't **original** to me. **Pastor Timothy Keller** told it first, but as an illustration for the **resurrection**. See, this life often feels like a **bad dream**, a bad dream full of desperation, despair, and depression. But if you are hidden in Jesus, if he is **your lighthouse**, one day you will wake up. You'll wake up and be reunited with friends and family who knew Jesus too. You'll wake up to the fullness of eternal life, and there will be **no more shadows**. God will deliver us to the **brightness** of an **eternal day**. *Pray in desperation, in darkness, in deliverance.*

*Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.*

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